

Art Musings

art is everything & everything is art

Art masterpiece



Ballet Arizona performs Ib Andersen's "Romeo and Juliet." Photo: Rosalie O'Connor. Courtesy of: Ballet Arizona.

Ib Andersen's "Romeo and Juliet" performed by [Ballet Arizona](#) is a true art masterpiece, coupling choreography and dance capturing the essence of youthful bravado with scenery that conjures images of the finest artworks exhibited in Europe's grandest museums.

Before dancers take the stage, the audience has plenty of time to enjoy their first glimpse at scenic design by Alain Vaës. A giant painting running the entire length of the stage depicts an Italian village under a beautiful blue sky whose clouds share the color of blood once Romeo slays Tybalt during the second of three acts.

It's punctuated in two places by towering marble columns that transform the work into a glorious triptych signaling the bounty of artworks not yet revealed — including additional large-scale paintings with tall sculptures of subjects from horse to man. Also crimson brick and trees saturated in dark olive hues. Above a row of five shields represents feuding families, plus the church.

Vaës' work has been featured in exhibitions at [The Morgan Library & Museum](#) in NYC and other venues, and he's designed sets and costumes for the [New York City Ballet](#). Vaës also illustrates children's books. Vaës did his art training in France, where he was born, but now lives in New York.



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Costume design for Ib Andersen's "Romeo and Juliet" is also by Vaës, whose heavy fabrics dominated by black, red and gold counterbalance the light, ethereal quality of pastel pieces. Costumes for "Romeo and Juliet" are after the original design by Henry Heymann.

Fabric dominates the set during scenes in Juliet's bedroom, where the lovers draw a massive curtain back and forth — sometimes revealing her balcony and the lush landscape beyond, other times cloistering the couple in crypt-like darkness. A tall, dark tapestry hanging behind her bed calls to mind a large-scale battle scene painting featured during The Capulet Ball.

At times the set feels remarkably simple. Only a small chapel is visible behind Friar Laurence as he joins Romeo and Juliet in marriage. Original lighting design by Michael Korsch beautifully conveys the larger church setting as four golden window shapes flank the couple. During the crypt scene as well, less prominent scenic elements allow lighting to communicate the moment's real power.

Andersen's "Romeo and Juliet" features more sword-fighting than you'll find in most theatrical productions of Shakespeare's play, and feels choreographed with as much attention to sound as movement. The clash of swords appears at times like another instrument carefully timed to punctuate music by Sergei Prokofiev, which is performed with exquisite precision by the [Phoenix Symphony](#) conducted by Timothy Russell.



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Romeo is performed by Slawomir Wozniak, Naylor Lovino and Junxiang Zhao — and Juliet by Amber Lewis, Jillian Barrell and Tzu Chia Huang. Joseph Cavanaugh is Friar Laurence, Shea Johnson is Paris and Kendra Mitchell-Dahl is The Nurse. Barrell and Lovino delivered a dance that felt light and limber during opening night.

Andersen's choreography brilliantly captures the impetuosity of youth — delivering boys fueled by machismo and girls filled with mischief. His Romeo and Juliet feel truly young, blending innocence with bravado as they undertake the treacherous road of defying family and tradition.

— Lynn

Note: [Ballet Arizona](#) performs "Romeo and Juliet" through Sunday, Feb. 17. Ballet Arizona just announced its 2013-14 season, which includes "Cinderella," "The Nutcracker," "La Bayadère," "Masters of Movement" and "All Balanchine." They'll also present "Innovations," featuring work by emerging choreographers — and "Studio Spotlight," providing behind-the-scenes insight into upcoming productions.