



Audience Guide

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This production is recommended for ages 14+.
Guide produced by PBT Education Department, 2023.

The Author and Novel

Bram (Abraham) Stoker (1847 - 1912) is an Irish author whose career also included work as a British civil servant, theater manager, critic, and assistant to famed British actor Sir Henry Irving. He wrote at least 12 novels and numerous short stories, as well as many articles and works of non-fiction. He published *Dracula* in 1897 after years of research. It was well received but not an immediate blockbuster: his 1912 obituary in the New York Times says in fact that his best-known work was a book of reminiscences about Irving - this was 15 years after *Dracula* was published! (*Dracula* didn't reach legendary status until it was adapted for movie versions in the 20th century.) Stoker was also a world traveler, including to America, which he greatly admired (note *Dracula's* heroic American character, Quincy). He was known in English-language literary and arts worlds, and visited or corresponded with such American authors as Mark Twain and Walt Whitman. Read an extended biography at the website of the [Bram Stoker estate](#).

The inspiration for and meaning of Stoker's *Dracula* continue to fascinate the general public and academics alike. There are scores of books and many sources online that speculate about its socio-cultural symbolism in late Victorian society. Some themes include anxiety about gender and sexuality (in particular female sexuality and homosexuality), fear of "invasion" by immigrants or the "other," medicine, religion and more. Stoker's original notes for the novel are held at the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia - for a deep dive on the book and conversations between *Dracula* researchers, you can watch 27(!) episodes of the Rosenbach's [Sundays with Dracula](#) series.

Stoker's *Dracula* has a connection with a historical figure, Vlad the Impaler, but it's unclear how much Stoker actually knew about him. Vlad the Impaler, also known as Vlad III, or Voivoda Dracula, was a brutal 15th century Romanian ruler who is said to have impaled thousands of adversaries on stakes in the woods near his castle. Dracul (meaning dragon) was the clan name of Vlad's father; Vlad (the son) would have been Dracula, or son of Dracul. In his research Stoker ran across a reference that mentioned the ruler, or "prince," Dracula. There was no connection to Vlad in this reference, and it suggested that Dracula meant "Devil." Stoker apparently thought the name was better than his original choice (Count Wampyr) as he promptly changed the manuscript. For more about Vlad the Impaler / Dracula, take a look at the transcript of a [2003 PBS interview](#) with foremost *Dracula* scholar, Professor Elizabeth Miller.

Main Characters in the Ballet

DRACULA

An immortal creature who is compelled to feed on the blood of humans. Here is Choreographer Michael Pink on the character and role: *I think the beauty of it and the power of it is that the role of Dracula is somewhat unspoken. If you go through the book, he has*

*relatively few lines, relatively few text moments. So, you think, what is it about it? It's a presence, it's about the way he is, his unspoken power, his sense of invincibility. . . . people are fundamentally in love with him. They see him as the anti-hero; he's wonderful and yet, he's pure evil. But people relate to him as this incredibly beautiful, handsome man - men and women. [They] are terrified by him, but [they] relate to him . . . **

JONATHAN HARKER

A young lawyer sent to Transylvania to conclude a real estate transaction with Count Dracula. In their first meeting his sensibilities are completely upended: *I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt. I fear. I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my own soul.***

MINA

Jonathan Harker's fiancée and Lucy's best friend. Dracula sees a picture Harker has of her and he becomes obsessed with her. Mina represents a new Victorian woman, strong and independent; she's analytical and intelligent, documenting all that's happening in an effort to understand what's happening.

LUCY

Mina's best friend. She's fun-loving and vivacious. She has many suitors, including the American, Quincy, but becomes engaged to Arthur Goldaming.

VAN HELSING

A religious man and also a scientist; an expert of the mysterious and supernatural. He runs the sanatorium where Renfield is a patient. Dr. Van Helsing is summoned once Lucy has fallen ill. In the ballet, Van Helsing combines the novel's characters of Van Helsing and Dr. Seward.

ARTHUR

Lucy's fiancé, Lord Godalming. Arthur is named for legendary King Arthur; Godalming means "giving alms to God."

QUINCY

A plainspoken American and another suitor of Lucy's. Though Quincy doesn't win Lucy's hand, he remains a steadfast friend. In the book, Quincy Morris represents the new world (America) versus the old world (Europe).

RENFIELD

A patient at the sanatorium obsessed with gaining Dracula's approval. He consumes flies, spiders, and birds, which he believes provide him with strength, vitality and life force.

