

January, 13-14, 2022

Hong Kong Ballet presents the United States Premiere of Romeo + Juliet

Company: Hong Kong Ballet
Venue: City Center
Location: New York, NY

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Hong Kong Ballet (HKB) presents the U.S. Premiere of Romeo + Juliet on Friday, January 13 at 8pm and Saturday, January 14 at 2pm at New York City Center, 131 W. 55th Street (between Sixth and Seventh Avenues) NYC. Tickets begin at \$35 and can be purchased online at nycitycenter.org, by phone at (212) 581-1212, or in person at the New York City Center Box Office.

Ancient grudges between triad families. Passion and tragedy. The iconic balcony scene. Set in Hong Kong in the turbulent 1960s, Shakespeare's timeless tale of star-crossed lovers is given a fresh and thought-provoking retelling in Septime Webre's new Romeo + Juliet. Juliet's father is an unrelenting Shanghainese tycoon who is determined to marry his only daughter off to a wealthy gweilo (Caucasian), and Webre's original choreography seamlessly incorporates intense street battles rendered in traditional Hong Kong-style kung fu. Accompanied by Prokofiev's dramatic score, retro Hong Kong is vividly brought to life in the epic love story's captivating dancing, complex drama and sumptuous cheongsams. This brilliantly imagined adaptation is especially relevant for contemporary audiences as it fuses dance and drama against a backdrop of a world in flux.

"Transposing the action from medieval Italy to 1960s Hong Kong is an ingenious idea which serves the dual purpose of appealing to the local audience while offering a uniquely Hong Kong product for international tours. Visually the production is stunning." — South China Morning Post

One of Asia's premier ballet companies, Hong Kong Ballet (HKB) is internationally recognized as a world-class institution which represents Hong Kong's unique character. Since its inception in 1979, HKB has evolved into a vibrant performing arts organization with a dynamic repertoire, forward-thinking community engagement initiatives and an emphasis on excellence. Septime Webre joined HKB as its Artistic Director in July 2017.

With nearly 50 dancers from all over the globe—Hong Kong, Mainland China and other parts of Asia, Australia and New Zealand, Europe and throughout North America—HKB has won recognition both regionally and internationally. HKB's repertoire includes celebrated restagings of the classics, neo-classical masterworks by George Balanchine, original full-length works created for HKB and an award-winning series of ballets for young audiences. In addition, HKB performs works by some of today's most sought-after choreographers, including Alexei Ratmansky, Christopher Wheeldon, Wayne McGregor, Justin Peck, Jiří Kylián, Nacho Duato, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa as well as dynamic new works by HKB's Choreographer-in-Residence Hu Song Wei Ricky, Yuh Egami, as well as numerous emerging Hong Kong choreographers.

With almost 50 tours to 11 countries, HKB most recently toured Europe, Mainland China and the US, at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and in New York at the Joyce Theatre and the renowned Fall for Dance Festival. In addition to its performances on stage at home and abroad, HKB maintains a full schedule of community engagement initiatives throughout Hong Kong to ensure the art of ballet is accessible to all. Since its debut in 2020, the HKBALLET@HOME online channel has garnered over 2 million views, connecting with ballet lovers across the globe.

Romeo + Juliet

Romeo: Alejandro Virelles (January 13), Taras Domitro (January 14)

Juliet: Ye Feifei (January 13), Xuan Cheng (January 14)

Juliet's Mother: Wang Qingxin

Juliet's Father: Wei Wei (January 13), Yonen Takano (January 14)

Juliet's Amah*: Zhang Xuening (January 13), Gao Ge (January 14)

Tai Po*: Garry Corpuz (January 13), Alexander Yap (January 14)

Mr. Parker*: Henry Seldon (January 13), Jonathan Spigner (January 14)

Little Mak*: Chun Long Leung (January 13), Albert Gordon (January 14)

Benny*: Jonathan Spigner (January 13), Kyle Lin (January 14)

Romeo's Sifu: Ethan Chudnow (January 13), Garry Corpuz (January 14)

*Some character names are adapted:

Nurse → Amah

Tybalt → Tai Po

Paris → Mr. Parker

Mercutio → Little Mak

Benvolio → Benny

Choreography: Septime Webre

Music: Sergei Prokofiev

Costume Design: Mandy Tam

Set Design: Ricky Chan

Assistant Set Designer: Ryan Lo

Lighting Design (based on the original designs by Billy Chan): Ruby Yau

Lighting Consultant: Billy Chan

Dramaturge: Yan Pat To

Make-up Design: M•A•C Cosmetics

Martial Arts Advisor: Hing Chao

Martial Arts Partner: International Guoshu Association

For more information, visit <https://www.hkballet.com>.

About the Artists

Born in Santiago, Cuba, Alejandro Virelles trained at National Ballet School of Cuba and upon graduation joined National Ballet of Cuba, where he became a principal dancer within five years. Afterwards, he danced with Barcelona Ballet and Boston Ballet, was invited to join English National Ballet in 2014 as a principal dancer and then joined Berlin State Ballet in 2018.

Virelles has danced most of the major roles in classical repertoire, worked with many leading choreographers and artistic directors and appeared in numerous prestigious galas and festivals. He has won awards at Varna International Ballet Competition and International Ballet Competition of Havana.

Born in Liaoning, China, Ye Feifei trained at Xun Yan Ballet School in Shenyang and Goh Ballet Academy in Canada. She joined Hong Kong Ballet as a Corps de Ballet member in 2006, was named Coryphée in 2009 and became Soloist in 2010. She left the Company in 2014 and returned as a Principal Dancer in 2016.

With HKB, Ye has danced principal and featured roles, including Odette/Odile in John Meehan's Swan Lake, Giselle in Septime Webre and Charla Genn's Giselle, Queen of the Wilis in John Meehan and Lin Mei-fang's Giselle, Princess Aurora in Cynthia Harvey's The Sleeping Beauty, Ballerina and Spanish Doll in Terence Kohler's The Nutcracker, Sugar Plum and Snow Queen in Webre's The Nutcracker, Kitri and Dulcinea in Nina Ananiashvili's Don Quixote, Medora and Gulnare in Anna-Marie Holmes' Le Corsaire, Juliet in Rudi van Dantzig's Romeo and Juliet and Webre's Romeo + Juliet, Swanhilda in Ronald Hynd's Coppélia, Hanna Glawari in Hynd's The Merry Widow, Marguerite in Val Caniparoli's Lady of the Camellias, Queen of Hearts and Eaglet in Webre's ALICE (in wonderland), Daisy Buchanan in Webre's The Great Gatsby, Turandot in Natalie Weir's Turandot, Carmen in Yuh Egami and Hu Song Wei Ricky's Carmen and lead roles in George Balanchine's Jewels. She was also featured in Jiří Kylián's Petite Mort, Christopher Wheeldon's Rush, Alexei Ratmansky's Le Carnaval des Animaux, Jorma Elo's Shape of Glow, Stephen Shropshire's Handelwerk, Hu's Between the Emotion and the Response and Tang Min (after

Jules Perrot)'s Pas de Quatre, among others.

An active participant in many international ballet competitions, Ye has received numerous awards, including a silver medal at the Genée International Ballet Competition and a bronze medal at the Varna International Ballet Competition in 2006.

Taras Domitro was born and raised in Havana, Cuba. Former Principal Dancer with National Ballet of Cuba and San Francisco Ballet. He trained at Alejo Carpentier School and the National Ballet School in Havana.

Mr. Domitro was nominated for best male dancer at the 2013 Benois de la Danse. He also won the 2008 Gold Medal at the World Ballet Competition in Orlando, Florida, the Grand Prix at Peru's International Ballet Festival in 2003, and in 2000, 1st Prize and the Revelation Award at International Ballet Competition and Ballet Academies Festival in Havana, Cuba. At age 20, he became a Principal Dancer with the National Ballet of Cuba. He built an incredible career sharing the stage with renowned dancers such as Italian Prima Ballerina Carla Fracci. Later he continued acquiring an extensive and versatile repertoire at San Francisco Ballet. Domitro's major roles as a principal dancer include Albrecht in Tomasson's & Alonso's "Giselle," Snow King and Nutcracker Prince in Thomasson's "Nutcracker," Prince & Sugar Plum Cavalier in Alonso's "Nutcracker," Mercutio in Tomasson's "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo & Mercutio in Alonso's "Shakespeare & the Masks," Prince Siegfried in Tomasson's "Swan Lake," Basilio in Tomasson's/Possokhov's & Alonso's "Don Quixote," Franz in Balanchine's & Alonso's "Coppelia," Lensky in Cranko's "Onegin," Benjamin in Wheeldon's "Cinderella," Prince in Consuegra's "Cinderella," Solor in Makarova's "Kingdom of the Shades" from "La Bayadere," The Creature in Scarlett's "Frankenstein," Brown in Robbins' "Dances at a Gathering." In addition, he created the role of Giovanni and The Swimmer, respectively, in Possokhov's Francesca da Rimini and Swimmer.

His repertoire also includes Balanchine's "The Four temperaments," "Emeralds," "Rubies," "Scotch Symphony," "Symphony in C," and "Theme and Variations." The title role in Fokine's "Petrushka," Lifar's "Suite en Blanc," Edward Liang's "Wunderland," McGregor's "Chroma," Nureyev's "Raymonda" Act III, Ratmansky's "Russian Seasons" and "Shostakovich Trilogy" (Symphony #9), Robbin's Opus19 "The Dreamer," Tomasson's "7 for Eight," "Caprice," "Criss-Cross," "Prism," "On a Theme of Paganini," "Le Quattro Stagioni" and "Trio." He has also performed the Pas de Deux from Vaganova's "Diana & Acteon," the Pas de Deux from Vainonen's "Flames of Paris," "La Bayadere" Pas D'action and Zanella's "Alles Walzer" and "Underskin." Mr. Domitro also worked with Cuban choreographers Alberto Mendez, Ivan Tenorio, and Eduardo Blanco. As an international principal guest artist, Mr. Domitro has performed with several renowned companies at some of the most important stages worldwide. To mention a few, Balletto dell'Opera di Roma, Italy, Florida Classical Ballet, Cuban Classical Ballet of Miami, Ballet Dortmund and Hamburg Ballet, Germany, Orlando Ballet, Kremlin International Ballet Festival, Russia, The Gran Ballet Festival del Queretaro, Mexico, Panama International Ballet Festival, Roberto Bolle & Friends Galas, Elisa Carrillo & Amigos Galas, Taipei International Ballet Gala, Taiwan, Gala of Stars Beijing International Ballet and Choreography Competition, International Ballet Season with National Ballet of China, Gala Internacional de Ballet Chile, Festival de Ballet Cordoba, Mexico, Collin County Ballet Theater, Colorado Conservatory of Dance, International Ballet Greenville, World Ballet Competition Gala of Stars, Gala de Danza, Mexico, Les Hivernales de la Danse, Belgium, YAGP Stars of Today Meet the Stars of Tomorrow, Tampa and Ballet West, The Alicia Alonso Foundation Gala in Madrid, Spain.

Taras has a degree as Professional Ballet Dancer and Teacher from the National Ballet School in Havana, Cuba. Based on the Cuban Ballet Method. In 2017, Taras left San Francisco Ballet to work as a Principal Guest Artist and teacher worldwide. He has worked with students from schools such as Master Ballet Academy, Pennsylvania Ballet Conservatory, Golden State Ballet Academy, Feijoo Ballet School, Hathaway Academy of Ballet, Galmont Ballet, In House Expressions, Performance Edge 2, KL Dance Works (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), National Capital Ballet School (Canberra, Australia), Ballet Gonzalez (Recife, Brazil), International Ballet Intensive (Johannesburg, South Africa). He has also taught several masterclasses for YAGP, Grand Prix Intensive, Ballet Arts Company's "Get Inspired" Series, and more.

Since the Summer of 2020, he has been a part of the Art of Classical Ballet Faculty, helping his mom, renowned Cuban ballet teacher Magaly Suarez built the Pre-Professional Program. For the past four years, he has been the private ballet coach of young prodigy Brady Farrar, a student of The Art of Classical Ballet and Stars Dance Studio (2021 YAGP Grand Prix Award).

Born in Hunan, China, Xuan Cheng trained at Guangzhou Arts School and Xinghai Conservatory of Music. She joined Guangzhou Ballet in 2000 and later become a Principal Dancer. She was invited to join La La La Human Steps, Canadian contemporary dance company, and later danced with Les Grands Ballet Canadiens and Oregon Ballet Theatre before joining Hong Kong Ballet (HKB) in 2022 as a Principal Dancer and Ballet Mistress.

Cheng's notable principal roles include Odette/Odile in Christopher Stowell's and Kevin Irving's Swan Lake, and she was the first Chinese dancer to perform the role of Teresina in August Bournonville's full-length Napoli. Additionally, she has performed almost all the lead roles in classical ballets like The Sleeping Beauty, The Nutcracker, Giselle, Cinderella, Don Quixote, Romeo and Juliet, La Bayadere and ALICE (in wonderland) and has danced leading and original roles created by world class choreographers, including George Balanchine, William Forsythe, Nacho Duato, Jiří Kylián, Édouard Lock, Nicolo Fonte, Trey McIntyre and Val Caniparoli. With La La La Human Steps, she toured 20 countries across Europe, Asia and North America. Cheng also guest performed with Barak Ballet and HKB and in the International Ballet Gala IX with Ballett Dortmund in 2009.

Her accolades include being the silver medalist in the 3rd Shanghai International Ballet Competition in 2004, the finalist in the 8th New York International Ballet Competition in 2005 and the gold medalist in the 2006 Taoli Cup Dance Competition.

Cheng is a guest faculty member of Guangzhou Arts School and the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre. In 2015, she co-founded Oregon International Ballet Academy with her husband and served as the Artistic Director, overseeing ballet education programs and full-length productions.

Artistic Director Septime Webre is an internationally recognized ballet director, choreographer, educator and advocate. He joined Hong Kong Ballet as its Artistic Director in July 2017 after 17 years as Artistic Director of The Washington Ballet in Washington DC, US from 1999-2016.

