

PITTSBURGH
BALLET
THEATRE

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
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Audience Guide



LE CORSAIRE

WITH THE PBT ORCHESTRA

April 15—17, 2016

Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

Audience Production Guide



April 15—17, 2016

The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

Staged by Anna-Marie Holmes after Marius Petipa and Konstantin Sergeyev

Music: Adolphe Adam (original score) with additions by Cesare Pugni, Léo Delibes, Riccardo Drigo and Prince Oldenbourg

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Orchestra Conducted by Resident Conductor Maestro Charles Barker

Libretto: Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Joseph Mazilier in a version by Anna-Marie Holmes

Based on the poem *The Corsair* (1814) by Lord Byron

Scenic Design by Simon Pastukh; Costume Design by Galina Solovyeva

The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Education Department is grateful for the support of the following organizations:

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Cover photo by Duane Rieder; Artists: Alexandra Kochis and Christopher Budzynski. Guide created by PBT's Department of Education and Community Engagement, 2016.

About the Ballet

If any ballet can be compared to a Hollywood blockbuster it's *Le Corsaire*. It has adventure, romance, comedy, a huge cast, juicy roles, and spectacle that is not often equaled in ballet. It has evolved over time into a showpiece for virtuoso ballet technique: its four bravura roles for men, two for women, and group dances are standouts in the classical catalogue.

Mounting the ballet is a major undertaking, requiring great depth of talent and experience among the dancers and considerable commitment by a company. While we've presented the famous excerpt from the ballet in the past (the *Le Corsaire pas de deux*), this production marks the first time PBT has performed the full-length ballet.

Principals Alexandra Kochis and Christopher Budzynski talk about *Le Corsaire's* larger-than-life ballet persona in this [PBT video](#).

The Ballet's Story

It's so convoluted that the story of *Le Corsaire* is nearly impossible to describe . . . not to mention a little hard to believe! There are drugged flowers, a dancing garden, and so many kidnappings and rescues that you can sometimes get mixed up with who's doing what to whom. And—full disclosure—sometimes even those dancing in or working on the ballet need a few minutes to figure out what's going on. Watch the first part of this video of the [1999 American Ballet Theatre production](#) to hear how ABT told the story.

The Main Characters



Conrad a corsair (pirate)

Birbanto Conrad's first mate

Ali Conrad's slave

Lankendem a slave dealer

Medora a beautiful young slave woman

Gulnare another beautiful young slave woman and Medora's friend

Pasha Seyd a Turkish ruler

Alexandra Kochis and Christopher Budzynski as Medora and Conrad, photo by Aimee DiAndrea

The Synopsis

Prologue: A pirate ship, manned by Conrad, his slave, and his friend Birbanto sails toward Turkey.

Act I, The Bazaar: Dealers and buyers fill a noisy bazaar where slave girls are being traded. Conrad and his men arrive where Lankendem, the owner of the bazaar, is selling girls. Conrad sees Medora, a slave girl, and falls immediately in love. Seyd, a pasha, arrives on the scene amidst much fanfare. Lankendem presents three young women whom the pasha rejects. Lankendem presents Gulnare, a lovely slave girl, to the pasha and he buys her. Lankendem then presents a young slave girl, Medora, and everyone is entranced by her beauty. The pasha buys her. Conrad instructs the slave to steal Medora back and the pirates raid the village and kidnap Lankendem.



Act II The Grotto: Conrad shows Medora his hideout. Birbanto calls all the pirates to bring in their stolen bounty to the grotto, as well as the slave girls and Lankendem. Medora, Conrad, and his slave dance to entertain the crew. Afterward, Medora entreats Conrad, in the name of their love, to free all the slave girls. He agrees, but Birbanto rebels against the idea and instead persuades the pirates to riot against Conrad. By the force of Conrad's commanding personality and physical presence, he

single-handedly instills terror into the hearts of the pirates and they abandon their mutinous plan. Not to be thwarted, Birbanto devises a new scheme. He sprays a rose with a sleeping potion and forces Lankendem to help him pass the flower to Medora, who unwittingly gives it to Conrad. He inhales its aroma and falls into a drugged sleep. The pirates return to the grotto and attempt to capture Medora. While struggling, she snatches a dagger and cuts Birbanto's arm. In the confusion, Lankendem steals Medora back and escapes. Birbanto is about to kill Conrad but is interrupted by the slave. Stunned and broken-hearted, Conrad discovers Medora missing. Birbanto feigns ignorance and swears his loyalty to Conrad.