Partially adapted from Milwaukee Ballet Audience Guide

* KCUR.org

**Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Synopsis

Prologue- A Sanatorium

Jonathan Harker's mind is flooded with images of his terrifying experiences in Transylvania. In his delirium, his ravings have been dreadful – "of wolves and poison and blood, of ghosts and demons..."

Act I - Charing Cross Station, London

Jonathan Harker is accompanied by his fiancée Mina and Dr. Van Helsing to the station as he sets off on his journey to see Count Dracula in Transylvania, where he is to conclude the Count's purchase of properties in England. Renfield, a patient at a nearby psychiatric facility, is escorted through the station, which leads to a disturbing incident.

Transylvania

Harker arrives in Transylvania, where he watches as villagers enact a violent ritual of sacrifice to protect their village from the dangers that threaten on All Souls Night. The ceremony is interrupted by a sinister figure, Count Dracula's coachman. Despite the desperate appeal of a distraught woman, Harker continues his journey to Dracula's castle.

Castle Dracula

Count Dracula welcomes Harker into his home and makes him comfortable before leaving him alone. Harker sinks into a reverie and is visited by three women who both fascinate and terrify him. This seduction is interrupted by an enraged Dracula, who distracts the vampire women with a live blood offering. Dracula then begins his domination of the terrified Harker, who desperately tries to escape the assault before finally being overpowered.

Suddenly, Harker's scream of terror wakes him from his nightmare, and he finds himself in the sanatorium with Mina's arms around him.

Act II - Winter Garden at the Grand Hotel, Whitby

At a Tea Dance in the Grand Hotel, Mina's friend Lucy dances with several suitors. Unbeknownst to them, a foreign ship approaches with a sinister and dangerous cargo. Only Harker is sensitive to the impending danger.

A violent storm interrupts the dance, throwing open the windows, and at the height of its fury, the figure of Dracula appears on the hotel's terrace. The hotel guests remain unaware of his presence, though Lucy is drawn to him. As the sound of the storm returns, Dracula disappears, and Lucy is discovered dazed and nearly unconscious.

The Sanatorium

Lucy is taken to Dr. Van Helsing's clinic, where her anxious fiancé Arthur and other friends visit her. As they leave, Van Helsing, who has noticed the strange puncture marks on Lucy's neck, takes the precaution of surrounding her with wild garlic. However, this does not prevent a second visit from Dracula.

Later that night, Lucy's body is discovered on the floor of her bedroom. The heartbroken men grieve the loss of this beautiful young woman. As her fiancé places a crucifix on her lips, Lucy attacks him violently before escaping into the night. She has become one of the Undead.

Act III - Mina's Room, the Sanatorium

Mina thinks about the terrible danger threatening all of her friends. After the departure of most of the group, she and Van Helsing are startled by Renfield, who attacks Van Helsing and draws blood before being overpowered by the wardens. Concerned for Renfield's suffering, Mina tries in vain to comfort and understand him. As she waits anxiously for the return of Harker and the rest, she imagines with horror what her friend Lucy has become.

The men fail in their attempt to find Dracula, but later that night Dracula enters Mina's room. Van Helsing discovers them as Dracula offers Mina his own blood. Van Helsing has no power to prevent Dracula from escaping and taking an unconscious Mina with him.

Carfax Abbey

Dracula has chosen to celebrate his union with Mina in the vault at Carfax Abbey and summons the Undead to the ceremony. Renfield is sacrificed by Dracula, and the Undead dance in adoration of their master and his offering. As the celebrants prepare for the ritual's consummation, an explosion blasts through the crypt, flooding the vault with the light of the coming dawn.

Though he is weakened, Dracula attempts to escape his adversaries. They pursue him, and finally drive a stake through his heart. The survivors— Harker, Van Helsing, Mina, Arthur— are left to come to terms with their horrific experiences.

The Choreographer

Michael Pink is the longest serving artistic director in Milwaukee Ballet history. Since joining the Company in December of 2002, he established himself as a prominent member of the Milwaukee arts community, demonstrating his commitment to the future of dance through new work, education and collaboration.

His artistic vision for Milwaukee Ballet continues to be exciting and challenging. His long-awaited production of *Peter Pan* signified a major landmark in the Company's history and was broadcast nationally by PBS in spring of 2014. His production of *Romeo & Juliet* has also been broadcast by MPBS. In 2008, the Wisconsin Dance Council presented Pink with the Choreography/Performance Award. In 2014, the Milwaukee Press Club honored him with the Headliner Award for service to the arts. He received the Civic Music Association's award for Distinguished Citizen – Professional in the Arts in 2015. In 2019 he received the Educational Excellence Award from the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts, which recognizes organizational achievement of a nonprofit that exemplifies collaboration in the arts.

Pink is an international choreographer whose theatrical productions of *Dracula*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Swan Lake*, *Giselle*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *La Bohème*, *Don Quixote*, *Mirror Mirror*, *Dorian Gray* and *Beauty and the Beast* have been hailed

as 'Classical Ballet for the 21st Century.' His first professional work, *1914*, was nominated for a West End Theatre Award, London.

His early choreographic work won him first place in the Frederick Ashton and the Royal Society of Arts Choreographic Competitions. He has worked as répétiteur for Rudolf Nureyev at the Paris Opera and La Scala Milan. He trained as a classical dancer at The Royal Ballet School and danced with English National Ballet 1975 to 1985.

Pink was the founding director of Ballet Central in London; he also served as associate artistic director of Northern Ballet.

He continues to build strong working relationships with other Milwaukee Arts groups, where his credits include *A Christmas Carol*, *Assassins*, *Cabaret* and *Next to Normal* for Milwaukee Repertory Theater, as well as *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and *Matilda* for First Stage.

The Ballet

We have tried to tell the story of the book and be honest with it.

- Michael Pink

Dracula was created for the centenary of the novel's publication in 1997 at Northern Ballet in Great Britain. Pink and co-creator Christopher Gable (then artistic director at Northern Ballet) designed it to stay as close to Bram Stoker's story as possible. They studied the book in great detail, choosing which characters would translate best to ballet, and cutting scenes that would not work well on the ballet stage (including Dracula's journey from England back to Transylvania at the end of the novel - in the ballet he stays in England). When the libretto was finalized, the creative team, including Pink, Gable, designer Lez Brotherston, composer Philip Feeney, and original lighting designer Paul Pyant (Emmy-winning designer David Grill redesigned the current production) found they had a story that could be told exceedingly well through ballet /non-verbal theater. Rather than fitting the production into a traditional story ballet framework, they gave it the urgent pace and theatricality of Stoker's narrative. The result is really more like cinema - it's been compared to silent film and action/thriller genres - and through movement and theater it manages to completely envelop the audience, taking hold of the imagination as the book itself does.

*I . . . want the characters to be real, so every step that they do will be as if they were speaking words. . . . I really try and think about, 'OK, what is the dialogue and how might that be in movement?'**

Dracula's choreography has an intense physicality that tells Stoker's nuanced narrative through challenging, vigorous dancing. Each dance and nearly every step relate the story and subthemes: the pas de deux and corps de ballet numbers are not stand-alone pieces but integral parts of the plot. Act 1's Villagers' dance (which Harker watches nervously) is a mourning ritual for an infant as well as ceremonial sacrifice to ward off evil. With its Downton

Abbey vibe, Act 2's Tea Party reveals that Lucy is looking for more than a genteel Victorian life as she willingly embraces the danger that Dracula presents - her attraction to him is a rebuke of societal expectations about women's roles and sexuality. We see Mina resist Dracula with greater conviction in their pas de deux, but she leaves us at the end to wonder what it is she really desires. The erotic undertone of Dracula and Harker's pas de deux in Act 1 is another moment that expresses the novel's subtext of gender and sexuality. Stoker himself may have been gay and certainly had gay friends, including the playwright Oscar Wilde - notice in the ballet that the Newspaper Man character carries a placard announcing "Oscar Wilde Released." Wilde had been jailed for a homosexual relationship in 1895, just before Stoker started the writing phase of *Dracula*.

Some of the most captivating choreography translates the character of Dracula from the page to dance. His movement is seductive, aggressive and terrifying. He glides slowly at times, conveying his power and also his immortality (he of course has all the time in the world). In moments of pursuit and passion he has immense strength, the agility of a tarantula (watch him crawl down the wall of the sanatorium in Act 2), and reptilian movement and speed. When his arms undulate like the wings of a bat (notice in Lucy's room in Act 2 and in the pas de deux with Mina in Act 3), it is as if he briefly loses control, unable to suppress his fundamental nature.**

*[Interview. The Oklahoman](#)

** Michael Pink, PBT Virtual Preview

Watch [PBT's Virtual Preview](#) with Michael Pink and see a few minutes of rehearsal.

The Music

. . . *the ballet world is far richer for (Feeney's) audacious invention.* . .

- The Huffington Post

British composer and pianist Philip Feeney studied at Cambridge University and the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome. His compositions range from full-length orchestral ballet scores to electro-acoustic soundscapes, jazz and hip hop scores. He composed eight full-length scores for Northern Ballet in Leeds, United Kingdom. With Michael Pink he has collaborated on full-length narrative ballets from *Dracula*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, both originally created for Northern Ballet, to those for Milwaukee Ballet, including *Peter Pan* (2010), *Mirror Mirror* (2014), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2016) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2018). His work with choreographer Cathy Marson includes *The Cellist*, for the Royal Ballet in London, *Jane Eyre* and *Victoria* for Northern Ballet, *The Suit* for Ballet Black in London, and *Snowblind* for San Francisco Ballet. He arranged the score for *Of Love and Rage* by Alexei Ratmanský, choreographer-in-residence at American Ballet Theatre, in 2020. He is currently

composer-in-residence for Ballet Central, London, and has been a long-standing accompanist at the London Contemporary Dance School.

The music for the ballet creates a profoundly unsettling soundscape. Feeney fills the score with an eerie dread, utilizing a musical stockpile that includes not only an orchestra, but also vocals, synthesizer and more, producing haunting sounds that puncture the story and atmosphere.

[Click here](#) for a fascinating account of composing the score on Feeney's website. Listen to the score on [PBT's Spotify playlist](#) (must be signed in to your Spotify account) or on YouTube at links below.

Some sounds to listen for:

>An urgent knocking (at :16 at this [link](#) for the ballet's Prologue) - this is the first sound you hear in the ballet and it becomes more and more frantic as the scene continues. Feeney uses it throughout the score; and while we never know who's knocking (Harker? Dracula? One of the Undead?) we do know we would not open that door!

>Dracula's leitmotif - heard throughout the ballet as a kind of "poisonous halo."* It introduces the ballet (at :36 in the [Prologue](#)) and is "voiced" over and over again through a variety of sounds, from church bells to full orchestra, and in a variety of tones, from melancholy to predatory to deadly.

>Howling wolves during the Act 1 Transylvania scene and as Harker arrives at [Dracula's castle](#) (8:51) - the howls were created on a trombone. You also hear cracking whips in this scene.

>Swarming bats at the [end of Act 1](#), at about 10:19

>Dripping water in the Sanatorium at the [beginning of Act 2](#)

>The screams at the [end of Act 2 \(8:31\)](#) when Lucy reawakens as a vampire, and in the scene with Dracula and Mina in Act 2 - created by a synthesizer

>Vocals - in the Villagers' scene in Act 1, and in Act 3, at the convening of the Undead. Feeney notes that when creating the ballet, the team agreed that the sound for the convening should be "a choral Mass of sorts." He decided to use an ancient litany, chosen "because of the sense of terror it evokes, and the constant plea, 'Good Lord, Deliver Us.'" Feeney had it translated from Latin to Romanian to authentically situate the language (Transylvania is a region in Romania) and to give the scene an "ancient" sound.** Listen at 2:00 on [this recording](#) for the litany.

>Throughout the ballet you'll hear the sound of a beating heart - again, we are not sure whose heart, and whether it beats with fear, or desire . . .

*philipfeeney.com

**Philip Feeney, email, 1/19/23

Costumes and Sets

The design is always a visceral part of the action. It's not window-dressing. The costumes and the set are so meshed into the production that you can't imagine it being done any other way. That's what real design is all about.

-[Lez Brotherston](#)

Both costume and set design for *Dracula* are by Lez Brotherston, an Associate Artist at New Adventures, the production company of British choreographer Matthew Bourne. He trained at the Central School of Art and Design, London. He is an influential and innovative designer of film, theater and opera, and is especially known for his work for dance.** Among his collaborations with Bourne are *Highland Fling*, an update of *Les Sylphides*; *Cinderella*, set during the London Blitz of World War II; *The Car Man* (based on Georges Bizet's opera, *Carmen*); *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Sleeping Beauty*; and *Swan Lake* (one of Bourne's signature productions, with male swans in place of female swans), for which he won a Tony Award for Best Costume Design. Brotherston was awarded the Order of the British Empire in 2022 for services to Dance and Theatre.

