

PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE



Storytelling in Motion

Audience Guide to the Ballets

Oct. 7 -9, 2022

August Wilson African American Cultural Center
Pittsburgh

Catharsis, by Yoshiaki Nakano. Artists: Grace Rookstool; Photo: Aviana Adams

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The Production

Storytelling in Motion launches Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre's 53rd season. It is a mixed repertory production – a program featuring three shorter ballets by three different choreographers that spotlight an exciting range of classical and contemporary technique. With *The Exiled*, a PBT premiere by Helen Pickett, *Duende*, by Nacho Duato and *Catharsis*, by PBT Principal Dancer Yoshiaki Nakano, the program celebrates PBT's depth, range and artistry.

[Click here](#) to watch the *Storytelling in Motion* preview trailer.

The Exiled

"Pickett seems to perfectly achieve what she set out for – a work exposing the intricacies of human existence. In particular, the use of spoken word was a wonderfully crafted tool in the hands of Pickett, drawing viewers farther into this otherworldly situation that revealed the truly ambiguous nature of good and evil."

-Chelsea Thomas, Dance Informa

Choreography and Concept - Helen Pickett

Music - John Corigliano

Staging - Sarah Hillmer

Lighting Design and Recreation - David Finn, Joey Walls

Costume Design - Tamara Cobus

Set Concept - Helen Pickett

Number of Dancers - 5

Length - 27 minutes

World Premiere - Atlanta Ballet, 2014

Artists: Diana Yohe, Lucius Kirst, Jessica McCann, Yoshiaki Nakano, Amanda Morgan | Photo: Aviana Adams



Helen Pickett's award-winning *The Exiled* is an innovative work of art and a departure from traditional ballet. It takes the form of a dramatic story told within the confines of a single room. The front wall is plexiglass, which creates an uncommon, disruptive barrier. It features narration through spoken word, as well as choreography, from the dancers.

The story was inspired by a play famous for the quote, "hell is other people," and centers around three strangers destined to spend eternity together. Two characters called "Proprietors" function as the story's narrators, curators and instigators, creating a cat-and-mouse dynamic in the group. Audiences will be entranced by the exploration of human choices and morality in this captivating story, and by Pickett's thought-provoking message that "all possibilities rest in every human being."

PBT Soloist Corey Bourbonniere on the pacing and intensity of the ballet:

The way that the piece moves and the pace of the piece, you get really, really tired, really fast. But I feel like it informs the piece. There were moments when I was first running the ballet

where I would start to do this “acting” breathing, but I had to settle into my body and say (to myself), “You’re really out of breath, you need to just actually breathe and use that.” But I realized I didn’t have to (calm my breathing) because I AM out of breath, I’m being tortured in this space - I hate to say by the choreography but a little bit by the choreography. Because it’s so intense and keeps moving. Dancing this piece, you really almost feel in a way like you’re living that experience, because you’re so tired, there’s so much being asked of you. We jump up and we’re trying to cling to these rafters in front of the plexiglass, trying to escape - it’s intense, it’s hard to hang on, it’s hard to be thrown against this glass - and know that there’s no escape ‘til the ballet’s over.

Helen Pickett on the ballet’s unique, narrative element:

The script, embedded within the ballet, will help tell the story of two individuals, (The Proprietors), who have decided to take matters of justice into their own hands. They seek revenge on three individuals who must pay the price for their criminal actions. The justice handed down: an eternity spent in an unrelenting cycle of turmoil. They are The Exiled! . . .

As the voyeurs, we, the audience, get a 25-minute glimpse of their ongoing, sometimes humorous, downward spiral. As the (Proprietors) say, “Perhaps it is a cautionary tale.”

- Excerpted from [Atlanta Ballet News](#)

Read more about Pickett’s concept for the ballet at [PBT’s blog](#).

[Click here](#) to watch a behind-the-scenes video with Helen Pickett when she was creating the ballet in 2014.

Helen Pickett



Helen Pickett, native of San Diego, CA, is an award-winning contemporary ballet choreographer, and has created over 50 ballets in 16 years in the U.S. and Europe, including *The Crucible*, a full-length for Scottish Ballet, which premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival. Pickett was resident choreographer for Atlanta Ballet, 2012 – 2017. In 2021, Pickett, the Co-Director for the Contemporary Program at Jacob’s Pillow, choreographed for PBT as well as American Ballet

Theatre, Boston Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Jacob's Pillow and Cincinnati Ballet. Future commissions include, The National Ballet of Canada, Boston Ballet and The Dutch National Ballet, which has commissioned a new full-length production.

During the Pandemic, starting in May 2020, Pickett launched her YouTube talk show, Creative Vitality Jam Sessions, and has completed 83 interviews. From June - December 2020, Helen choreographed 12 dances for film resulting in two series: Homes Studies and The Shakespeare Cycle. Three films from *The Shakespeare Cycle* were featured in a PBS special. And a fourth, *The Air Before Me*, created with director Shaun Clarke was an official selection of the San Francisco Dance Film Festival 2021, and won the Audience Favorite Award from Screen Dance International. All were created virtually on Zoom. In April 2021, Pickett founded the Female Choreographer's Big Round Table, a zoom meeting place for female choreographers, 140 women, to build community and forge avenues for more equitable work environments.

Pickett danced with Ballet Frankfurt, director, William Forsythe from 1987-1998, and performed with the New York theater company Wooster Group, director, Elizabeth LeCompte, for five years. In addition to Pickett's contemporary ballet choreography, she has collaborated, as a choreographer and actress with installation video artists and filmmakers, including Eve Sussman, Toni Dove and Laurie Simmons.

Pickett is the co-director, along with Milton Meyers, of the Jacob's Pillow Contemporary Summer Dance School Program. She leads her think-tank dance workshop, Choreographic Essentials in universities around the country. She earned her MFA in 2011 from Hollins University, and in 2016, Pickett received an Honorary Doctorate, from University of North Carolina School for the Arts, awarded by then Dean of Dance Susan Jaffe, for her contribution to the arts. www.helenpickett.com

Photo: Mihaela Bodlovic

The Music

The music comprises excerpts from film scores by [John Corigliano](#), an American contemporary classical composer and winner of numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Music (*Symphony No. 2* for String Orchestra).

For the ballet, Pickett selected several pieces from Corigliano's Academy Award-winning score for *The Red Violin* (1998), including "The Theft," "Death of Anna," "Pope's Betrayal" and "Kaspar's Audition;" and from his Oscar-nominated score for *Altered States* (1980): "Three

Hallucinations" movements No. 2 "Hymn" and No. 3 "Ritual."

Throughout the ballet the music is haunting, frightening and grating, and contributes to an atmosphere of extreme discomfort and psychological distress. Its dissonance is a challenge for the dancers not only emotionally but physically as well. Because there are no counts to depend on for pacing they have to learn a different way of listening to the music and find another method of absorbing it in their bodies and expressing it in movement.

[Click here](#) to listen to the music excerpted from *Altered States, Movements No. 2 and 3*, starting at 6:00 and 12:07 respectively.

The Costumes

I love taking an idea and making it happen in reality. I love the process of fitting. I love to have a little secret in the design, a low back that you wouldn't expect. Or making people wonder, 'How does that stay on?'

- Tamara Cobus

The costumes were designed by Tamara Cobus, a costume and fashion designer, during her tenure as costume director at Atlanta Ballet. PBT Costume Shop duplicated her original designs using photos of Atlanta Ballet's performance and Cobus's original design drawings. PBT Shop staff made entirely new costumes for PBT's production, substituting fabrics and design elements to add additional stretch, and recreating fabric to attain the look of the originals. The costumes are highly symbolic in the ballet, as the three characters held by the Proprietors gradually strip off their clothing, as if taking off the artificial layers and revealing their inner selves.

Ms. Cobus' designs for ballet, theater and film, and served as Costume Director for Richmond Ballet in the 2000s. She worked on the costume team under Ruth E. Carter for the 2018 hit, [Black Panther](#), which won the Academy Award for Best Costume Design.

[Watch a discussion](#) about the costumes from *The Exiled* with PBT Costume Director Kristin McLain, from timestamp 6:15 - 12:13 on the video (the video covers all the ballets in the production).

The Set

A Conversation with PBT Director of Production Curtis Dunn



Can you give us a quick introduction to the set for *The Exiled*?

The set was built from my drawings by the Construction Center at Pittsburgh CLO, and will be moved to the August Wilson African American Cultural Center (AWAACC) for the performance. So the set the audience sees at the theater is the one we've used here the last few weeks for rehearsals.

The original set was built by Atlanta Ballet when Helen (Pickett) created the piece (in 2014). And the version of the set they created, in order to be stable, had to be bolted with 3/8" bolts through their dance floor and into the stage floor. I didn't want to damage our dance floor or underlying bounce floor, and the construction of the AWAACC's floor isn't such that you can put bolts into it with stability. So, we had to figure out a different way to make it structural.

How was the set designed and built?

The largest pieces are the steel, which is 23 feet long, and the plexiglass panels, which total 20 feet wide by 8 feet tall. The whole front wall rig weighs approximately 900 pounds. Once assembled, it is one big cube and it's stable on its own, so that when the dancers do the highly athletic things that they do - like jump up and slam against it or climb up on it - it'll all just stand there! After the performance, most of the set flies out (lifts up into the ceiling area) and hangs above the dancers during the rest of the show. It all breaks down and stores in two large boxes for moving over to the theater or for renting out. Because our version of the set is non-destructive to the theater it is used in, we hope other ballet companies will rent our version when doing Helen's piece.

How about the cost?

Considering that it's a third-of-an-evening-length ballet, it merited a bit of investment in order to be structurally stable. It's certainly an impressive piece. Though relatively simple to deploy,

you need to commit to the labor required to execute it and have enough hanging pipes and space to fly it, along with anything else that the rest of the performance may require.

The props - the couch, the flowers, the pedestal - did PBT make them or buy them? Who specified what they would look like?

Helen actually did the specifications for all of this, set and props, so the design is hers. We built all the ancillary parts and props in the PBT Production Shop. They were built by Thomas Edkins and Jeff Edkins. We copied the Atlanta production - took the look of the original production and the dimensions and built them.

The pieces are built specifically for the choreography. The sofa is extremely overbuilt because the dancers do a lot on it - they jump on it, they step on it, they climb over it. It's a very stable piece of furniture. Most commercial sofas would quickly be destroyed, and probably wouldn't match the look that Helen wanted. The column that the flower pot sits on is at a height so that it's at shoulder level for the dancer that has to interact with it.

Is there anything else about the set that is different, or something that you hadn't encountered before?

Using a wall of lexan on stage is a bold choice because it mainly needs to be lit from angles that won't reflect into the audience. It cuts a lot of the potential lighting positions because you don't want to bounce light off of it and (reflect glare into) the audience. So it has to be lit very carefully. It's not a common choice. It's like having mirrors on stage - there's always a trick involved. And, in ballet we don't normally have microphones on stage - our dancers don't usually speak, although we've performed *West Side Story Suite* (2018) where our dancers sang a few numbers, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (2012) had some brief spoken pieces. But *The Exiled* actually has dialogue in it. Helen lives in both the ballet and theater worlds. Her cross-disciplinary approach manifests in a lot of her work, (and it challenges) the people performing in it. It's no-doubt a mind-opening experience for them.

Duende

Choreography - Nacho Duato

Choreographer's Assistant - Jim Vincent

Music - Claude Debussy

Costume Design - Susan Unger

Lighting Design - Nicolás Fischtel

Number of Dancers - 12

Length - 30 minutes

World Premiere - Nederlands Dans

Theater, November 1991



Duende is the Spanish word used to describe the mythological creatures that live in the forest (elves, pixies), the indescribable personal charm some people possess, and the aura of 'magic' that happens in a flamenco performance.

