

OPUS ARTE

 ROYAL BALLET



Joby Talbot
The Winter's Tale

MUSIC FROM THE BALLET BY CHRISTOPHER WHEELDON

Conductor
Koen Kessels

Orchestra of the
Royal Opera House

ROYAL BALLET & OPERA

Track Listing

Act 1

1	Prologue	5.53
2	Scene 1: The court at Sicilia	2.49
3	Bohemian dance	2.35
4	Jealousy seizes Leontes	5.51
5	Leontes confronts Polixenes	3.04
6	Scene 2: The nursery and Arrest of Hermione	7.06
7	Scene 3: Leontes broods alone	1.49
8	Paulina presents the baby girl	2.15
9	Leontes rejects his daughter	1.49
10	Antigonus flees with the baby	1.08
11	Scene 4: Trial of Hermione	1.10
12	Hermione's plea	2.25
13	Profession of loyalty	2.20
14	Leontes condemns his wife	1.00
15	Death of Mamillius	1.17
16	Paulina saves Leontes	1.52
17	Shipwreck and Exit pursued by a bear	3.23

Act 2

18	Scene 1: Bohemia, sixteen years later	5.26
19	Florizel and Perdita's tryst	4.01
20	Polixenes and his retinue	0.28
21	Florizel and Perdita in love	2.38
22	Scene 2: Polixenes & Camillo in disguise	1.16
23	Scene 3: Springtime festival part 1	3.47
24	Village musicians	2.33
25	Brother Clown dances	2.00
26	The wishing tree	1.35
27	Wind chimes	3.10
28	Perdita dances	2.00
29	Scene 4: Springtime festival part 2	2.16
30	Florizel proposes	1.57
31	Polixenes unmasked	1.19
32	Chase on the high seas	1.43

Act 3

33	Scene 1: Sicilia, at the graves of Hermione and Mamillius	4.51
34	Scene 2: Florizel and Perdita disembark	3.21
35	Polixenes appears	0.48
36	Leontes appeals to Polixenes and Perdita's true identity discovered	1.49
37	Scene 3: Wedding of Florizel and Perdita	3.42
39	Paulina's gift	1.32
40	Hermione lives	2.30
41	Hermione forgives Leontes	2.59
42	Reunion of Hermione and Perdita	3.22



Synopsis

PROLOGUE

Two kings separated as children are reunited in adulthood.

One king, Leontes of Sicilia, marries Hermione, giving her a beautiful emerald. They have a son, Mamillius, and are blissfully happy. The other king, Polixenes of Bohemia, visits the court of Leontes. He is delighted to be reunited with his old friend and stays for nine months. By the time of his departure, Hermione is soon to give birth to her second child.

ACT I

The Court of Sicilia

It is the day of Polixenes' departure. The Bohemian court say goodbye to their Sicilian friends. At Hermione's request, Polixenes agrees to stay on another week. In a flash of jealousy, Leontes becomes convinced that his wife has been unfaithful and is carrying Polixenes' child. Jealousy turns to rage and he attacks Polixenes, who flees back to Bohemia. Leontes publicly accuses Hermione of adultery and treason, then has her arrested. This so distresses Mamillius that he falls seriously ill.

In prison, Hermione has given birth to a daughter. The head of her household, Paulina, brings the newborn to Leontes, hoping to convince him that the baby is his daughter. Instead, Leontes violently rejects the child, then orders Paulina's husband Antigonus to abandon the baby in a remote place. Antigonus sets sail into a brewing storm with the baby and some treasure, including the emerald once given to Hermione by Leontes.

Hermione is brought to trial and pleads her innocence. Leontes, now quite mad, refuses to believe her. Dazed and feverish, Mamillius enters the courtroom and, upon witnessing the unfolding tragedy, he collapses and dies from distress. Seeing the death of her child, Hermione too collapses dead and is taken away. Only now does Leontes realize the disastrous consequences of his terrible mistake.

The Shores of Bohemia

Battling the storm, Antigonus struggles ashore to abandon the baby princess. As he leaves, he is pursued and killed by a wild bear. His ship, waiting at sea, is smashed to pieces on the rocks. As day breaks, a shepherd and his son Clown discover the baby girl and the treasure.

ACT II

A hillside in Bohemia. Sixteen years later

Perdita, the abandoned daughter of King Leontes and Queen Hermione, has been raised by the shepherd who found her. She dances beneath the great tree with her love, Prince Florizel, the son of Polixenes, whom the other villagers know only as a shepherd boy.

The villagers arrive for the annual springtime festival. King Polixenes, who has heard that his son has been cavorting with a shepherdess, sends his steward to spy on the young prince. When the steward confirms his suspicions, Polixenes is enraged, and demands to see for himself.

