

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Cincinnati Ballet presents

***ROMEO AND JULIET***  
***A Ballet in Three Acts***

*Music by Sergei Prokofiev*  
*Choreography by Victoria Morgan*

**SHAKESPEARE'S ROMANTIC TRAGEDY  
TRANSLATES TO BREATHTAKING DANCE  
DURING VALENTINE'S WEEKEND**

**SCORE ONE OF MOST BELOVED PIECES IN THE CLASSICAL REPERTORY**

**LEGENDARY PERFORMER ADDS TO MIX**

**CINCINNATI, OH – January 25, 2008** – From February 15 – 17, 2008, Cincinnati Ballet Artistic Director Victoria Morgan's stirring interpretation of Shakespeare's romantic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, set to Sergei Prokofiev's dynamic music performed live, appears on stage at downtown's Aronoff Center, in two evening and two matinee performances.

Music Director Carmon DeLeone conducts the Cincinnati Ballet Orchestra.

Scheduled during Valentine's weekend, Morgan's full-length ballet premiered in 2002, and repeated in 2004. The production, called "a superb re-telling" with "passionate performances" has drawn strong critical praise and cheers from sell-out houses.

**BALLET CLOSELY FOLLOWS SHAKESPEARE'S ENDURING TALE**

Set in Renaissance Italy, Morgan's ballet opens in the hustle and bustle of Verona's marketplace. Sergei Prokofiev's colorful orchestral score—by turns playful, urgent, strident and haunting in its jazzy harmonies—keeps the large cast in constant motion.

Like the play, the ballet is a version of love at first sight, visceral in its passionate discovery. After meeting at a ball, the young lovers lock eyes while the rest of the world stands still.

Unfortunately, that tumultuous world holds the Capulets and Montagues, dueling feudal families, who are soon at each other throats.

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Juliet in love poignantly develops from a carefree child clutching her favorite doll into a woman willing to give her life for her Romeo. The ballet's loveliest dancing is found in the famous Balcony Scene, when Romeo declares his love. The scene ends with a passionate kiss.

The day after the Capulet ball, Romeo and Juliet are secretly married by Friar Laurence. But all is not well.

In a series of escalating encounters in the Market Square, the contentious Tybalt has killed Mercutio, and Romeo in turn has exacted revenge on his cousin by marriage. When Juliet hears the news from her nurse, and that Romeo has been sentenced to death, she is angry and frustrated. Romeo, who has secretly entered her room, is also anguished. Slowly they rekindle their love, but are interrupted by the nurse who tells them her parents are coming.

Lord and Lady Capulet, unaware of their daughter's secret marriage, have arranged for her marriage to Paris. Juliet appeals to the Friar, who gives her a potion that will make her seem to have died. Through a horrible series of miscommunications, Romeo arrives at the crypt, thinking Juliet has died. He takes up what he thinks is her corpse and "dances" with it, but her limp body cruelly mimics their previous love. In despair, he drinks a lethal poison.

Juliet awakes only to find his lifeless body. The vial of poison is empty, but she finds Romeo's dagger and takes her own life, as she crawls into his arms for one last kiss.

### **ONE OF THE MOST BELOVED PIECES IN THE CLASSICAL REPERTORY HAS FASCINATING EVOLUTION IN TIME OF TURMOIL**

Today, Sergei Prokofiev's score for *Romeo and Juliet* has never been more popular. Performances that one sees today, typically follow the libretto from its premiere Russian performance by the Kirov Ballet in 1940.

But in a sense, the fact that the score, despite being heavily censored, is still so magnificent is as impressive as the music itself.

As Stalin consolidated his power in the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s, he courted Russian artists like Prokofiev who had lived abroad for nearly 20 years. Musicians were especially prized, and Prokofiev returned to Moscow, according to critic Patricia Cohen, "as though he were Odysseus returning from Troy."

*Romeo and Juliet* was one of his first commissions. According to Cohen, in October 1935 Prokofiev played his finished piano score for the suspicious conductor of the Bolshoi Ballet, who was appalled by the unfamiliar and complex musical syntax and the happy ending (in which Prokofiev bypassed Shakespeare's tragic conclusion).

The Bolshoi and cultural officials frowned on tampering with classics to such an extent, that Prokofiev was persuaded to rewrite the ending to match Shakespeare.

But things for the ballet were far from going smoothly. The tense political atmosphere was worsening. In 1936 a shocking denunciation of composer Dmitri Shostakovich appeared in Pravda, and shook the Soviet musical world to its foundations. Members of the artistic community were fired or sucked into the gulag; one of Prokofiev's collaborators was executed.

