WHO IS GISELLE?

POETRY CHALLENGE

Part of English National Ballet's *Dialogues with Giselle*

AKRAM KHAN'S

GISELLE

Co-produced by

English National Ballet

SADLER'S WELLS

MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL
Introduction

As part of English National Ballet’s (ENB) new production of Giselle, English National Ballet and Manchester International Festival have teamed up with The Poetry Society’s Young Poets Network to launch Who is Giselle? - a national poetry challenge for young people. This resource pack contains lots of information about traditional productions of Giselle from English National Ballet’s repertoire, and an insight into the creation of Akram Khan’s new production, designed to inspire creative writing.

Akram Khan’s Giselle

English National Ballet, together with Manchester International Festival (MIF), and Sadler’s Wells, has commissioned leading choreographer Akram Khan to create a new interpretation of the iconic Romantic ballet Giselle for the Company. Akram is working collaboratively with a world class creative team including: Academy-Award winning designer Tim Yip (Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon) and celebrated dramaturg Ruth Little. Giselle premieres at the Palace Theatre, Manchester in September 2016. Who is Giselle? forms part of the wider engagement programme for this exciting project.

giselle.ballet.org.uk
mif.co.uk

Image: Tamara Rojo and Akram Khan in rehearsals for Akram Khan’s Giselle © Laurent Liotardo
The Production

One of the greatest romantic ballets of all time, Giselle is the first full length ballet choreographed by Akram Khan.

“Giselle is a ballet that lives in both the real and the spiritual world; this is why I thought it would be particularly appropriate for Akram, whose work often represents those two worlds. It is a story that you find in some way in every culture, the woman deceived who dies of a broken heart, and the spirit of this woman that either forgives or seeks revenge.”

-Tamara Rojo, Artistic Director, English National Ballet

“I am eager to start the creation of Giselle. It is a beautiful and iconic piece, and I am looking forward to bringing my own take, together with my collaborators and the wonderful English National Ballet dancers. I am still nostalgic from the experience of creating Dust, in the Lest We Forget programme, and am now even more energised to discover the world of Giselle.”

-Akram Khan, Choreographer

See Akram Khan and Tamara Rojo talking about how and why to reinterpret the classic story of Giselle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPjouYj88WI

See video diaries released in the lead up to the premier. http://giselle.ballet.org.uk/video-diary

Image: Tamara Rojo in rehearsals for Akram Khan’s Giselle © Laurent Liotardo
Giselle

“From the beginning of my tenure as Artistic Director I have expressed my commitment to keeping the classics relevant. When I decided I wanted to bring Giselle, one of the most traditional pieces of the classical repertoire, into the 21st Century there was only one choreographer I believe had both the knowledge of tradition and creativity necessary for this task. I am incredibly excited that Akram [Khan] accepted this challenge. I believe this will be a very important step for the whole art form.”

-Tamara Rojo

Akram Khan has reworked the iconic piece of ballet repertoire with the aim of keeping Giselle relevant for modern audiences. The key themes remain the same as in the original ballet which premiered in 1841 where the prolific opera and ballet composer Adolphe Adam composed the music and Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot created the original choreography.

Based on the iconic romantic ballet Giselle, with choreography by Marius Petipa and music by Adolphe Adam, Akram Khan’s brand new Giselle combines some of the old story with the new.

The classic story (you can find out more about this on pages 6 and 7) of love, betrayal and redemption is given a new interpretation. The original ballet is set in Germany where a young peasant girl, Giselle is in love with the handsome Albrecht, a Duke who hides his nobility, and his engagement to another woman.

Akram Khan’s interpretation of Giselle takes the romantic narrative of the original ballet, and shapes it to fit a contemporary economic and social context. Exploring themes of displacement and inequality, Khan’s Giselle depicts the hardships suffered by migrant workers, who don’t own any land or property, and who are cast out of society when hard times hit the factory they once worked in.
Who is Giselle?

Giselle is one of a community of migrant workers, cast out of their jobs by the closure of a condemned garment factory. They seek access to the land beyond a high wall, where the factory Landlords live in privileged splendour and seclusion. Giselle rejects the advances of her fellow Outcast Hilarion, and is in love with Albrecht, believing he too is a landless migrant worker. Giselle’s spirit and will bring hope to her people, inspiring them to move towards a better future free of violence, oppression and dislocation.
Giselle is one of a community of migrant workers cast out of their jobs in a condemned garment factory. They seek entry to the place where the factory Landlords live, beyond a high Wall built to exclude them.

