

# Romeo and Juliet

## Synopsis with Prokofiev movements and play excerpts

We kindly ask that you hold applause until the end of the first half.

Here is a full synopsis of *Romeo and Juliet*, contextualising Prokofiev's music within the narrative. Audio extracts from productions of *Romeo and Juliet* through the ages will be interspersed between the movements.

In the city of Verona, Italy, two powerful noble families—the Montagues and the Capulets—are trapped in a bitter and ancient feud. This relentless rivalry dominates the lives of the households and repeatedly spills into the streets as violent clashes that disturb the peace of the city.

### The Duke's Command (No. 7 from the ballet)

#### Prologue

**Chorus:** Two households, both alike in dignity  
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene),  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;

Whose misadventured piteous overthrows  
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.  
The fearful passage of their death-marked love  
And the continuance of their parents' rage,  
Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,  
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;

(Performed by Lucian Msamati, National Theatre 2021 original film)

### Introduction (No. 1 from full the ballet)

Romeo, a Montague, is a sensitive and emotional young man suffering from unrequited love for Rosaline, which leaves him withdrawn and melancholic. Juliet, the daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet, is introduced through a conversation with her mother and her Nurse, who discuss the expectations of marriage and the interest shown by Count Paris. Still young, Juliet expresses obedience but feels no desire to marry.

#### Act 1 Scene 3

**Lady Capulet.** Tell me, daughter Juliet,  
How stands your dispositions to be married?

**Juliet.** It is an honour that I dream not of.

**Lady Capulet.** Well, think of marriage now.  
Younger than you  
Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,  
Are made already mothers.  
Thus then in brief:  
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love.

**Nurse.** A man, young lady. Lady, such a man  
As all the world – why, he's a man of wax.

**Lady Capulet.** Verona's summer hath not such a flower.

**Nurse.** Nay, he's a flower, in faith a very flower.

**Lady Capulet.** Speak briefly, can you like of Paris' love?

**Juliet.** I'll look to like, if looking liking move,  
But no more deep will I endart mine eye  
Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.

**Nurse.** Go girl, seek happy nights to happy days.

(Performed by Margaret Tyzack [Lady Capulet] Anna Calder-Marshall [Juliet] Patricia Routledge [Nurse], 1970, BBC Radio 4)

### The Young Juliet (No. 2 from Suite No. 2)

The Capulets prepare to host a lavish masked ball. Lord Capulet plans to present Paris to Juliet during the festivities, hoping to encourage a match. Meanwhile, Romeo's friends Benvolio and the witty, reckless Mercutio try to lift Romeo's spirits by persuading him to attend the ball disguised by their masks. Though uneasy, Romeo agrees to go, troubled by a sense that the night will alter the course of his life.

### Act 1 Scene 3

**Romeo.** My mind misgives  
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night's revels, and expire the term

*Of a despised life clos'd in my breast  
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.*

(Performed by Kenneth Branagh [Romeo], 1993, BBC Radio 3)

## The Dance of the Knights (No. 1 from Suite No. 2)

At the ball, Romeo and Juliet meet by chance and are instantly drawn to one another, sharing a brief but impassioned exchange, but they do not yet know each other's identities.

### Act 1 Scene 5

**Romeo.** If I profane with my unworsted hand  
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:  
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

**Juliet.** Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand  
too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this;  
For saints have hands that pilgrims hands do  
touch,  
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

**Romeo.** Have saints not lips, and holy palmers  
too?

**Juliet.** Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

**Romeo.** O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do:

**Juliet.** Saints do not move, though grant for prayer's sake.

**Romeo.** Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.  
Thus my lips, by thine my sin is purg'd.

**Juliet.** Then have my lips the sin that they have took.

**Romeo.** O trespass sweetly urged!  
Give me my sin again.

(Performed by Josh O'Connor [Romeo] Jessie Buckley [Juliet], National Theatre 2021 original film)

Tybalt, Juliet's fiery cousin, recognises Romeo's voice and becomes furious that a Montague has dared to intrude upon the Capulet celebration, immediately preparing to challenge him.

### Act 1 Scene 5

**Tybalt.** This by his voice should be a Montague.  
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What, dares the slave  
Come hither, cover'd with an antic face,  
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?  
Now by the stock and honour of my kin,  
To strike him dead I hold it not a sin.

**Capulet.** Why, how now, Tybalt! wherefore  
storm you so?

**Tybalt.** Uncle, this is a Montague, our foe:  
A villain that is hither come in spite  
To scorn at our solemnity this night.

**Capulet.** Young Romeo is it?

**Tybalt.** 'Tis he, that villain Romeo.

(Performed by Michael N. Harbour [Tybalt] and Joseph O'Connor [Capulet], 1970 BBC Radio 4)

## Tybalt Recognises Romeo (No. 17 from the ballet)

Lord Capulet steps in and restrains Tybalt, insisting that the evening must remain peaceful and that Romeo be allowed to stay. After the feast ends, Romeo secretly returns to the Capulet grounds, where he overhears Juliet speaking openly of her love for him while standing at her balcony, unaware that he is listening.

### Act 2 Scene 2

**Juliet.** O Romeo, Romeo,  
wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name,  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.  
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,  
And for that name which is no part of thee  
Take all myself.

(Performed by Claire Danes [Juliet], 1996 Film, Dir. Baz Luhrmann)

Romeo comes out from hiding, the two confess their deep love for one another and vow to marry, convinced that their bond can rise above the hatred dividing their families.

### Act 2 Scene 2

**Juliet.** Dost thou love me?  
I know thou wilt say "Ay,"  
And I will take thy word. Yet, if thou swear'st,  
Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries,  
They say, Jove laughs.

