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Music

From the opera Don Carlos (1867) by Giuseppe Verdi



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Choreography

George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust

Premiere

January 12, 1978, New York City Ballet, New York State Theater

Original Cast

Merrill Ashley, Robert Weiss, Debra Austin, Bonita Borne, Stephanie Saland, Sheryl Ware

Average Length

17 min.

Balanchine was no stranger to opera. Not only did he create ballets to the music from such works as *La Sonnambula* and *Don Sebastian*, he also choreographed the ballet portions of many opera productions. He felt that opera taught something important. "From Verdi's way of dealing with the chorus," Balanchine told biographer Bernard Taper, "I have learned how to handle the corps de ballet, the ensemble, the soloists, how to make the soloists stand out against the corps, and when to give them a rest." *Ballo Della Regina* is a virtuoso set of variations, comparable to the bel canto style of opera. It is set to ballet music that was cut from the original production of Verdi's *Don Carlos*. Lincoln Kirstein writes that the ballet seems to take place in a grotto, with reference through lighting and costumes to the original tale of a fisherman's search for the perfect pearl. Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) did not have a formal music education (studying privately, for the most part, with local musicians). He completely changed the course of Italian opera with such masterpieces as *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Aida*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, popularizing the art form like no other composer before or since. Verdi was also a fervent supporter of the

"A BALLERINA IS A PERSONALITY AND A PERSONALITY MEANS IMPROVISATION."

— George Balanchine

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movement for Italian independence, which led to his being
nominated for a seat in the Italian Parliament.

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