Previously he served as Artistic Director of the American Repertory Ballet, based in Princeton, New Jersey, US from 1993-1999. In addition, Webre has served as the Artistic Director of Halcyon, a Washington DC-based foundation, launching an annual international Festival for Creativity in Washington DC in June 2018.

During Webre's tenure at The Washington Ballet, the institution's budget grew by 500%, and it enjoyed unprecedented advances in the scope and quality of its work on stage, in the size and reach of its professional school, and in the development of several far-reaching community engagement programmes, which he founded. Webre launched an array of artistic initiatives including The American Experience, which developed great works of literature into full-length ballets, including *The Great Gatsby* and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* among others.

As a choreographer, Webre's works appear in the repertoires of ballet companies throughout North America, including Pacific Northwest Ballet, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Colorado Ballet, Ballet West, Atlanta Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Ballet Austin, Ballet Memphis, Milwaukee Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Ballet Concierto de Puerto Rico, and many others, and he has worked frequently in theatre as well as opera. His new works for HKB, *Romeo+Juliet*, set in 1960s Hong Kong, and *The Nutcracker*, set in 1920s Hong Kong, world premiered in June 2021 and December 2021 respectively. The latter work also won him Outstanding Choreography at the 2022 Hong Kong Dance Awards.

As a dancer, Webre was featured in solo and principal roles from the classical repertoire as well as in contemporary works by choreographers such as Twyla Tharp, Paul Taylor and Merce Cunningham. He has served on the juries of a number of international ballet competitions, including those in Varna, Bulgaria, Istanbul, Cape Town, New York, Seoul, and elsewhere. He has served on the board of Dance/USA and his work has received numerous honors, grants and awards. He holds a degree in History/Pre-Law from the University of Texas at Austin, and is the seventh son in a large, boisterous Cuban American family.

After 14 years in the West, Sergei Prokofiev returned to Soviet Russia and composed his first full-length ballet score, *Romeo and Juliet*, commissioned by Serge Diaghilev. His score has a wonderful lyricism depicting Juliet's innocence and Romeo and Juliet's tender love for each other. A Czech company first staged the ballet, followed by the Kirov in 1940, and in 1946, the Bolshoi staged it a decade after Prokofiev had finished it. There were those who wanted a happy ending, so Prokofiev had to fight to retain Shakespeare's tragic ending. *Romeo and Juliet* is now one of the most popular ballets today.

Mandy Tam has designed costumes for more than 80 productions in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Macao, Taiwan, Berlin, Singapore and other cities in North America, encompassing Chinese and Western opera, dance, drama, musical and physical theatre. In 2004 and 2015 she won twice the "Best Costume Award" from the Hong Kong Federation of Drama Societies. In 2008, she was awarded the Lee Hysan Foundation Fellowship of the Asian Cultural Council.

One of the most prominent set and costume designers in Hong Kong, Ricky Chan is the Head of Theatre Design in The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Chan has designed for more than 150 productions of various genres, including opera, Chinese opera, Chinese dance, contemporary dance and drama, winning much critical acclaim. His most representative works include the award-winning Hong Kong Repertory Theatre's *Dr Faustus* and the large-scale Cantonese opera production *Shade of Butterfly and Red Pear Blossom*. He has worked extensively in the theatre, commercial fields and interior design and actively promoted theatre arts education and given talks on set and costume design. He was the chairman of Hong Kong Association of Theatre Technicians and Scenographers from 2008 to 2012.

Billy Chan has collaborated with ELDT, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Dionysus Contemporary Theatre, choreographer Duncan Macfarland and Taiyuan Dance Troupe, Macao Cultural Centre and Trinity Theatre, in addition to pop concerts. He won Best Stage Art of the Year (Lighting Design) at the 2017 Shanghai Jing'an Modern Drama Valley One Drama Awards. In April 2019, he was awarded Best Lighting Design at the Hong Kong Drama Awards for Chung Ying Theatre Company's *Rashomon* and Outstanding Lighting Design at the Hong Kong Dance Awards for Hong Kong Dance Company's *Waiting Heart*.

Award-winning playwright, director and educator Yan Pat To is Artistic Director of Reframe Theatre. His works have been performed in Berlin, London, Munich, New York, Taipei, Mannheim, Seoul, Montreal and Hong Kong. His play *A Concise History of Future China* was the first ethnic Chinese play ever selected by Berliner Festspiele Theaterreffen Stuckemarkt and premiered at the 2016 Hong Kong New Vision Arts Festival. Yan is currently Lecturer (Dramaturgy) at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and Chairman of the Literary Art committee for Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

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Hong Kong Ballet
131 W 55th St, New York, NY 10019
New York, NY, 10019
<https://www.nycitycenter.org/pdps/2022-2023/hong-kong-ballet-romeo-juliet/>

Schedule
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