

Romeo & Juliet program note

Romeo & Juliet is the latest BSO collaboration with writer/director Bill Barclay, following *Peer Gynt*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *L'Histoire du Soldat*, *The Magic Flute*, and *The Chevalier*.

Tonight's production began in conversations with The Royal Albert Hall about making live music feel essential in a digital age. We all know classical music largely struggles to connect with young people, a challenge with which each generation has valiantly wrestled. The idea was hatched to create a new standard version of Shakespeare's most famous play with the finest music it inspired. They commissioned Concert Theatre Works to create something trim and taut, roll it out internationally, and incidentally create an opportunity for young people all over the world to see a story about them, and fall in love with great music along the way.

My nonprofit touring company, Concert Theatre Works, has been creating theatrical concerts for 10 years to build new audiences, believing, as I do, that musicians have seen it all and are the best story keepers, if not the best storytellers. To illuminate canonical works from within, we merge classical music with actors, dance, puppets, film, illusions, juggling - even food. Tonight we meet our last great untapped collaborator in the wildly thrilling world of live swordplay.

Prokofiev's 1935 ballet score contains multitudes, and what is more, it leans into the wit and humor that elevates the first half of Shakespeare's tragedy. This is important, as a classroom may overlook the reality - plainly obvious on its feet - that this play is hilarious until Mercutio is killed. Prokofiev knew his Shakespeare, and his enormous fondness for these characters is visible on every page of the score. I employ two tricks learned from seven years as director of music at Shakespeare's Globe: 1) cross-dressing is fun (and historically correct), and 2) we only need to present the silhouette of reality to encourage your minds to complete the picture. When you "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts," you own your own image, and the artform is created collaboratively with you.

We forget that before loudspeakers made musicians largely redundant in straight theatre, a production of *Romeo & Juliet* without an orchestra would be an exercise in box office failure. Live music accompanied onstage action for over 300 years *de rigueur*, and we still enjoy various concert suites derived from those events - some of which you have no doubt seen staged with the BSO in my *Peer Gynt* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* adaptations. Prokofiev's ballet was not intended as incidental music of course, but he composed it during the revolution in amplified sound in the 1930's, and its epigrammatic structure of short colorful movements makes it wonderfully adaptable as concert-theatre.

This world premiere joins ranks with these incidental scores with more at stake. In the coming years, funding cuts and digital advances (particularly in artificial intelligence), will create formidable headwinds for all live arts to defend their pivotal role in civic health. It is of paramount importance that we labor now to create works that clearly show our value and force as the Performing Arts. This means working together, and to wit, this evening we present The Royal Albert Hall and The Boston Symphony Orchestra, actors and musicians, music and poetry, and this evening's major innovation - live sword-fighting with orchestra. These connections make music visible, and help to tell music's phenomenal story.

Our aims are all the same: to deepen our love for the repertoire we cherish, to share that love with newcomers, to build community around great art, and to celebrate what is truly alive in a digitizing world. Like our eponymous star-crossed lovers, we are fragile here in the performing arts. Our love affair with live art may begin as child's play, but its future is ultimately a matter of life and death.