Act III, Scene One: The Pasha's Palace: The playful Gulnare is interrupted by Lankendem bringing a veiled Medora. The pasha is delighted that Medora has been recaptured and declares that she will become his number one wife.

Act III, Scene Two, *Jardin Animé*: Delighted by all his lovely women, the pasha dreams of them in a beautiful garden.

Act III, Scene Three, The Pasha's Palace: The pasha is awakened by the arrival of Conrad, Birbanto, and the pirates, disguised as pilgrims. He invites them to enter the palace. Medora recognizes Conrad, disguised as one of the pilgrims. Suddenly the pilgrims throw off their robes and reveal themselves as pirates. Chaos erupts within the palace. Conrad and his men chase away the pasha, his guard and wives. They dance in victory. Suddenly, Birbanto runs in chasing Gulnare. They collide with Conrad and Medora. Medora exposes Birbanto as a traitor, and Conrad shoots him. Conrad's slave helps Medora, Gulnare, and Conrad escape. They flee to the ship.

Act III, Scene Four, The Storm: The pirate ship sails upon a calm sea. Conrad, at the helm, cradles Medora in his arms. Suddenly a fierce storm blows across as lightning illuminates the darkening sky. Gusting winds shred the sails and a lightning bolt snaps the ship's mast in half. The ship sinks amidst the relentless, turbulent waters.

Epilogue: As the wind subsides and the sea calms itself, the moon rises in the sky. It sheds light upon Conrad and Medora, clinging to a rock and offering thanks for their miraculous survival, a testimony to the strength of their love.



PBT rehearsal photos: Top: Jessica McCann, Joseph Parr, Ruslan Mukhambetkaliyev, Corey Bourbonniere and Emily Simpson as pirates, by Aimee DiAndrea. Right: Hannah Carter and Yoshiaki Nakano as Medora and Conrad and Luca Sbrizzi as Ali, by Kelly Perkovich.

A *Le Corsaire* Timeline

The full history of the ballet too complicated to detail here! Below are some of the major moments in the *Le Corsaire*'s development.

1814 *The Corsair*, by Lord Byron, is published.

1826 – 1844 Three *Le Corsaire* ballets are produced by different choreographers. These generally follow the story of Byron's poem.

1856 Joseph Mazilier, ballet master at the Paris Opera, creates a *Le Corsaire* ballet, co-writing the libretto with Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint Georges and with a score by Adolphe Adam (both of whom helped created the great Romantic-era ballet, *Giselle*, in 1841). Mazilier retains the names and exotic idea of Byron's poem but his ballet ditches Byron's gloomy air and it becomes a more light-hearted, romantic adventure.

1858 The success of Mazilier's ballet is noticed in St. Petersburg, Russia. Jules Perrot (another member of that original *Giselle* team), ballet master at the Imperial Theatre, stages his own version of Mazilier's *Le Corsaire*. Perrot is assisted with some new choreography by Marius Petipa, a young dancer who stars in the lead role of the corsair Conrad.

1863 Petipa, now himself ballet master at the Imperial Theatre, stages his own version of *Le Corsaire*, casting his wife in the role of Conrad's beloved Medora. He adds new choreography and music.

1868 and 1880 Petipa presents updated *Le Corsaire* productions at the Imperial Theatre, each time for a different prima ballerina, and each time adding more dances and music.

1899 Petipa's final and definitive version of *Le Corsaire* premieres. He adds music by Riccardo Drigo for a new pas de deux for Medora and Conrad.

1915 – 1930s The pas de deux is updated and refined with contributions by both Samuil Andrianov (Imperial Theatre ballet master and an instructor of George Balanchine's; Andrianov actually makes it a pas de trois for Conrad, Medora and the slave) and Russian virtuoso Vakhtang Chabukiani. It becomes the bravura show stopper we see today, and begins to be performed apart from the full-length work.

1962 Rudolf Nureyev dances the *Le Corsaire pas de deux* (with Lupe Serrano) in a Bell Telephone Hour television broadcast. It is the first introduction for many in the U.S. and the West to the ballet, and to Nureyev's power, magnetism and sensuality.

1989 A full-length version of *Le Corsaire* is seen in the U.S. for the first time—more than 130 years after Mazilier's ballet!—in a Kirov Ballet tour at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

1992 Konstantin Sergeyev stages his version of the full-length ballet, based on Petipa's 1899 production, in Moscow.

1997 Anna-Marie Holmes revives and reworks Sergeyev's production for Boston Ballet, the first American company to present the full-length ballet.

1998 Holmes stages the ballet for American Ballet Theatre.

2016 PBT presents Holmes' *Le Corsaire*.

Anna-Marie Holmes, *Le Corsaire* Stager

For some story ballets PBT contracts with a stager to “set” the ballet on the Company—to teach and rehearse the ballet for us. For *Le Corsaire* the most renowned stager outside of Russia is Anna-Marie Holmes. Ms. Holmes spent a month in our studios to immerse our dancers in the story and choreography of this mammoth work.

Born in Canada, Ms. Holmes was a renowned ballerina and has both danced and taught in more than 30 countries on five continents. She founded the International Academy of Dance Costa do Sol in Portugal and served as its co-artistic director.

Known for her interpretations of the Russian classics, she has produced or set these great works in Lisbon, Oslo, Helsinki, Antwerp, Naples, Florence, New York and Tokyo. She has taught and restaged many of the classics in America for such companies as Dance Theater of Harlem and American Ballet Theatre. Her staging of *Le Corsaire* appeared on PBS’s Great Performances, for which it won an Emmy Award.

She joined Boston Ballet in 1985 and in 1997 was named Artistic Director of the company as well as Dean of Faculty for the Boston Ballet Center for Dance Education. During her tenure with Boston Ballet, Ms. Holmes created new stagings of many ballets, including *Giselle*, *Don Quixote*, *La Bayadère*, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. She received the Dance Magazine Award for extraordinary and lasting contributions to the art form. Ms. Holmes became the first recipient of the North Carolina School of the Arts Rudolf Nureyev Endowed Distinguished Professorship in Ballet. She has worked for the Canadian Government as an adjudicator, evaluating most of the major Canadian ballet companies and schools for the Canadian Council.

Ms. Holmes is very active in her work as a judge for Youth American Grand Prix, traveling throughout the United States each year for their preliminary and final competitions. She is in constant demand as a judge, guest teacher and choreographer.

Photo: Anna-Marie Holmes in rehearsal with PBT principal dancer Julia Erickson, by Aimee DiAndrea.



The Choreography

The choreography in a story ballet can have a complex lineage. Our production of *Le Corsaire* is Holmes’ staging of Sergeyev’s staging of Petipa’s 1899 version of the ballet. It’s a blend of the three, and includes still other choreography that has been added over the years, such as the *Le Corsaire pas de deux*. What complicates matters more is that we don’t really know what in Petipa’s production may have originated with Mazilier or Perrot. Despite all of that, we tend to give Petipa most of the credit, as dance historian Doug Fullington says, because “he gave it the most years.”* The 1899 version is also recorded in Stepanov notation, a system for documenting ballet choreography, and so we know what Petipa included in the ballet then. All modern productions—though updated, changed, added onto—are said to be derived from Petipa’s last production.

*Doug Fullington, [“Works & Process at the Guggenheim,”](#) YouTube, live-streamed on 2/23/14

Some Highlights of the Choreography

Watch for these remarkable moments in *Le Corsaire*:

Act 1

Pas de trois des odalisques · *Dance for three harem slaves*. Petipa inserted this dance into the ballet in one of his early revivals. In this scene Lankendem shows off three of his slaves to the Pasha, hoping he will purchase them. It is a pristine example of Petipa's aesthetic, with solos for each dancer that demand steely, classical technique. The coda, or finale, where all three dance together, is beautifully balanced. Petipa uses a variety of inventive steps to display different aspects of the dancers' strength and delicacy. Watch ABT's Gillian Murphy in her [odalisque variation](#) starting at :58.

Pas d' esclave. This pas de deux for Gulnare and Lankendem was added by Petipa in 1858. It's one of the only places in the ballet where we see a nod to the emotional undercurrent of the ballet's slave-trading plotline. The partnering is graceful and sensitive, which is curious given the slave-trader / slave relationship; the choreography betrays a poignancy that is not really felt elsewhere in the ballet. You can see [ABT's 1999 pas d' esclave](#) in this video, starting at 4:16.



Act 2

Le Corsaire pas de deux (actually a *pas de trois* in our production). This dance for Conrad, Medora and Ali is one of the most celebrated moments in all of ballet, with thrilling bravura technique. It's often danced as a stand-alone showpiece—though as a pas de deux, eliminating Conrad and adding his character's choreography to Ali's. This is one of Rudolf Nureyev's signature roles, who infused it with a regal and sensual charisma that captivated audiences around the world. Watch [Nureyev and Margo Fonteyn](#) in the pas de deux.

Luca Sbrizzi as Ali in the Le Corsaire pas de deux, photo by Aimee DiAndrea

Grotto pas de deux. In this very romantic dance Conrad and Medora express their love for each other. It was added by Konstantin Sergeyev to music by Riccardo Drigo (from his ballet *Floral Awakening*). It is full of spectacular lifts and the classical movements are marked by an expressive tenderness. ABT's 1999 pas de deux starts at 7:44 in [this video](#).



Hannah Carter and Yoshiaki Nakano in the Grotto pas de deux, photo by Aimee DiAndrea

Act 3, Scene 2

Jardin Animé. Added by Petipa in 1868, in this dance (in which the Pasha dreams that his wives have become a dancing garden) the stage gradually fills with dozens of ballerinas. Petipa's perfect, formal choreography is amplified by the large group of dancers, the layers of motion they create together, and the essential beauty of the balance and symmetry of the group. These elements combine to create an architectural grandeur that is a signature of his aesthetic.



Caitlin Peabody, Alexandra Kochis, Molly Wright, Olivia Kelly and JoAnna Schmidt, photo by Kelly Perkovich

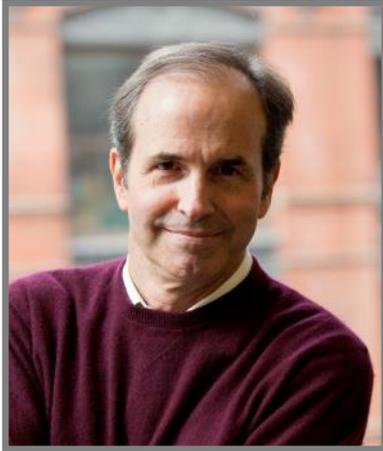


Choreographer Marius Petipa, the “father of classical ballet,” was born in France to a theatrical family in 1818. His father, Jean Petipa, a ballet master, trained Marius and his brother in dance. While studying music in Brussels, Marius made his ballet debut, at age 9; by 20 he was a premier danseur and produced several short ballets. In 1840, he made his debut at the Comedie Francaise, partnering the famous ballerina Carlotta Grisi. After two affairs with married women, Petipa left for St. Petersburg, where he served as premier danseur at the Imperial Ballet. He was to remain in St. Petersburg for the rest of his career.

By 1855, Petipa was restaging and creating original ballets for the Imperial Ballet, tailored for his ballerina wife, Maria. His first great success was *The Daughter of the Pharaoh*, resulting in his 1862 appointment as choreographer of the Imperial Theatre. Petipa was promoted to Chief Choreographer and served as Premier Ballet Master from 1871 until 1903 (when he was pressured to retire at age 84). The value of his accomplishments is inestimable; he produced more than 60 full-evening ballets, including *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, *La Bayadère*, and *Don Quixote*. Petipa is still considered the most influential choreographer of all time.

Illustration: Wikipedia

Music Notes · Maestro Charles Barker



A bricolage, a goulash, a salmagundi: all ways of describing the picnic basket of music in PBT's production of *Le Corsaire*. Composer Adolphe Adam (of *Giselle* fame) wrote the original ballet score to a short-lived 1856 Parisian production of *Le Corsaire*. All subsequent revivals of the ballet reworked the choreography and interpolated other music to fill out the apparently deficient Adam score. Some productions added the music of Chopin, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Glière, and Dvořák. Our current version interpolates music from less celebrated composers starting with Cesare Pugni, (a prolific composer but a convicted embezzler, a compulsive gambler and an alcoholic), Prince Oldenbourg (a noted scholar, philanthropist and composer), Léo Delibes (an intelligent composer whose few works are still dear to us, *Coppelia*, *Sylvia*,

Lakme), and finally Riccardo Drigo (the Italian maestro who rearranged *Swan Lake* for Marius Petipa).