Magical in its strangeness, the ballet is a journey into the secret world of nature 'where elves laugh and play in the spring'. According to the choreographer Nacho Duato, 'duende' is the Spanish name for magical people. They are inhabitants of another world, friendly to humans, who can easily do headstands. They draw squares and triangles with their feet in the air, jump on each other's shoulders, dissolve in the air, instantly disappearing from view. In this ballet, the audience is invited to surrender themselves to the fantasy world and be transported to a dimension where the ordinary laws of human life lose their power and significance.

Courtesy Mediart Producciones SL

Artists: JoAnna Schmidt, Masahiro Haneji; Photo: Aviana Adams

Read more about *Duende* on the [PBT blog!](#)
[Click here](#) to watch the first movement of the ballet, performed by Compania Nacional de Danza.

Nacho Duato



Born in Valencia, Spain, Nacho Duato started professional ballet training with the Rambert School in London at 18, expanding his studies at Maurice Bejart's Mudra School in Brussels and completing his dance education at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York. In 1980, Duato signed his first professional contract with the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm, and a year later Jiří Kylián brought him to the Nederlands Dans Theater in Holland, where he was quickly incorporated into the company and repertoire. For his achievements as a dancer he received the Golden Dance Award in 1987. Duato's natural talent soon had him turn towards choreography. In 1988 he was named Resident

Choreographer for Nederlands Dans Theater working alongside Hans van Manen and Kylián. With the growing demand from international companies requesting a work of his for their repertoire, Duato had to take a decisive step in his career. His ballets form part of the repertoire of companies like Cullberg Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Deutsche OperBallet, Australian Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet, Ballet Gulbenkian, Finnish Opera Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Royal Ballet and American Ballet Theatre and Paris Opera Ballet. In 1995, he received the grade of Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, which is awarded annually by the French Embassy in Spain. In 1998 the Spanish Government awarded him the Gold Medal for Merit in the Fine Arts. In April 2000 at the Stuttgart Opera he won the Benois de la Danse, one of the most prestigious international awards for choreography, presented by the International Dance Association for *Multiplicity. Forms of Silence and Emptiness*. Duato is National Dance Award 2003 in the category of Creation. At the invitation of the Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escenicas y de la Musica of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, Nacho Duato has been Artistic Director of the Compania Nacional de Danza since June 1990.

Courtesy Mediart Producciones SL

Photo: Fernando Marcos

Music and Movement



Duato's choreography is always inspired by the music. For *Duende* he chose works by Claude Debussy, a composer he "fell in love with"* early in his life and career.

Debussy (1862 – 1918), one of the most influential composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, developed a new style of rhythm, harmonics and orchestral color, creating an altogether different musical sound. PBT Principal Pianist and Music Administration Yoland Collin notes that the pieces in *Duende* are innovative in their own right: *Syrinx*, ("nymph") L. 129 is one of the first compositions to be written for a single flute with no accompanying instrument(s). Debussy composed the *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*, L. 137, using a classical pedal harp, which

allowed for half steps and a much more complex sound than previous composers were able to produce.

Debussy's music often depicted in sound what he saw, felt and heard in the natural world. *Duende* is an evocation of that, with dancers costumed in mottled, forest colors and movement that can be as magical and mysterious as the music. Duato's choreography is "fresh, fluid and fast,"** as well as incredibly musical, with each note filled out and expressed with accompanying articulation by the dancers - the combination results not only in highly athletic and demanding technique, but with artistry that is breathtaking. The movement is also beautiful in form, with moments where Duato seems to be creating sculptures with the melodies and the dancers' bodies.

[Click here to listen to *Syrinx*, L. 129](#)

[Click here to listen](#) to the *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*, L. 137

*grandballets.com, **theballetbag.com

Artists: Amanda Morgan, Corey Bourbonniere; Photo: Aviana Adams

Costumes

When creating the ballet in 1991, Nacho Duato approached Susan Unger, a fashion and interior designer in Madrid, to create the costumes. Unger's design philosophy, "bringing nature inside,"* was a perfect fit for Duato's concept for the work. For the women she created

a short, loosely-shaped shift - she hand-painted the silk charmeuse fabric in the greens, blues and browns of the forest; the long-sleeved leotard underneath the dress is moon-colored and luminous. The skirt's short panels twist and flow with the dancer's movements. The original design included full tights for the women but through years of performing the ballet, skirt-length bike shorts were substituted. The men are bare-chested and their tights are more blue and celestial in tone. The overall look is a vision of magical forest inhabitants.

American designer Donna Karan encouraged and funded Unger's move to New York in the late '90s, where her hand-painted, nature inspired fabrics and clothing became favorites in the American fashion world.

[Watch a discussion](#) about the costumes from *Duende* with PBT Costume Director Kristin McLain, from timestamp 2:12 - 6:15 on the video (the video covers all the ballets in the production).

Read more about Susan Unger [here](#).

[*binchic.com](http://binchic.com)

Catharsis

Choreography - Yoshiaki Nakano

Music - "An Amalgamation Waltz 1839 - Vocal version," by Joep Beving; "Slow Seasons: Summer," "Moonlight Sonata: Adagio," recomposed and performed by Maya Beiser; "Drifting Circles," written and performed by Anne Müller

Costume Design - Kristin McLain, Yoshiaki Nakano

Lighting Design - Joseph Walls

Number of Dancers - 11

Length - 21 minutes

World Premiere - Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, October 7, 2022



Catharsis looks at universal experiences in human connections and relationships. It portrays a landscape recognizable to us all - from the isolation of feeling unseen and unknown by

another, to the intimacy and joy of deep emotional bonds. The work includes four movements that unfold in a journey from dark to bright.

Nakano notes that his movement style is “always, always” neoclassical, characterized by demanding physicality, abstract shapes, free-flowing speed, and minimalist storyline, costumes and sets. In *Catharsis* he utilizes this aesthetic to explore the emotional content and power that is innate in human movement. This is Nakano’s fifth commissioned mainstage work for the PBT Company.

Click here to read more about the ballet at [PBT’s blog!](#)

[Watch a discussion](#) about the costumes from *Catharsis* with PBT Costume Director Kristin McLain, from timestamp 12:13 - 16:40 on the video (the video covers all the ballets in the production).

Artists: PBT Company. Photo: Aviana Adams

Yoshiaki Nakano

A native of Japan, Nakano joined Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre in 2010 and was promoted to principal in 2014. He received his early training at the Elite Ballet Studio in Osaka, Japan, and went on to train at San Francisco Ballet School and in PBT School’s Graduate Program. Yoshiaki won the gold medal at the 2013 Beijing International Ballet and Choreography Competition in China and the silver medal at the 2010 World Ballet Competition in Orlando, Florida. In 2014, Dance Magazine named Nakano among its top 25 Dancers to Watch.

Yoshiaki has performed the roles of Prince Siegfried in *Swan Lake*, Basilio in *Don Quixote*, Albrecht in *Giselle*, Prince Desiré and Blue Bird in *The Sleeping Beauty*, Solor and The Golden Idol in *La Bayadère*, Conrad and Ali in *Le Corsaire*, Romeo and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nephew and Sugar Plum Cavalier in *The Nutcracker*, the White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* and Tony in Jerome Robbins’ *West Side Story Suite*. He also has performed featured roles in George Balanchine’s *Agon*, *Divertimento No. 15*, *Rubies* and *Western Symphony*; Twyla Tharp’s *In The Upper Room* and *Nine Sinatra Songs*; Jiří Kylián’s *Petite Mort* and *Sinfonietta*; William Forsythe’s *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*; and Jerome Robbins’ *In the Night*. PBT commissioned Nakano to choreograph two new works – *A Fellow Feeling* and *Infusion* – for its 2015-2016 and 2017-2018 mainstage seasons, and a new work for 2021 Open-Air series -*A Frame Of Mind*-. He has also created works for PBT School, Point Park University and Tetsuya



Kumakawa's Gala in Tokyo. Each summer, Nakano returns to Osaka, Japan, to choreograph and perform in the World Dream Gala in partnership with his mother's Elite Ballet Studio, where he grew up dancing. He also teaches, performs and choreographs in several companies and studios in Japan.