Giselle is in love with Albrecht, a member of the privileged class, who has disguised himself as an Outcast in order to woo her. When the Landlords arrive, expecting to be entertained by the Outcasts, Albrecht recognises his fiancée Bathilde among them, and tries to hide. He is challenged as an impostor by Hilarion, an Outcast who also loves Giselle, and the two men fight. Bathilde’s father confronts Albrecht and he is forced to choose between the two women. When he submits and returns to Bathilde, Giselle is driven to madness. The Outcasts encircle Giselle, and when they move apart, her lifeless body is revealed. The Landlords retreat to safety beyond the Wall.

**Act II**

In the wrecked and abandoned factory where Giselle and her female co-workers have labored, and many have died, Albrecht confronts and condemns the Landlords. But he flees at the appearance of Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis (ghosts of the factory workers who seek revenge for the wrongs done to them in life). Myrtha summons Giselle into the realm of death and into the company of the Wilis.

Hilarion enters the factory to mourn Giselle. The Wilis surround him, demanding retribution for her death, and he is brutally killed.

Albrecht returns, and the lovers are reunited on the threshold of life and death. Breaking the cycle of violence, Giselle forgives Albrecht and saves him from the vengeance of Myrtha. Giselle departs into death with the Wilis, and Albrecht, now an outcast from his own community, is left to carry the burden of his wrongdoing.
Mary Skeaping’s Giselle

Act I

A pleasant valley in Germany with vine-clad hills in the distance. It is the vintage festival, when the villagers gather at each other’s cottages every day to drink the new wine. Today, the celebration will be at the cottage of Giselle, a beautiful and innocent peasant girl.

Giselle has fallen in love with Albrecht, Duke of Silesia, who, disguised as a peasant, courts her. Hilarion, a gamekeeper who is in love with Giselle, suspects the true identity of his rival, and soon finds out that Albrecht is not the peasant he claims to be. Villagers return from the fields to celebrate the grape harvest and join in a dance with Giselle and Albrecht.

Giselle’s Mother, Berthe, is worried that Giselle’s passion for dancing may be the death of her delicate daughter, who will then fall under the spell of the Wilis, vengeful spirits of virgin-brides who have been abandoned before their wedding night.

The Wilis haunt the forest seeking their revenge on young men by forcing them to dance to their death. The peasants are frightened by this, but Giselle is amused at her mother’s concern, and continues dancing with her friends, until she is finally crowned Queen of the Vine.

The Prince of Courland and his hunting party stop at Giselle’s cottage to taste the wine. One of this party, the Prince’s daughter, Bathilde, is engaged to Duke Albrecht.

Hilarion takes this opportunity to reveal the truth about Albrecht’s identity. Giselle, destroyed by grief at Albrecht’s duplicity, loses her mind and dies.
Act II

A forest on the banks of a lake. A cross marking the place of Giselle’s grave stands underneath the trees. This is the supernatural world of the Wilis. Attired in their bridal dresses, they dance in the moonlight and lure young men to dance until they fall dead of exhaustion.

Separately, Hilarion and Albrecht visit Giselle’s grave, mourning the tragic death of the innocent peasant girl. Hilarion is caught by the vengeful spirits and Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, condemns him to dance until he dies.

Albrecht faces a similar fate, but Giselle’s love and forgiveness protect him through the night.

The Queen of the Wilis tries to get Albrecht away from the cross on Giselle’s grave which is helping to protect him, but her magic Myrtle branch breaks. She makes a desperate effort to maintain her control by commanding the Wilis to attack the cross, but its power is too great. She commands Giselle to come away from the cross, knowing Albrecht will follow her. However, as dawn breaks over the forest Queen Myrtha loses her power and with the first rays of the sun the Wilis are forced back into their graves.

After a final farewell, Giselle and Albrecht are parted forever.

Image: Erina Takahashi in Mary Skeaping’s Giselle © Daria Klimentova
Other Dialogues with Giselle projects
Design contexts: Fashion and costume

Launched by Academy-Award winning designer Tim Yip (Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon), in partnership with Manchester International Festival, the Giselle Design Contexts: Fashion and Costume project has seen talented students from across North West England respond to an industry brief inspired by Akram Khan’s Giselle.