Each of these composers, though not exactly on the level of the three "Bs," is represented with tuneful melodies and characteristic harmonies that identify their style. It is entertaining (at least for me) to guess who wrote what in *Corsaire* (there are over 60 different pieces). The majority of Act 1 is by Adam, *Odalisques* by Pugni, the *Pas d'esclave* for Gulnare and Lankendem by Prince Oldenbourg, the familiar *Corsaire Pas de Deux* in Act 2 by Drigo, and the *Jardin Animé* in Act 3 (the dream scene) is by Delibes. Drigo was responsible for assembling this musical mélange and (most likely) reorchestrated its various parts to fit the Mariinsky Orchestra of St. Petersburg in the late 1890s. The current orchestration is by Kevin Galie.

Photo by Rosalie O'Connor

Listen to the [Le Corsaire Pas de Deux](#) by Drigo.

The Original Composer

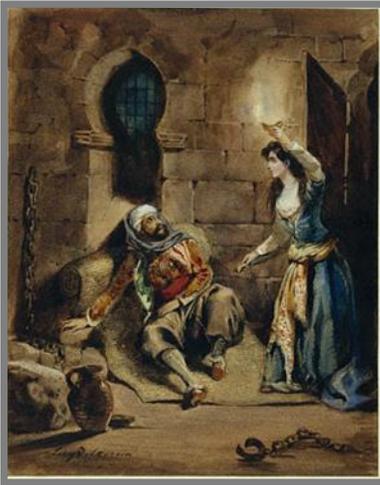
Adolphe Adam (1803-1856) was an energetic and prolific composer, with more than 50 operas and 12 ballets to his credit. His most enduring ballets are *Le Corsaire* and *Giselle* (1841). With *Giselle*, Adam changed the landscape of ballet music—he was the first composer to write an original score for a ballet. Until that time, ballet music was a pastiche of bits and pieces of existing popular works extracted and arranged to form a score. Adam spent a year composing *Le Corsaire* and died the same year of its premiere, perhaps accounting for the need to use other composers' music when new dances were added to the ballet in later years. Adam was a noted instructor at the Paris Conservatory where Léo Delibes, whose work was added to *Le Corsaire*, was one of his students. Adam is also known for the Christmas hymn, *O Holy Night* (1847).



Illustration: Wikipedia

The Source of the Story · *The Corsair*

The Corsair is a tale in verse by George Gordon Byron, better known as Lord Byron. It was published in 1814 and set a sales record for the time, selling out all 10,000 copies in one day. Written in sections (cantos) and dozens of verses long, its story goes something like this:



Conrad is a pirate who has done a “thousand crimes”—too many evil deeds to list. He’s hiding out on an island with his beloved Medora—his love for her is his one true virtue. He learns that the Pasha Seyd, a Turkish ruler, is planning to invade the island, so Conrad travels to the Pasha’s castle to thwart the invasion. Once there he discovers Gulnare, the Pasha’s chief harem slave, who falls in love with Conrad. He is determined to rescue her and is willing to risk his life for her, despite his love for Medora. Conrad has the opportunity to kill the sleeping Pasha but can’t bring himself to commit such a dishonorable act. Gulnare takes matters into her own hands and kills the Pasha herself, allowing their escape back to the island. There they discover that Medora has died of sorrow, believing Conrad dead. Riddled with guilt and regret, Conrad disappears forever.

The poem was influenced by Byron’s travels to what were then exotic lands: Portugal, Spain, Albania, Greece, Malta. It’s one of the works in which Byron establishes the qualities and characteristics of the Byronic hero: an idealized yet flawed and essentially tragic figure who never finds peace or happiness. Byron admits that this “hero” is autobiographical, emerging from his own inner conflict and sense of moral ambiguity and despair.