This is Nakano's thirteenth season with Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and his ninth as a principal.

Theater Programs

Join us online or at the theater to learn more about the production!

Educational programs at the theater are subject to change as Covid regulations are updated through the year. Thank you so much for your patience and understanding.

Virtual Preview | Wed., Sept. 28 | 6:30 p.m.

Get a quick preview of the costumes in the production with Costume Director Kristin McLain. Join us on Facebook Live.

Opening Night Preview | Friday, Oct. 7 | 6:30 p.m.

Join us on opening night to hear from Jim Vincent, assistant to Nacho Duato, and Steven Annegarn, PBT Repetiteur.

Artist Q & A | Saturday, Oct. 8 | after the show

Audio-described Performance | Sunday, Oct. 9 | 2 p.m.

Live narration of the production for patrons with blindness or low vision, or anyone interested in listening to a verbal description of the production. Visit Guest Services before the show for assistance.

Accessibility

We believe dance is for everyone! Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre is committed to including everyone from our greater Pittsburgh community and beyond in the beauty, discipline, and

creativity of dance. We strive to make our company, school and art form accessible to talented and committed students and families.

Theater Accessibility Services

Audio-described Performance | Sunday, Oct. 9 | 2 p.m.

Live narration of the production for patrons with blindness or low vision, or anyone interested in listening to a verbal description of the production. Visit Guest Services before the show for assistance.

Wheelchair accessibility: The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts features elevators, accessible restrooms and companion seating (available only on the main floor of the theater). Guide dogs are permitted; please inquire when purchasing tickets. Please inform your ticketing representative when purchasing to take advantage of wheelchair and companion seating.

Braille and Large Print Programs: With assistance from the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children Outreach/Braille Project, PBT makes printed Braille programs available at the Benedum Center for patrons who are visually impaired. Large-print programs also will be available. Please see front-of-house staff at the Benedum Center for a program.

Assistive Listening Devices: Assistive listening devices are available at the Benedum Center for Performing Arts for patrons who desire amplification. Neck loops are available. Please see an usher at the Benedum Center when you arrive to obtain an Assistive Listening Device, which are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Sign language interpretation may be available for performances that use music with lyrics and educational programs only upon request. We kindly request at least two weeks advance notice before the performance or program dates to ensure that we are able to secure interpreters.

Sensory-Friendly Performances: PBT is proud to present a sensory-friendly performance once per year. [Learn more here.](#)

Audio Program Notes: Audio program notes are produced for each of PBT's productions. The recordings are produced in collaboration with the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, part of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh system. [Listen here.](#)

For more information about all of the accessibility services at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts, please visit the [theater's accessibility page](#).

Studio Accessibility

Dance for Parkinson's: This program, based on the Dance for PD® program, invites people with Parkinson's, their families, caregivers, and friends, to become participants in the dance process! [Learn more here.](#)

Adaptive Dance: Themed around classic story ballets, our adaptive dance classes are designed for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders or other sensory sensitivities. We emphasize creative movement principles and simplified ballet technique within a welcoming and structured studio environment. [Learn more here.](#)

Children's Scholarship Program: This program aims to expose more children to dance at an early age by funding need-based scholarships for talented and committed students from ages 5-13. [Learn more here.](#)

PBT in the Community: PBT's education team brings ballet into neighborhoods, schools and community centers in an effort to engage and inspire more people with the mind-body benefits of ballet and movement. [Learn more here.](#)