the national ballet of canada
study guide

75 years of bold ambition

Romeo and Juliet

Welcome to The National Ballet of Canada
Tuesday, November 3, 2026

> “Cranko’s production is an excellent example of the narrative form, shown through the seamless structure and emotional sweep of the dance language.”

Hope Muir
Joan and Jerry Lozinski Artistic Director

Greta Hodgkinson (2009). Photo by David Cooper.
Cover: Isabella Kinch and Oliver Yonick.
Photo by Karolina Kuras.

About the Ballet

Romeo and Juliet tells the famous love story by William Shakespeare, set in the beautiful city of Verona, Italy. Choreographer John Cranko created the ballet for the Stuttgart Ballet in 1962 and set it on The National Ballet of Canada in 1964, where it became one of the most beloved ballets in the company's repertoire. This glorious production was instrumental in shaping the company's artistic growth and returns this season in honour of the National Ballet's 75th Anniversary. The ballet is told in three Acts. In Act I, Romeo and Juliet fall in love at first sight. Act II shows their secret wedding, while Act III ends in tragedy. Sergei Prokofiev composed the music especially for ballet and it is considered one of the greatest ballet scores ever written, helping bring every character and storyline to life.

The Story

In Verona, the Montagues and Capulets are locked in a bitter feud but this does not stop the young members of these rival families, Romeo and Juliet, from falling in love and secretly marrying. When Juliet's family pledges her to another man, she fakes her death and sends word to Romeo of her plan. The message never reaches him. Believing Juliet is truly gone, Romeo takes his life. When Juliet awakens to find her beloved dead, she follows his tragic example.

At left and bottom right: Principal Guest Artist Jason Reilly and Greta Hodgkinson (2009). Photos by David Cooper. Top right: Piotr Stanczyk with Artists of the Ballet (2006). Photo by Sian Richards.

The Creator

Born in South Africa, John Cranko danced with The Royal Ballet in London, England and created some of the 20th century's most loved story ballets. Works such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Onegin* and *Taming of the Shrew* are admired for their rich characterization, drama and musicality and continue to be performed by leading companies worldwide.

The Score

Completed in 1935, Sergei Prokofiev's score is one of ballet's finest. The different sections of music are named for key scenes, such as the grand "Dance of the Knights," which helps to tell the story. Prokofiev also used distinct musical phrases or "leitmotifs" to identify different characters. The music conveys the many shifts in emotion throughout the story, from the dreamlike passion of first love to the heaviness of death.

Top: John Cranko in rehearsal (1964). Photo by Alex Gray.
Bottom: Sergei Prokofiev. Photographer unknown.

Meet the Characters

Juliet
A determined young Capulet who falls in love with Romeo, the son of her family's great enemy, and plans to marry him secretly.

Romeo
The passionate son of Lord and Lady Montague who falls in love with Juliet at first sight after sneaking into the Capulet ball.

Mercutio
Romeo's witty and loyal best friend who gets caught up in the feud between the Montagues and Capulets.

Benvolio
Romeo's cousin and close friend who tries to keep the peace and urges Romeo to be cautious when it comes to the Capulets.

Paris
A nobleman chosen by Juliet's family to be her husband, a plan that is upended when she falls in love with Romeo instead.

Tybalt
Juliet's hot-tempered cousin whose fierce loyalty to the Capulets leads him to challenge Romeo to a duel.

Friar Lawrence
A monk and mentor to Romeo who sympathizes with the young couple and helps them carry out their plan to marry.

Nurse
A mother figure for Juliet who loves her deeply, knows her better than anyone and cares about her wellbeing.

Greta Hodgkinson and Principal Guest Artist Jason Reilly (2009). Photo by David Cooper.

Fun Facts

1 Verona comes to life with bustling crowds, a lively marketplace and colourful sets and costumes that capture the warmth and excitement of the city.

2 The thrilling sword fight between Mercutio and Tybalt is carefully choreographed so it looks fast, dangerous and spontaneous while keeping the dancers safe.

3 Mercutio, Romeo and Benvolio are fun-loving best friends who disguise themselves to sneak into the Capulets' grand ball, which is a masquerade.

4 This ballet is known for its beautiful pas de deux, or dances for two, especially the balcony scene where Romeo and Juliet declare their love.

Aleksandar Antonijevic and Sonia Rodriguez (2006).
Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann.