

*Les Sylphides*  
*Opus 19/The Dreamer*  
*La Ronde*

**BALLET**  
NOTES

*The*  
**National  
Ballet of  
Canada**

JAMES KUDELKA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
KEVIN GARLAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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I

## LES SYLPHIDES

CHOREOGRAPHY: **MICHEL FOKINE**

STAGED BY: **MAGDALENA POPA**

MUSIC: **FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN**, ORCHESTRATED BY **ROY DOUGLAS**  
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SET AND COSTUME DESIGN: **PETER FARMER**

LIGHTING DESIGN: **CHRISTOPHER DENNIS**

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II

## OPUS 19/THE DREAMER

CHOREOGRAPHY: **JEROME ROBBINS**

STAGED BY: **SUSAN HENDL**

MUSIC: **SERGEI PROKOFIEV**,  
*VIOLIN CONCERTO No. 1 IN D MAJOR (1917)*  
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COSTUME DESIGN: **BEN BENSON**

LIGHTING DESIGN: **JENNIFER TIPTON**,  
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III

## LA RONDE

CHOREOGRAPHY: **GLEN TETLEY**

STAGED BY: **BRONWEN CURRY**

MUSIC: **ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD**,  
*SINFONIETTA, OPUS 5.*

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ALEKSANDAR ANTONIJEVIC IN *LES SYLPHIDES*

# Les Sylphides Opus 19/The Dreamer La Ronde

BALLET  
Notes



SONIA RODRIGUEZ WITH ARTISTS OF THE BALLET IN *LES SYLPHIDES*

## A NOTE ON *LES SYLPHIDES*

*“There may not be another ballet that makes such spiritual demands of its dancers. It is crucial that the dancers ‘behave,’ as well as move, as (choreographer Michel) Fokine intended. He meant them to be sweet but not cloying, to be unaffected but not foolish, to be ethereal without simpering. The ballet’s delicacy requires the component of humility, yet its exacting challenges are met only by dancers of extraordinary technique. This most modest of ballets is the least pedestrian of dances.”*

— Vitale Fokine on the production of *Les Sylphides* by his father, Michel Fokine

*Les Sylphides* is a poetic reverie brought to life by ballet technique that is evanescent and timeless. Dance critic Dale Harris writes that it “transcends the age it was born.” The ballet’s subject, he adds, is “musical atmosphere,” a subject “created by steps and dance gestures, not by narrative interest, literary theme or the evocation of place.”

Originally created by Michel Fokine (1880-1942) in 1907, the ballet was presented by the Imperial Russian Ballet at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg under the title *Chopiniana*. Fokine was first inspired to create this ballet when he found a suite of music by Frédéric Chopin entitled *Chopiniana* that had been orchestrated by Alexandre Glazunov in 1894. Glazunov not only allowed Fokine to use his orchestration but offered to add another selection to the composition, Chopin’s *Waltz in C Minor*. The work was a 20th-century tribute by Fokine to the Romantic style of ballet prevalent in the mid-19th century.

With the creation of *Les Sylphides*, Fokine broke away from his Russian heritage of story ballets and virtuoso divertissements. Instead, Fokine created a mood ballet, or what is called a “ballet blanc.” One critic noted that the “movements evoke the romantic imagination to a story of its own.... The music tells the story of magical creatures who dance in the light of the moon.”

A second version, the one that today’s audiences are familiar with, was created in only three days and premiered less than a month after the original version danced by students of the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg. Fokine recalls: “This was a record for me. I have never changed anything in this ballet and, after thirty years, I still remember every one of the slightest movements in each position. Some of the corps de ballet groups accompanying the dancing of the soloists were staged by me during the intermission, just before the curtain time.”

On June 2, 1909 this work was premiered in Paris by Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes under the title *Les Sylphides*. Dancing in the production were Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina and Vaslav Nijinsky. The Ballets Russes were well noted for their lavish dance spectacles as well as their exoticism, lushness, imaginative settings by premier artists such as Léon Bakst, Pablo Picasso and Alexandre Benois, and new music by Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev and Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Even though *Les Sylphides* did not fit directly into the avant-garde mould of the company, it remains one of the purest, most classically based works of that era and the most famous.

*Les Sylphides* symbolizes a beautiful dream. Through music and dance, presented in a moonlit garden setting, a mystical atmosphere is evoked. There is no plot and the characters are metaphysical rather than physical. The Poet, the single male role, personifies the creative artist, while the female dancers, in their diaphanous dresses, are the muses of his inspiration. The ballet's setting is said to be inspired by Chopin's own life. Chopin, deserted by his friends and in ill health, sits desolate and dejected at his piano. Uninspired to compose, he is haunted by despair. Suddenly, muses come to comfort and inspire him.

