

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

FOR RELEASE IN
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**STAR-CROSSED TEENAGE LOVERS:
HOUSTON BALLET PRESENTS SHAKESPEARE'S EPIC
*ROMEO AND JULIET***

**Flagship Work, Featuring Intimate Romance and Swashbuckling Spectacle,
Returns to Houston**

A New Generation of Houston Ballet Stars Make Their Debuts in Leading Roles

Houston, TX -- From March 10 – 20, 2005, Houston Ballet will revive its lavish production of **Romeo and Juliet**, a Houston Ballet classic choreographed by Ben Stevenson, which inaugurated the opening of Wortham Theater Center in 1987 and opened the company's historic tour to China in July 1995. In the ballet, two teenagers from warring families meet, fall in love, and rush headlong towards their romantic destiny. With its magnificent evocation of Renaissance Italy by David Walker and Prokofiev's gorgeous score, the flagship production brings this classic love story thrillingly to life. Houston Ballet will present seven performances of **Romeo and Juliet** at the Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling the box office at 713-227-2787 or by logging on to Houston Ballet's Web site at www.houstonballet.org

"Romeo and Juliet is part of Houston Ballet's history," commented Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch. "Many of Houston Ballet's dancers have passed through this ballet and are keeping up the tradition. Every ballerina and ballet dancer wants to perform the leading roles in this production because it's an important part of a dancer's growth. In fact, every dancer needs to do this ballet. We will have a lot of wonderful new Romeos and Juliets in these performances."

Houston Ballet's performances of **Romeo and Juliet** are generously underwritten by Fulbright & Jaworski LLP, Burlington Resources, JP Morgan Chase, Cooper Industries, and Fluor Corporation; with additional support from The Wortham Foundation and the Humphreys Foundation.

Houston Ballet most recently performed **Romeo and Juliet** in 2000, with Molly Glentzer, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle*, noting, "**Romeo and Juliet** soars with emotion, fine dancing. I found myself wishing for the impossible...I yearned for Juliet to wake up before Romeo downed his poison." (June 10, 2000)

Writing in the January 1988 edition of *Dance Magazine*, critic Josie Neal observed of **Romeo and Juliet**, "Stevenson has an eye for grand drama, and it serves him well here, with sweepingly regal dances in the ballroom scene, robust dances and swashbuckling swordplay in the marketplace scenes, and poignant pas de deux, all of them an apt expression of the ravishing Prokofiev score."

***Romeo and Juliet* in Ballet History**

Prokofiev's 1935 score and Shakespeare's dramatic play have inspired many notable choreographers. In 1940, Leonid Lavrovsky created the first Soviet production for Kirov Ballet. Among other treatments of the work are Sir Frederick Ashton (for Royal Danish Ballet in 1955), John Cranko (for La Scala Ballet, Milan in 1958, revised for Stuttgart Ballet in 1962), Sir Kenneth MacMillan (for The Royal Ballet in 1965), John Neumeier (for Royal Danish Ballet in 1974), and Rudolf Nureyev (for London Festival Ballet in 1977; also staged for La Scala in 1980 and Paris Opera Ballet in 1984).

Houston Ballet's production of **Romeo and Juliet** has played a key role in the history of the company. In September 1987, the ballet's world premiere inaugurated the opening of Houston Ballet's opulent new home, the \$72 million Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston – a milestone in the company's development. In July 1995, Houston Ballet was the first full American company to be invited by the Chinese government to

tour the People's Republic of China. A performance of **Romeo and Juliet** at Beijing's Exhibition Theater launched the two-and-half-week tour to Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. The opening night performance of **Romeo and Juliet** was broadcast live on Chinese television, with officials estimating that an audience of 500 million viewed the telecast.

The Story of *Romeo and Juliet*

The ballet's story is exceedingly simple, yet stunning in its emotional force. Set in sixteenth century Verona, **Romeo and Juliet** chronicles the romance of two beautiful Italian teenagers from families on opposing sides of a bitter feud. Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet first meet at a masked ball, fall headlong in love during a romantic encounter on the girl's balcony, and are secretly wed with the aid of Friar Laurence and Juliet's nurse.

The central love story is played out against a backdrop of violence, enmity, and conflict. The two lovers find themselves trapped in a vicious web of circumstance. After a bloody confrontation in the marketplace with Tybalt, a relative of Juliet's, Romeo is banished from Verona. When Juliet's parents insist that she marry the nobleman Paris, Juliet takes a potion that will give her the appearance of death, but allow her to escape and be reunited with Romeo. The two young lovers are indeed reunited in the devastating climax of the ballet in the Capulet family crypt.

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HOUSTON BALLET
ROMEO AND JULIET
FACT SHEET

WHAT: ROMEO AND JULIET
Music by Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography by Ben Stevenson
Designs by David Walker
Lighting by Tony Tucci

Generously underwritten by:
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Additional Support Provided by:
The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
Humphreys Foundation

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

A Houston Ballet classic, Ben Stevenson's staging of **Romeo and Juliet** brings Shakespeare's classic love story vividly to life. Two teenagers from warring families meet, fall in love, and rush headlong towards their romantic destiny. With its magnificent evocation of Renaissance Italy by David Walker and Prokofiev's gorgeous score, the ballet offers Houston Ballet dancers a feast of juicy theatrical roles as well as impassioned classical dance.

WHEN:

At 7:30 pm on March 10, 12, 18, 19, 2005
At 2:00 pm on March 13, 19, 20, 2005

WHERE: Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center
Texas at Smith Streets in downtown Houston

TICKETS: Start at \$19. Call (713) 227 ARTS or 1 800 828 ARTS
Also available at Houston Ballet Box Office at Wortham Theater Center
downtown at Texas at Smith Street, or purchase tickets online at
www.houstonballet.org.

FOR MORE

INFORMATION: Visit Houston Ballet on the Web at www.houstonballet.org