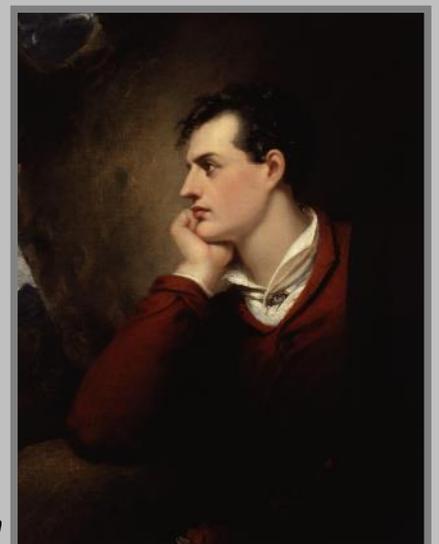
In early versions of the ballet the character of Conrad and the ballets’ storylines were similar to that of Byron’s poem. In later versions (including current-day), the plot and the characters change dramatically, so that the names, the exotic locale, and a shadow of the story are all that remain of the original poem.

Illustration: Episode from The Corsair, by Eugene Delacroix, 1831; Wikipedia

The ballet takes the names Conrad, Medora, Gulnare and Pasha Seyd from Byron’s poem. Byron noted that the meaning of Gulnare is *the flower of the pomegranate*.

Lord Byron

“Mad, bad and dangerous to know.” These were words used by Lady Caroline Lamb in 1812 to describe her lover, George Gordon Byron. The 6th Baron Byron was born in 1788 to parents whose own erratic behavior and mental frailties no doubt contributed to the wild emotions and behavior for which Byron became notorious. Byron grew up in Scotland, but was educated at Cambridge, where Byron’s poems (some considered indecent) drew critics so vehement that more than one challenged him to a duel—but with the publication of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* in 1812 Byron’s fame was established. His became the most fashionable poetry of the day, and Byron was sought after as a guest at London’s most prestigious social events. In his poetry, notably *The Corsair* (1814), *Prometheus* (1816) and



Portrait of Byron by Richard Westall, National Portrait Gallery, London

Don Juan (1819-24), Byron created a romantic hero—"defiant, melancholy, haunted by secret guilt,"—adored by society and taken as a model for himself. By the age of only 36, however, Byron had died in Greece, after throwing his fortunes in with Greek rebels fighting the Ottoman Empire.

Extravagant, self-indulgent, promiscuous, sometimes bulimic, and possibly manic-depressive, Byron left the world with a canon of romantic poetry that immortalized a series of "hero villains," and "noble outlaws." Inspiring more than 40 operas by the likes of Donizetti and Verdi, music by composers Berlioz, Schumann, and Mendelssohn, and of course, Joseph Mazilier's ballet *Le Corsaire*, Byron influenced a generation of Romantic-Era artists. It may be telling that the very year Byron published his epic poem, *The Corsair*, he confided to a close friend, "I have been all my life trying to make someone love me."

For more about Byron and *The Corsair* check out these sources: an NPR story, [The Corsair, Byron's Bestseller](#); [Byron's Corsair](#) at TodayinLiterature.com; [Byron's The Corsair](#) at the website *Anthology of Ideas*.

PBT Connects

Join us at the theater to learn more about *Le Corsaire*!

Afterthoughts: April 15, at 10:30 p.m. Stay after the performance for an enlightening discussion about the ballet with Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr & guest stager and dance luminary Anna-Marie Holmes. In the theater.

Insights: April 16, at 7 p.m. Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr & Maestro Charles Barker give a preview of the performance with an exclusive look at the music of *Le Corsaire*. Mezzanine level. Please reserve a spot: education@pittsburghballet.org or 412-454-9109.

Talks with Terry: April 17, at 1 p.m. Take this special opportunity to watch the Company as they finish their warm-up class on stage and talk with Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr about the production. In the theater.

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- Wheelchair accessibility
- Braille and large print programs
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- Audio recordings of select program notes. Click [here](#).
- Sign Language Interpretation and Closed Captioning for select ballets. (These services not available for *Le Corsaire*.)
- Audio-described performances (Sunday, April 17 at 2 pm).

For more information about all of these programs please visit the [accessibility page](#) on PBT's website. Should you have a special request that is not listed above or have any questions about our accessibility services, please do not hesitate to contact at 412-454-9105 or accessibility@pittsburghballet.org.

For more information about the accessibility services at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts, please visit their [accessibility page](#).