**[Victoria and Albert Museum](#)



Brotherston's designs for sets and costumes are integral to *Dracula's* cinematic theater experience. To design the props and stage sets Brotherston generally works with models rather than drawings, as he prefers to develop the sets in three dimensions. A few standouts in the set/prop design that you'll notice:

>The iron staircase, which defines each scene in a dramatically different way, showing how a basic piece of setting can suggest different locations. (We were relieved it fit through the studio doors at PBT so that dancers could rehearse with it!)

>A mutilated wolf corpse, shockingly realistic, featured in Act 1 and used as a sacrifice to protect the village.

>A bed, disturbingly tilted, conveying that something is very off in the world of this ballet. There are two particular moments when

the bed is used to fantastically creepy effect, in Act 1, when a Vampire snakes up through it during Harker's dance with the three Vampires, and in Act 3, when it serves as a platform for the dramatic finale of Mina and Dracula's pas de deux.

Many of the costumes are representative of the late Victorian time period in which the novel is set. Other costumes, including those for the Vampires, the Undead, the Wolves and of course, Dracula himself, evoke the darkness Stoker imagined. Here's a look at a few of the costumes with PBT Costume Director Kristin McLain:



Dracula - McLain describes Dracula's costume as "surprisingly simple." The first time we see him he's in a gorgeous, floor-length, red velvet coat. The red is ombre-dyed, fading into a charcoal-maroon color at the bottom, which adds a lush, creepy effect to Dracula's choreography as he glides across the floor; it is almost as if he melts into or emerges from it. He has a double of this coat built in a lighter fabric, allowing freer movement in some scenes. Underneath the coat he wears black pants, a very blousy and beautiful black shirt and a black jacquard vest.

Photo: Rieder Studios

Mina, Lucy and the Victorian Women - These dresses are true to Victorian-era style with complex construction and authentic detailing, some of which is very unusual for ballet costuming. There are several different fabrics involved in each dress, as well as a variety of trims, laces, brocades and netting. They have a rear bustle, a feature popular in 19th century fashion that creates a bell shape on the back of the skirt. The bustle has padding to fill it out, and also uses a cartridge pleating technique to accommodate the large volume of fabric required.



Costume Design for the Opera Singer, by Lez Brotherston, [Victoria and Albert Museum](https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/costume-design-for-the-opera-singer); detail of bustle

The Wolves - The three Wolves who crawl over Harker in his nightmare are dressed in red (reminiscent of Dracula), wearing padded costumes made of stretch fabric over a sleek spandex suit. Their masks are beautifully sculpted, with a padded interior; eye and mouth openings are covered with a light fabric that the dancer can see and breathe through. The mask is attached to the torso of the costume. The quilted fabric has dimensionality and gives the effect of musculature. It hangs loose and moves in sinewy drifts with the dancers' movements.

The Villagers - The seven villager men wear nearly identical costumes comprising very loose pants with gauzy shirts and a heavy, woven vest lined with wool. The seven women wear dark dresses with loose pants, and each has different and intricate detailing - with shimmery buttons that read like bits of shell, and colorful embroidery and other stitching in a variety of patterns. McLain says the costumes are not as heavy as they look, but they give the impression of everyone being “very cloaked” and hidden.

The Vampires - The dresses for the Vampires in Act 1 are silk chiffon, distressed and tattered in to give them a wildly diaphanous, spiderweb sort of appearance. The trim looks haphazard, including remnants of ribbons and other decor that are perhaps vestiges of their previous lives. They also wear beautiful metallic mesh headpieces that remind McLain of chain mail, and that are set onto long black wigs.

Educational Programs

Watch online or join us to learn more about the production:

[Virtual Preview](#) | Micheal Pink on the ballet, with a look at a few minutes of Company rehearsal.

Director's Cut | Friday, Feb. 10, 6:30 p.m. | With Choreographer Michael Pink. Mezzanine level, Benedum Center. Seating is limited. [REGISTER HERE](#)

Artist Q&A | Friday, Feb. 10 | After the performance | PBT artists take your questions after the production. No registration required.

Performance Preview | Saturday, Feb. 11, 6:30 p.m. | An introduction to the production with PBT Répétiteur Marianna Tcherkassky. No registration required.

Curtain Up! | Sunday, Feb. 12, 1 p.m. | Watch the last few minutes of company class on stage and get a quick overview of the ballet. No registration required.

Audio-described Performance | Sunday, Feb. 12, 2 p.m. | Live narration of the performance for those with blindness or vision impairment, or for anyone who'd like to listen! No registration necessary.



Programs presented in partnership with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.