Fokine also staged *Les Sylphides* for the Royal Danish Ballet (1925), René Blum's Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo (1936) and for Ballet Theatre, now known as American Ballet Theatre (1940). Choreographer Agnes de Mille, who danced in the Ballet Theatre production, said of the premiere: "Never shall I forget *Les Sylphides* opening night. Advancing to the foots in a floating line, seemingly two inches off the ground, not a girl touched earth, not an arm stirred out of breath — a single impulse propelled them. Through the green twilight they came forward like a tide. They breathed together, an organic and spiritual unity." Ballerina Alicia Markova recalls of the same production that Fokine had said in rehearsal: "You must not simply stand and put your hands above your head — you are reaching for the moon."

*Les Sylphides* was on the first program presented by the National Ballet at its debut performance on November 12, 1951 at Toronto's Eaton Auditorium. Staged by the company's founding Artistic Director, Celia Franca, the work proved a test in classicism, style and technique for the fledgling ballet troupe.

Another version of *Les Sylphides* later was produced for the National Ballet by Franca and the late Erik Bruhn. This production was first presented on September 26, 1973 at the Cleary Auditorium in Windsor, Ontario. The production took its inspiration from Franca's memories of the Sadler's Wells Ballet production that she had danced in England in the 1940s. Bruhn brought to the production his knowledge of the Fokine productions he had observed and performed with the Royal Danish Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

The current version of *Les Sylphides* performed by the National Ballet is staged by Principal Ballet Mistress Magdalena Popa after Michel Fokine. Hailed by *L'Humanite*, Paris, as "one of the greatest stars of our time," Magdalena Popa was one of the world's most acclaimed Prima Ballerinas and since retiring from the stage she has set her own productions of *La Bayadère*, *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Giselle* around the world.



## A NOTE ON *OPUS 19/THE DREAMER*

The great American choreographer Jerome Robbins (1918-1998) had an instinct for marrying the precision and elegance of classical ballet with the exuberant and playful side of American culture. His works are beautifully structured and formally conceived even as they bop, swing and jive to his clever choice of music. Whether working within a narrative context, as Robbins did in *West Side Story* (1957) with frequent collaborator Leonard Bernstein, or in a more abstract medium, as he did in many of his later works, he understood the necessity for ballet to entertain the eye and mind as it enriched the soul.

Robbins set *Opus 19/The Dreamer* to Sergei Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 1 in D Major*, also referred to as Prokofiev's *Opus 19*. Prokofiev completed this work in 1917, but fled the Russian revolution shortly afterward to settle in the United States, therefore delaying the premiere of the work. The work did not premiere until 1923 in Paris. In its three movements, *Opus 19* reflects Prokofiev's "early maturity" at age 26; in his own words, a "softening of temper" after a rebellious youth. Prokofiev took a simple song in his mind and translated it into a three-movement concerto. The lyrical first and third movements bookend an energetic middle movement. The violin solos stir deep emotions within the listener, and the orchestral passages are reminiscent of Prokofiev's ballets, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*.

*Opus 19/The Dreamer* was premiered by New York City Ballet on June 14, 1979. The original cast featured Patricia McBride and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Robbins' choreography mirrors the music beautifully in the way it manages to integrate in such a seamless and original manner the angularities of the modern, the emotional intensity of the romantic and the irreplaceable pleasures of the familiar. The fluid choreography, lyrical music and dimly set lighting create a dream-like environment. This wistful veil is

punctuated with jarring movements, flexed hands and feet and wildly flung arms and legs. The "dreamer" does not seem to be entirely at rest. Characterized as part of Robbins' later style of choreography, *Opus 19/The Dreamer* is more abstract in direction, a move away from the character-driven dances of his youth. Through his later works, Robbins continued to reduce his dances to their essence.

2005 marks The National Ballet of Canada's premiere of *Opus 19/The Dreamer*. James Kudelka selected *Opus 19/The Dreamer* for the company's repertoire in part because Robbins' work is rarely seen in Toronto. Kudelka notes, "I have learned a lot from this work, and continue to learn from it. I want to introduce it to the dancers of this company so they can learn from a different choreographer and a different style." Kudelka continues, "The work is exciting musically and choreographically. The central male role, created for Baryshnikov, is magical. The ballet is simple, but serious; a challenge, but wonderful." *Opus 19/The Dreamer* joins two other Robbins works in the repertoire of the National Ballet: *Afternoon of a Faun*, created in 1953 and first performed by the National Ballet in 1977 and *The Concert*, created in 1956 and first performed by the National Ballet in 1994.

*Opus 19/The Dreamer* is staged for the National Ballet by Susan Hendl a former dancer with New York City Ballet, on whom both Balanchine and Robbins created many new works. Hendl is currently vice-president of The George Balanchine Foundation, a guest repetiteur with New York City Ballet and is part of the Advisory Committee to the Robbins Rights Trust.

The company premiere of *Opus 19/The Dreamer* also features one of the Canada's brightest young musicians, James Ehnes, performing the violin solo.

# A NOTE ON LA RONDE

From March 1, 1986, until June 30, 1989, internationally acclaimed choreographer Glen Tetley (1926) was Artistic Associate of The National Ballet of Canada. During that time he created a number of original ballets for the National Ballet, including *La Ronde*.

The world premiere of *La Ronde* on November 12, 1987, followed in the footsteps of the triumphant success of *Alice*, Tetley's first specially commissioned premiere for the National Ballet. *La Ronde* has since been performed by the National Ballet numerous times including performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1988 and throughout Germany in 1989. Writing in the *New York Times*, dance critic Anna Kisselgoff declared: "In *La Ronde* Mr. Tetley achieves a tour de force — a ballet that is almost exclusively a series of pas de deux and yet is also psychologically nuanced within each duet to convey a social critique. Mr. Tetley has accomplished wonders: the social station of each character is evident in the ingenious way in which each person's attitude changes toward each partner."

One of the most prolific and respected choreographers working today, Tetley's name has been synonymous with first-class contemporary ballet since presenting his first evening of choreography more than 50 years ago. Known as an intellectually and visually stimulating choreographer, Tetley has works in the repertoires of the world's foremost ballet companies, including England's Royal Ballet and Ballet Rambert, American Ballet Theatre, Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Stuttgart Ballet, Netherlands Dance Theatre, the Royal Danish Ballet and the Australian Ballet.

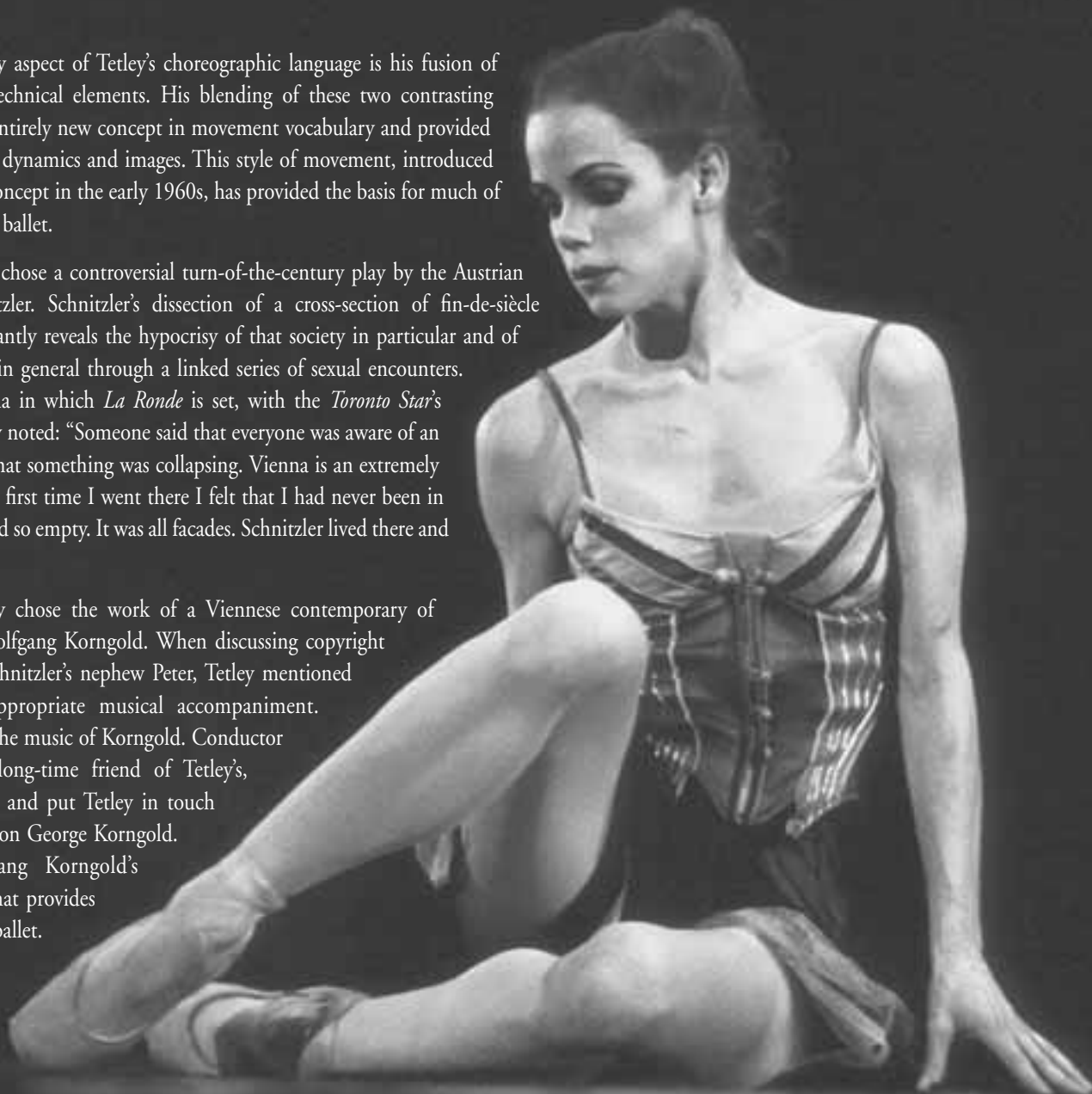
Tetley's creative work have always been complimented by fascinating intellectual complexity, so that they are communicated on two levels simultaneously. His innovative use of dance images has proven widely influential, inspiring other choreographers.

Another extraordinary aspect of Tetley's choreographic language is his fusion of ballet and modern technical elements. His blending of these two contrasting genres has led to an entirely new concept in movement vocabulary and provided for a greater range of dynamics and images. This style of movement, introduced by Tetley as a novel concept in the early 1960s, has provided the basis for much of today's contemporary ballet.

For *La Ronde*, Tetley chose a controversial turn-of-the-century play by the Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler. Schnitzler's dissection of a cross-section of fin-de-siècle Viennese society blatantly reveals the hypocrisy of that society in particular and of human relationships in general through a linked series of sexual encounters. Discussing the Vienna in which *La Ronde* is set, with the *Toronto Star's* William Littler, Tetley noted: "Someone said that everyone was aware of an inner panic, a sense that something was collapsing. Vienna is an extremely beautiful city, but the first time I went there I felt that I had never been in a large city that seemed so empty. It was all facades. Schnitzler lived there and understood it well."

For his music, Tetley chose the work of a Viennese contemporary of Schnitzler's, Erich Wolfgang Korngold. When discussing copyright for his ballet with Schnitzler's nephew Peter, Tetley mentioned his quest for an appropriate musical accompaniment. Schnitzler suggested the music of Korngold. Conductor John Lanchbery, a long-time friend of Tetley's, supported the choice and put Tetley in touch with the composer's son George Korngold. It is Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Sinfonietta, Opus 5* that provides the score for Tetley's ballet.

Tetley's *La Ronde* draws upon the universal, if disquieting, message of Schnitzler's play. Tetley notes that





ALEKSANDAR ANTONIJEVIC AND MARTINE LAMY IN *LA RONDE*

Schnitzler's characters "are deluded into thinking they are holding onto life, when what they are really doing is reinforcing life's loss through a blind pursuit of physical pleasure." His own vision of *La Ronde* is "concerned with showing greed — the possession of one person by another."

*La Ronde* is translated from the French as "the round" or "round dance." The dance element of the title is carried over to the structure of the play: The sequence of events is circular, moving through a linked changing of partners that begins and ends with the same person. "Interestingly, critics said (the play) was written as a dance," Tetley comments. "Certainly it has a dance-like structure; even its title suggests ring-around-the-rosy, though, because the characters are adults, there is more going on than in a children's game."

Beginning with the Prostitute, the ballet's couples climb the social ladder and despairingly fall from it. Tetley follows Schnitzler's scenario, as Prostitute meets Sailor; Sailor meets Parlor Maid; Parlor Maid meets Young Man; Young Man meets Young Wife; Young Wife

meets Husband; Husband seduces Sweet Young Thing; Sweet Young Thing encounters Poet; Poet is tantalized by Actress, Actress has an affair with Count and, finally, the full circle is made as Count meets up with Prostitute. James Neufeld, writing in the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, calls *La Ronde* "a probing, ironic work, speaking of the animalistic basis of human behaviour as well as the hypocrisies of social structures.... Immediately after the climax, one partner simply loses interest and goes, leaving the other to execute a narcissistic solo while waiting for the next one to come along."

English dance critic Edward Thorpe wrote in *Dance Gazette*: "The battery of weapons that are used in this war of the sexes are blatant sensuality, charm, guile, innocence, sophistication, wit and unbridled passion. The emotions that emerge are bittersweet, a sense of foolishness, the fragility, the transience of the human condition. One even finds oneself looking inward at one's own motives ... and if a ballet can do that, can touch a nerve not usually so exposed, then the choreographer has achieved something rare and remarkable." In 1989 Primedia filmed *La Ronde* under the direction of Norman Campbell.

FRONT COVER: SONIA RODRIGUEZ AND RYAN BOORNE IN *LA RONDE*  
PHOTOS BY: LYDIA PAWELAK AND CYLLA VON TIEDEMANN

## The National Ballet of Canada

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