In March 2016, the Whitworth Art Gallery was host to an exclusive presentation by the acclaimed Giselle visual and costume designer for the north-west based students. Speaking of his infamous body of work spanning costume, fashion, photography, visual design and art direction to name a few, the students were introduced to Yip’s unique aesthetic and took the opportunity to ask questions about his process for designing Giselle.

Yip then tasked the students from the Manchester College, Blackpool and the Fylde College, and University of Central Lancashire, with designing a costume for dance, in response to the themes of ‘dislocation’ or ‘the underworld’.

Of those submitted, 15 selected students were given individual feedback on their designs from members of the English National Ballet Costume Department and Yip himself, and were invited to take part in a special day of activity at the English National Ballet studios. This armed the students with an understanding of the practicalities of designing for dance and the translation of sketches into working costumes.

The students then put all of this new knowledge into practice as they re-submitted their designs before Yip chose the two strongest designs to be created by a professional maker.

You can see the two winning designs below.
Giselle-Design Context

Final Design
My design is based on the connotations of the Underworld, looking at pantheons and death. I created a design in which the dancer wears a leotard underneath two skirts. The first skirt is made from a grey silk which is to shield the dancer from the feathered skirt on top. The skull on the leotard is based on the Underworld Gate Keeper Cerberus. The feathers were inspired by Thanatos the God of Death; he is described to have black wings on his back. Her sweeping face is from Giselle’s ‘the Wills’ but I got this inspiration from the Day of The Dead and their use of highly decorated facial imagery that is used to

Colour Palette

Day of the Dead Face Paint

Greek God of Death Thanatos

Cerberus, the guardian of the gate to the Underworld. (Greek Mythology)
Giselle-Design Context

Design Brief:
Looking at the connotations of the Underworld,
Death, sin, religion

Cindy To
BA (Hons) Fashion and Costume for Performance
Blackpool and the Fylde College

Costing
Ostrich feathers (black), £23.49 (x10)
Grey Silk £14.30 per metre
Cotton Lycra £8 per metre
Designs by Lauren Karpowicz

Image: © Lauren Karpowicz
**Who is Giselle?**

**Challenge partners**

**English National Ballet**

English National Ballet is a world-class ballet company, renowned for creative excellence and innovative collaborations with some of the best-known British and international choreographers, designers and creators. We bring ballet to the widest possible audience by touring throughout the UK and beyond. Our mission is to keep ballet alive and relevant to future generations by creating new work, developing new talent and engaging new audiences. Our Engagement programme reaches over 40,000 people annually, offering a myriad of opportunities to participate, experience and be inspired by ballet.

Find out more at: [ballet.org.uk](http://ballet.org.uk)

**The Poetry Society**

The Poetry Society is the UK's leading voice for poets and poetry. It was founded in 1909 to promote "a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally. Today it has more than 4000 members worldwide and publishes the leading poetry magazine, The Poetry Review.

With innovative education and commissioning programmes and a packed calendar of performances, readings and competitions, The Poetry Society champions poetry for all ages.

Find out more at: [poetrysociety.org.uk](http://poetrysociety.org.uk)

**Young Poets Network**

Young Poets Network is The Poetry Society's online platform for young poets up to the age of 25. Here you'll find features about poets and poetry, challenges and competitions to inspire your own writing, new writing from young poets, and advice and guidance from the rising and established stars of the poetry scene. We also bring you the latest news and ideas from the writing world, and a list of competitions, magazines and writing groups which particularly welcome young writers.

Young Poets Network is for everyone interested in poets and poetry – whether you've just started out, or you're a seasoned reader or writer. Teachers and parents might find it a useful resource, too.

Find out more at: [youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk](http://youngpoetsnetwork.org.uk)

**Manchester International Festival**

Manchester International Festival (MIF) is the world's first festival of original, new work and special events and takes place biennially in Manchester. The Festival launched in 2007 as an artist-led, commissioning Festival presenting new works from across the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture. MIF's commitment to creative learning and to inspiring, supporting and developing local creative talent is realised through two flagship programmes – MIF Creative and MIF Learning – which bring international artists together with local communities, often to powerful, transformational effect.

Find out more at: [mif.co.uk](http://mif.co.uk)
How can I find out more?
Visit our website or contact English National Ballet’s Engagement Department for more information on 020 7581 1245 or email engagement@ballet.org.uk.

English National Ballet
Engagement Producer, Creative Learning: Michaela Ellis
Engagement Director: Fleur Derbyshire-Fox
Artistic Director & Lead Principal: Tamara Rojo