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By 1938, after Prokofiev had composed a couple of highly nationalistic pieces in the Social Realist style, Stalin's cultural czars gave the Kirov Theater permission to perform *Romeo and Juliet*, staged as a class conflict between arrogant old aristocrats and youthful progressives. Still there were problems. Not understanding the untraditional syncopated rhythms and episodic structure, the ballet's stars, Galina Ulanova and Konstantin Sergeyev, refused to perform it, calling it undanceable. She quipped "For never was a story of more woe/Than Prokofiev's music for 'Romeo.'" The contract was cancelled. Finally, in 1940, the ballet was presented, though it's said that choreographer Leonid Lavrosky and the dancers once again claimed that they did understand the music.

In one last ditch effort to avoid disaster, the orchestra even tried to cancel the show.

Yet despite little hope for its success, the ballet received acclaim and has been popular ever since. According to New York City Ballet Music Coordinator Richard Moredock, some of the very reasons we value the music so highly today were considered radical at the time of its production. "One of these was the concept of a full-length ballet inspired more by the techniques of contemporary cinema than by those of traditional ballet. Rather than supporting a flowing narrative, Prokofiev's score actually appears to suggest montage," a cinematic device showing a series of scenes, all related and building to a conclusion.

At that time the composer's unusually vivid characterizations were bewildering to his collaborators. Then, as today, Moredock says, they demand a "fresh naturalistic quality of expression matching passages so personal and revealing that traditional broad gestures and steps [aren't] sufficient." It is altogether fitting that this ballet continues to take "its place as the finest full-length ballet score composed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century"--and that the character of Juliet, uneasy with her nascent sexuality and giddy with youthful energy, is a heroine modern audiences readily recognize and embrace."

#### **About Cincinnati Ballet Webisodes**

Cincinnati Ballet Webisodes, which premiered during the 2006-07 season to popular acclaim, aim to propel fun-loving young professionals to the web stratosphere in starring roles with professional dancers. **Friday, February 1 from 6-8 pm**, a mix of cast members and the general public unite to party and view the newest world premiere at Know Theatre Underground, 1120 Jackson Street. Attend or watch online, and vote to get \$10 off your Cincinnati Ballet ticket. "Fate/Destiny or Free Will?," the newest webisode, is a hilarious episode in the ongoing series, in which four "regular" people who are roomies with real ballet dancers have their Tarot cards read.

#### **About Cincinnati Ballet's After Hours at the Ballet Barre**

*After Hours at the Ballet Barre* occurs every Thursday one week before production week. **Thursday, February 7, 2008**, watch Cincinnati Ballet dancers rehearse a work from *Romeo and Juliet* for an hour beginning at 5:15 pm; afterwards mingle at an informal reception and meet the dancers at The Cincinnati Ballet Center, Mickey Jarson Kaplan Performance Studio, 1555 Central Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45214. Admission: \$5; reservations recommended. 513-621-5219.

#### **About Cincinnati Ballet After Parties**

Enjoy a night at the ballet, then mingle, meet the dancers and enjoy complimentary *hors d'oeuvres* and a cash bar during the *After Parties*, just across the street at the Contemporary Arts Center.

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**About Cincinnati Ballet's *Footnotes*, a Pre-performance Discussion**

Have you ever wanted to know the story behind a particular ballet or what was going through the choreographer's mind? Cincinnati Ballet's free pre-performance talk, *Footnotes*, is the perfect way to find out. You'll have the opportunity to hear background information, learn interesting facts and ask questions in a casual setting. *Footnotes* discussions occur forty-five minutes before every performance at the Aronoff Center Stage Room (entrance across from the Westin Art Gallery), and are led by choreographers, designers and Cincinnati Ballet directors and staff.

**About Cincinnati Ballet**

For 44 years, Cincinnati Ballet has been the cornerstone professional ballet company of the Cincinnati tri-state area, presenting a mix of full-length and mixed repertory ballets, regularly with live orchestral accompaniment. The company has maintained an annual *Nutcracker* series since 1974. During 2006-07, Cincinnati Ballet celebrated the tenth anniversary season of Artistic Director Victoria Morgan, who has choreographed extensively for the company, and attracted an intriguing mix of renowned choreographers to challenge her dancers in well-received world premieres. Under Morgan's guidance, Cincinnati Ballet has also established a national and international presence and enjoyed ground-breaking collaborations. The Otto M. Budig Academy, the official school of Cincinnati Ballet, is dedicated to developing dancers with a strong classical technique and unified style.

**WHAT:** Cincinnati Ballet presents

***ROMEO AND JULIET***  
***A Ballet in Three Acts***

**Music by Sergei Prokofiev**  
**Choreography by Victoria Morgan**

**WHEN:** 02/15/08 – 02/17/08

Friday, 02/15/08 8:00pm  
Saturday, 02/16/08 2:00pm  
Saturday, 02/16/08 8:00pm  
Sunday, 02/17/08 2:00pm

**WHERE:** The Aronoff Center  
650 Walnut Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45202

**TICKETS:** \$21 - 66; at The Cincinnati Ballet Office at 513-621-5282 , or online at [www.cincinnati-ballet.com](http://www.cincinnati-ballet.com).

Cincinnati Ballet's 2007-2008 season is generously sponsored by:

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