

Backstage Pass

An Interview with Ballet Victoria's Principal Dancer Andrea Bayne

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In between rehearsing with Ballet Victoria and teaching the next great generation of ballet dancers at the Ballet Victoria Conservatory, Principal Dancer Andrea Bayne found the time to answer some questions about the upcoming production of *Romeo & Juliet*.



Andrea rehearses the poison scene (G. Takahashi - 2021).

What is your favourite part of the ballet to perform?

Tough question! The whole ballet is so beautiful, but if I had to pick, I would have to say the classic 'Balcony Pas.' The best way I can describe Paul's choreography for this part is like a beautiful wave that is continuously moving from one pool of water to another. The movements never stop and it matches so well with the music that it makes expressing the emotions of the excitement of pure, young love feel natural. A close second would have to be the poison scene where Juliet decides to drink the poison. The choreography revolves around the bottle of poison and it makes dancing with it feel off balance, all while trying to make the action of drinking it believable. It's a great challenge for me as an artist, which I always enjoy.

What do you think performing the role of Juliet will be like this time in comparison to when you performed it in 2016?

I feel lucky to have the opportunity to tackle this ballet again at a more mature age. When I performed it in 2016, I read the play



Andrea and former BV dancer Matthew Cluff pictured in a performance (G. Takahashi - 2016).



Juliet and Romeo's secret wedding ceremony
(G. Griffiths - 2021).

over and over, and did a lot of research to really understand the character of Juliet. Although I was satisfied with my performance, I believe that, with more life experience now, I will be able to use it to portray a more realistic character. Juliet experiences so many deep emotions throughout the ballet; excitement, trepidation, curiosity, deep love, and then ultimately deep loss. It is amazing what you can experience in five years of life, but with some of my personal life experiences (some happy and some very sad) I truly feel more prepared to be able to translate my emotions to the audience. I feel more comfortable and stronger with my technique now as well, which gives me more opportunity to focus on telling the story. I want to be able to make people laugh, smile, and cry when they see this ballet. In the end, I truly

believe that that is what dance is all about, evoking emotion and connecting with the audience.



Performance of the bedroom pas de deux from 2016 (W. Donaldson Laird).

What keeps you inspired when performing the same show night after night?

The incredible thing about living art is that each and every performance is unique to whomever is dancing it, with whom you are dancing, who is watching it, as well as other natural elements involving what is happening both on stage and off. This means that even though I may be performing the same role, the same choreography, night after night, there is always something new and fresh to draw on to help

build a new experience for each show. We are all individuals who experience life differently each day; I like to take advantage of that fact and allow it to inspire me for each new show. I feel it is my responsibility as an artist to give my whole heart to the audience, whether it is my first performance of a ballet or my hundredth.



Rehearsal in Kirk Hall, Ballet Victoria's new venue (D. Takahashi - 2021).

What helps you get into character for your roles?

When preparing to go on stage, or even in rehearsal, it is important for me to put myself in the right state of mind before beginning anything. The more ballets I have danced, the more I have realized that for me, it is not just about preparing to become my character; it is knowing that when you are working on a certain role, you truly have to become that person. As soon as the curtain goes up, I want to be as believable to the audience as possible, and the only way to do that is to truly believe - believe in what you are doing, and believe in who you are as a unique artist.

Do you have any pre-performance rituals or habits?



Andrea and Matthew performing in 2016 (R. Marshall).

Before a performance, things usually look like this: I start with a warm-up class (I typically wear my pointe shoes for barre on show days to try and feel the shoe on my foot right away). Post class, I like to take some time to practise any parts of the ballet that I find challenging and run through at least a portion of the choreography. I am a dancer that needs some sort of run-through or rehearsal before a show; it helps my nerves and mind relax, as well as warm up my body and brain! After rehearsal, I do my hair and makeup – which typically takes no more than 20 minutes – I am known for being speedy in that regard. After hair and make-up, I always have something nutritious to eat pre-show. Protein bars, bananas, and eggs always seems to give me the fuel I need to perform at my best.



Which is your favourite role that you have performed in your career, and why do you love it?

I am blessed to have been able to perform so many amazing roles over my career, but performing as Juliet has been my favourite. Dancing Juliet is such a bittersweet sensation; at the height of the story you must plunge yourself into despair as well as joy, and the crazy part is that all the turmoil feels real, and it can take some time recovering from the experience post show. The feeling of truly living the role is a gift both to myself as a ballerina and to the audience.

Andrea and Matthew performing in 2016
(L. Burton).