



GISELLE

STUDENT MATINEE PACKET

ABOUT BALLET ARKANSAS

Ballet Arkansas traces its origins to the Little Rock Civic Ballet, founded in 1966 by Lorraine and Donald C. Cranford. Incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1978, the organization has, over the course of its 47-year history, touched the lives of more than half a million Arkansans through its performances, education programs, and community engagement initiatives. Today, Ballet Arkansas stands as the only professional ballet company in Little Rock and is widely recognized as the state's premier ballet organization—serving audiences across every region of the Natural State.

Under the visionary leadership of Michael and Catherine Fothergill, Ballet Arkansas has grown into one of the 75 largest ballet companies in the United States, according to the Dance Data Project. The company of 17 world-class dancers presents an annual season of vibrant programming that spans classical masterpieces, landmark works of American dance, and world premieres by some of the field's most innovative choreographers. With a performance and broadcast reach extending to all 50 states and over 60 countries worldwide, Ballet Arkansas engages nearly 50,000 audience members each year and serves as a powerful cultural ambassador for the state of Arkansas.

Ballet Arkansas is proud to serve as the official dance presenter of the Robinson Center, Little Rock's most prestigious performing arts venue, and to hold the distinguished designation of Arts Partner Company in Residence at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. These partnerships amplify the company's capacity to deliver high-caliber, multidisciplinary programming to diverse audiences while deepening its integration within the state's broader cultural ecosystem.

A recognized statewide leader in dance education, Ballet Arkansas is home to a thriving School for Dance that provides exceptional instruction to hundreds of students from diverse backgrounds. Led by a distinguished faculty, the School is complemented by the organization's robust educational outreach initiatives, which engage more than 10,000 K–12 students annually. In addition, over 300 young dancers participate each year in Ballet Arkansas's celebrated Community Cast productions, cultivating meaningful access to the performing arts and nurturing the next generation of artists and arts patrons across Arkansas.

THE LIFE OF A PROFESSIONAL BALLET DANCER



Ballet Arkansas's company of 17 professional dancers are full-time, salaried employees who receive employment benefits and work a standard Monday–Friday schedule. Many are graduates of the nation's most prestigious university dance programs, while others have trained at some of America's finest ballet institutions.

Each day begins with a 90-minute ballet class to condition and prepare their bodies for the physical demands ahead. The remainder of the workday is dedicated to rehearsals, where—on average—it takes 25 hours of practice to learn just one hour of performance material. Once choreography is “staged,” dancers devote the rest of the rehearsal period to refining every detail for the audience's enjoyment. While they are artists, they are also professional athletes, balancing artistry with peak physical performance.

In addition to mastering thousands of intricate dance steps and precise musical phrasing, company members must memorize hundreds of light cues, navigate shifting formations, and bring each character to life with theatrical nuance. Producing any Ballet Arkansas production requires hundreds of hours of meticulous rehearsal.

In fact, a 2020 ranking by InsuranceProviders.com and the U.S. Department of Labor identified dance as the most physically demanding job in the United States. The intensity of the profession often leads dancers to retire from performing in their mid-thirties, transitioning to other roles within the arts.



AUTHOR

Théophile Gautier was a French poet, novelist, critic, and champion of the Romantic movement whose imagination and sense of drama brought *Giselle* to life. Inspired by a passage from Heinrich Heine's *De l'Allemagne* about the Wilis—spirits of maidens who die before marriage—Gautier conceived the ballet's haunting love story.

Working with librettist Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and choreographers Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, Gautier shaped *Giselle* into a two-act masterpiece that premiered at the Paris Opera in 1841. His poetic vision gave the ballet its blend of rustic charm, tragic romance, and supernatural mystery.

Beyond *Giselle*, Gautier was a leading voice in French arts and literature, known for his vivid descriptions and passionate advocacy of beauty in all forms. His work continues to influence ballet storytelling, securing *Giselle*'s place as one of the most enduring works in the classical repertoire.



COMPOSER

Adolphe Adam was a French composer best known for his ballets and operas, whose melodic gift and theatrical flair made him one of the most popular stage composers of the Romantic era. The son of a piano professor at the Paris Conservatoire, Adam studied composition there under François-Adrien Boieldieu.

Adam composed more than 80 stage works, including the beloved ballets *Giselle* (1841) and *Le Corsaire* (1856), as well as the enduring Christmas carol “O Holy Night.” *Giselle*, created in collaboration with choreographers Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, remains his most celebrated work—its lush, emotive score perfectly capturing the innocence, heartbreak, and supernatural beauty of the story.