At the festival, Perdita is to be crowned May Queen. In honour of the occasion, Father Shepherd presents her with the emerald necklace he found with her on the beach. Polixenes and his steward arrive in disguise, keen to see what Florizel is up to. On witnessing Florizel's engagement to a mere shepherdess, Polixenes reveals himself. He is furious with Florizel, and condemns Perdita and her family to death. They all flee by boat to Sicilia, pursued by Polixenes.

ACT III

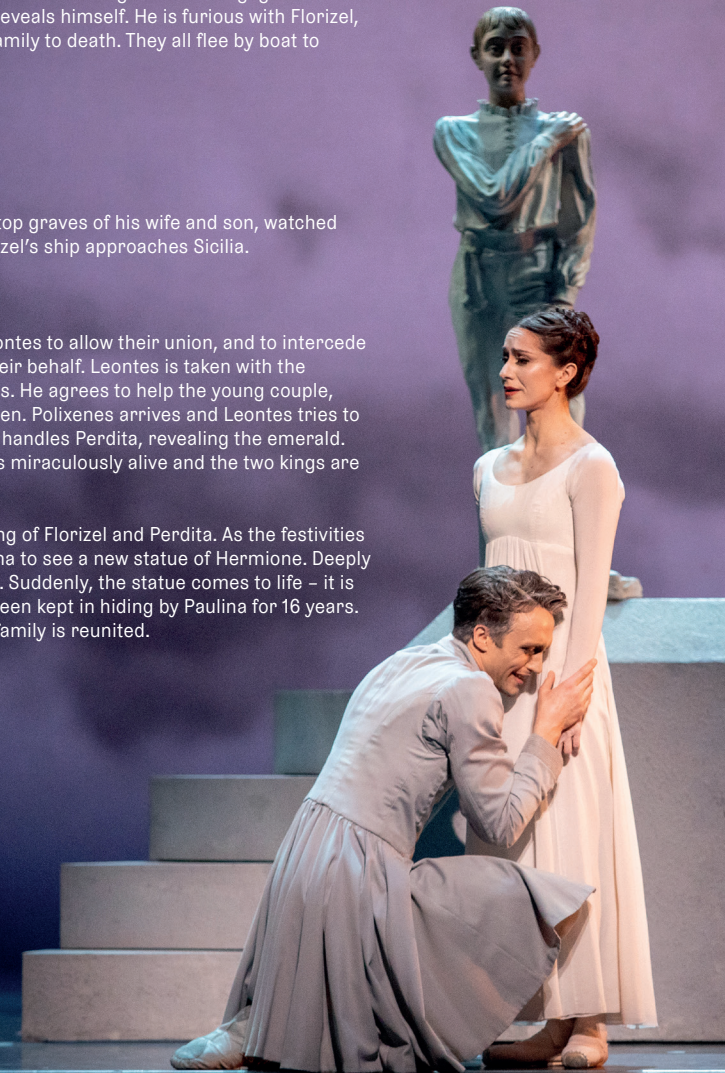
A clifftop in Sicilia

King Leontes mourns by the clifftop graves of his wife and son, watched over by Paulina. Perdita and Florizel's ship approaches Sicilia.

The palace in Sicilia

Perdita and Florizel appeal to Leontes to allow their union, and to intercede with the enraged Polixenes on their behalf. Leontes is taken with the likeness of the Prince to Polixenes. He agrees to help the young couple, who remind him of his lost children. Polixenes arrives and Leontes tries to reason with him, but he violently handles Perdita, revealing the emerald. The long-lost Princess of Sicilia is miraculously alive and the two kings are reunited.

The Palace celebrates the wedding of Florizel and Perdita. As the festivities die down, Leontes is led by Paulina to see a new statue of Hermione. Deeply remorseful, he kneels at its base. Suddenly, the statue comes to life – it is Hermione, who is alive and has been kept in hiding by Paulina for 16 years. She embraces Leontes, and the family is reunited.





Composer's Note

Shakespeare's late masterpiece, *The Winter's Tale*, has sometimes been described as one of his problem plays. Beginning as a tragedy and ending as a comedy with a sixteen year hiatus between the two sections, the play breaks all three classical unities (of action, time, and place) as it shifts from the buttoned-up, monochrome repressiveness of the Sicilian court to the colourful, idyllic freedom of rural Bohemia, introducing us to two completely different casts of characters and telling us two (almost) entirely separate narratives. The eventual overlapping of the two worlds would seem contrived in anyone's hands but Shakespeare's. Nevertheless, it is a play that has often proved notoriously difficult to pull off as a piece of straight theatre.

Paradoxically, it was exactly this bipolar quality to which Christopher Wheeldon and I were attracted when considering the play as a subject for our second full-length narrative collaboration, following 2011's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Ballet is a theatrical genre that thrives on big contrasts of colour, scale, and emotion, and we felt that the very issues that render the play 'problematic' might actually turn out to be its strengths in a narrative dance context. And, after all, who better qualified to convincingly play a statue coming to life than a prima ballerina?

I worked on the score intensively for over two years between 2011 and the ballet's premiere, a period during which I was based half in my home town of London and half in a studio in the mountains of southern Oregon. Perhaps inevitably, I ended up writing most of the Sicilian sections in the city and the Bohemian ones in the forest, with the sound of the wind chimes that hang in pretty much every Oregonian porch and garden ringing in my ears. I was never actually pursued by a bear, but more than once was grateful for securely locked doors when one was snuffing around outside at night.

Unlike the original play, our ballet begins with a prologue which sets the scene and explains the relationships between the characters. Some of the main leitmotifs are introduced here: melodies for Leontes and Hermione, and a wailing, elemental oboe figure which foreshadows the storm that will finally break at the end of the act. The shifting of the seasons during Polixenes's nine month stay in Sicily are presented almost in the style of a cinematic montage sequence, establishing the pattern of juxtaposing old-school theatricality (wind machines and thunder sheets, silk drops and moving scenery) with modern filmic devices (shifts of perspective, flashbacks, time-lapse sequences, projections) which soon becomes a defining feature of the piece.

In the extended first scene proper, the music, which is always working hard to tell the story, takes an even more explicit narrative role when Polixenes summons the Bohemian musicians in his entourage to perform for the assembled Sicilian courtiers. Shakespeare's Bohemia is an imaginary country – the real Bohemia no more has a coastline on which to wreck a ship than Sicily is known for its snowy winters – so, when creating the 'folk' music for the onstage band to play, I decided to use a variety of non-orchestral instruments from around the world to create a musical palette that would seem 'authentic' but not in a way that conjured a geographically specific sense of place. The five-piece 'banda' consists of bansuri (an Indian bamboo flute), hammered dulcimer, accordion, and African and South American percussion instruments. When the Bohemian musicians start to play, it is the sight of Hermione and Polixenes dancing to this exotic and alien music that triggers Leontes's first outburst of sexual jealousy and, by extension, the entire subsequent narrative.

After a 50-minute opening act of intense drama and intricate storytelling, the music of Act Two unfolds at a more relaxed pace as befits the bucolic setting of Bohemia. The banda musicians are restored to their natural environment and provide the soundtrack to the villagers' springtime celebrations. The wintry disquiet of Act One is forgotten, for a while at least, before the young lovers, Florizel and Perdita, are forced to flee. We accompany them on a dramatic nautical chase back to Sicily where sixteen years of penance has earned Leontes a second chance and a bittersweet happy ending. Remorse and forgiveness combine in a final, redemptive pas de deux. The experience of seeing this exquisitely choreographed moment brought to life by Lauren Cuthbertson and Edward Watson on opening night at Covent Garden in April 2014 remains for me one of the defining moments of my creative life.

Joby Talbot, London, April 2025



Joby Talbot

BIOGRAPHY

Joby Talbot was born in London in 1971. He studied composition privately with Brian Elias and at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, before completing a Master of Music (Composition) at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama under Simon Bainbridge.



Chroma with choreographer Wayne McGregor for the Royal Ballet was Talbot's first major work for the Royal Ballet, Covent Garden. It was followed by two further collaborations with McGregor, *Genus* (Paris Opera Ballet, 2007) and *Entity* (Random Dance, 2008). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with choreographer Christopher Wheeldon was the first full-length narrative score commissioned by The Royal Ballet in 20 years, and the work has gone on to be universally hailed as a modern classic. Besides *The Winter's Tale*, for which he was awarded the prestigious Prix Benois de la Danse for composition in 2015, Talbot's further collaborations with Christopher Wheeldon include *Tide Harmonic* (2009), a work for large ensemble that began life as the score for *Eau* by choreographer Carolyn Carlson and CCN Roubaix; and *Fool's Paradise* (2007), adapted from Talbot's score for silent film *The Dying Swan*. Their third full length ballet *Like Water for Chocolate*, for the Royal Ballet and American Ballet Theatre premiered in London June 2022 and with ABT at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in July 2023. In September 2024 The Australian Ballet gave the world premiere of *Oscar*, Talbot and Wheeldon's fourth ballet based on the life and storytelling of Oscar Wilde. *Oscar* was commissioned for the Australian Ballet by their Artistic Director David Hallberg.

Talbot's music has been widely commissioned by, among others, Paris Opera Ballet, BBC Proms, the British Film Institute, the Calder Quartet, The Dallas Opera, the Duke Quartet, Independent Opera, LA Opera, LA Chamber Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, and Netherlands Dans Theater.

Joby Talbot's music is published exclusively by Chester Music, part of the Wise Music Group.

The Winter's Tale

Choreography **Christopher Wheeldon**
Scenario **Christopher Wheeldon and Joby Talbot**
Music **Joby Talbot**
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