Renowned for his ability to write memorable melodies and vivid orchestral colors, Adam left a lasting mark on ballet music, with *Giselle* continuing to enchant audiences worldwide nearly two centuries after its premiere.

THE STORY

ACT I

In a cheerful village during the grape harvest, Giselle, a peasant girl who loves to dance, is pursued by Hilarion, the gamekeeper, and Loys—actually the nobleman Albrecht in disguise. Giselle chooses Loys, unaware of his true identity. Her mother, Berthe, warns of the Wilis—ghostly maidens who punish unfaithful men—and fears for Giselle's fragile health. During the harvest festivities, a hunting party arrives with Bathilde, Albrecht's fiancée. When Giselle learns the truth, heartbreak overwhelms her, and she collapses dead in her mother's arms.

ACT II

At midnight in a moonlit forest, the Wilis—spirits of betrayed brides—emerge, led by their queen, Myrtha. They summon Giselle from her grave to join their ranks. Hilarion is caught and forced to dance until he dies. When Albrecht arrives to mourn, Myrtha condemns him as well. Giselle, still loving him, dances to protect him until dawn breaks, when the Wilis lose their power. Albrecht is spared, but Giselle returns to her grave, leaving him to face life without her.

CHARACTERS

- **Giselle** – A young peasant girl with a love for dance and a fragile heart, whose innocence and deep capacity for love transcend even death.
- **Albrecht** – A nobleman disguised as a villager, who falls in love with Giselle despite being betrothed to another.
- **Hilarion** – A local gamekeeper who loves Giselle and is suspicious of Albrecht's true identity.
- **Berthe** – Giselle's protective mother, who warns her of the Wilis—spirits of maidens who died before their wedding day.
- **Bathilde** – A noblewoman, engaged to Albrecht, whose unexpected kindness toward Giselle contrasts with the tragedy that unfolds.
- **Duke of Courland** – Bathilde's father, a figure of noble authority.
- **The Wilis** – Ghostly maidens jilted before marriage, who haunt the forest at night, forcing men to dance until they die.
- **Myrtha** – Queen of the Wilis, powerful and unyielding, she condemns intruders to dance to their deaths.
- **Peasants & Villagers** – Members of Giselle's community, who share in her joys and sorrows.

QUESTIONS

TO ASK YOURSELF



1. What are the overarching themes of Giselle?
2. Was the narrative of the story clearly portrayed within the production?
3. Did the performers' characterizations feel consistent and believable?
4. How was movement used to depict the storyline?
5. Describe the happenings of your favorite scene.
6. What impact did the costumes, sets, and special effects have on your audience experience?
7. How might performers use principles of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) during a performance?
8. What words or emotions would you use to describe the choreography?
9. Discuss the geometric shapes and patterns present within the dance formations.
10. Who was your favorite character within the production and why?
11. How did Adolphe Adam's score make you feel, and what was your favorite musical moment?
12. Describe the sights and sounds of a filled auditorium.
13. Describe the theater technology you witnessed in the production.

ETIQUETTE 101

RULES FOR THE THEATER



Attending a ballet performance is much like going to the movies—only the magic is live. The lights will dim before the performance begins, and the theater will remain dark until the end, except during intermission. Audience members are expected to sit quietly while the dancers perform, with applause warmly welcomed at the conclusion of each scene. However, loud expressions such as shouting, whistling, or screaming are discouraged, as they can distract both performers and fellow audience members.

Guests are encouraged to dress comfortably, keeping in mind that food, beverages, and chewing gum are not permitted inside the auditorium. Restroom visits are allowed as needed, but should be done quietly and with minimal disruption. Because all performance material is protected by copyright, photography and video recording are strictly prohibited.

Rules of the Theater

- Avoid Distractions – Silence or turn off your phone and give the performers your full attention.
- Open Your Mind – Immerse yourself in the sights and sounds of the performance, and enjoy forming your own interpretations.
- Be a Courteous Participant – Follow audience guidelines at all times to ensure an enjoyable experience for everyone.
- Enjoy the Show!



SHARE THE MAGIC OF THE GISELLE WITH YOUR STUDENTS!

Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts
Friday, April 17, 2026 • 10:30 a.m.

The season concludes with the Arkansas premiere of *Giselle*—a beloved romantic ballet of haunting beauty and emotional depth. This full-length production sets a new benchmark in classical performance for the region. With ethereal choreography, a lush, sweeping score, and a poignant tale of love, betrayal, and redemption beyond the grave, *Giselle* invites audiences into a world where the supernatural meets the sublime. Featuring both professional and community performers, this masterpiece promises an unforgettable, immersive experience.

Tickets: \$5 Student & \$10 Educator