**Romeo.** By yonder blessed moon I swear.

**Juliet.** O, swear not by the moon,  
the inconstant moon,

That monthly changes in her circled orb,  
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

**Romeo.** What shall I swear by?

**Juliet.** Do not swear at all;  
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,  
Which is the god of my idolatry,  
And I'll believe thee.

(Performed by Olivia Hussey [Juliet], Leonard Whiting [Romeo], 1968 film, Dir. Franco Zeffirelli)

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### Act 2 Scene 2

**Juliet.** Three words, dear Romeo,  
and good night indeed.  
If that thy bent of love be honourable,  
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,  
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,  
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite;  
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay  
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

**Romeo.** Love goes toward love,  
as schoolboys from their books,  
But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.

(Performed by Claire Danes [Juliet] and Leonardo DiCaprio [Romeo], 1996 Film, Dir. Baz Luhrmann)

## Romeo and Juliet / The Balcony Scene (No. 6 from Suite No. 1)

The following day, Romeo visits Friar Laurence and declares his love for Juliet, asking the Friar to marry them in secret. Though surprised, the Friar agrees, hoping that their union might finally bring an end to the long-standing feud. Romeo and Juliet are secretly married later that day.

### Act 3 Scene 3

**Romeo.** Good morrow, father.

**Friar Laurence.** Benedicite!  
What early tongue so sweet saluteth me?  
My friend, it argues a distemper'd head  
So soon to bid good morrow to thy bed:  
Therefore thy earliness doth me assure  
Thou art up-roused by some distemperature;  
Or if not so, then here I hit it right,  
Our Romeo hath not been in bed to-night.

**Romeo.** That last is true;  
the sweeter rest was mine.  
I have been feasting with mine enemy,  
Where on a sudden one hath wounded me,  
That's by me wounded: both our remedies  
Within thy help and holy physic lies:

**Friar Laurence.** Be plain, good son, and homely in thy drift;  
Riddling confession finds but riddling shrift.

**Romeo.** Then plainly know my heart's dear love is set  
On the fair daughter of rich Capulet:  
As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine;  
And all combined, save what thou must combine  
By holy marriage:

**Friar Laurence.** Come, young waverer, come, go with me,  
In one respect I'll thy assistant be;  
For this alliance may so happy prove,  
To turn your households' rancour to pure love.

(Performed by Josh O'Connor [Romeo] and Lucian Msamati [Friar Laurence], National Theatre 2021 original film)

## Friar Laurence (No. 3 from Suite No. 2)

Shortly after the marriage, tragedy begins to unfold. Tybalt confronts Romeo in the street, still enraged by his presence at the Capulet feast. Romeo refuses to fight, now bound to Tybalt and his family through his secret marriage. Mercutio, outraged by Romeo's restraint, takes up the challenge himself and is mortally wounded. As he dies, Mercutio curses both families. Overcome with anger and grief at the death of his friend, Romeo kills Tybalt and escapes.

### **Act 3 Scene 1**

**Tybalt.** Romeo, the love I bear thee can afford  
No better term than this: thou art a villain.

**Romeo.** The reason that I have to love thee  
Doth much excuse the appertaining rage  
To such a greeting. Villain am I none.  
Therefore farewell. I see thou knowest me not.

**Tybalt.** Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries  
That thou hast done me; turn and draw.

**Romeo.** I do protest, I never injured thee,  
But love thee better than thou canst devise,  
Till thou shalt know the reason of my love:  
And so, good Capulet,--which name I tender  
As dearly as my own,--be satisfied.

**Mercutio.** O calm, dishonourable,  
vile submission!  
Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?

**Tybalt.** What wouldst thou have with me?

**Mercutio.** Good king of cats, nothing but one of your  
nine lives.

**Tybalt.** I am for you.

**Benvolio.** Art thou hurt?

**Mercutio.** Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch  
A plague o' both your houses!  
They have made worms' meat of me.

**Romeo.** for Mercutio's soul  
Is but a little way above our heads,  
Staying for thine to keep him company:

**Tybalt.** Thou wretched boy  
Shalt with him hence.

**Romeo.** Either thou, or I, or both, must go with him.  
O, I am fortune's fool!

(Performed by John Leguizamo [Tybalt], Leonardo DiCaprio  
[Romeo], Harold Perrineau [Mercutio] and Dash Mihok [Benvolio],  
1996 Film, Dir. Baz Luhrmann)

## **The Death of Tybalt (No. 7 from Suite No. 1)**

For killing Tybalt, Romeo is banished from Verona. This punishment devastates both Romeo and Juliet, as it threatens to separate them forever. Romeo spends one final night with Juliet before fleeing to Mantua.

### **Act 3 Scene 5**

**Romeo.** Farewell,

**Juliet.** Art thou gone so? love, lord,  
ay, husband, friend!  
I must hear from thee every day in the hour,  
For in a minute there are many days:  
O think'st thou we shall ever meet again?

**Romeo.** I doubt it not;  
and all these woes shall serve  
For sweet discourses in our time to come.

**Juliet.** O God, I have an ill-divining soul!  
Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,  
As one dead in the bottom of a tomb:  
Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.

**Romeo.** And trust me, love, in my eye so do you:  
Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu!

(Performed by Alfred Enoch [Romeo] and Rebekah Murrell [Juliet], 2021  
production at the Globe Theatre)

## **The Last Farewell (No. 39 from the ballet)**

Juliet's parents, unaware of her marriage to Romeo, arrange for her to wed Count Paris. When Juliet refuses, Lord Capulet, in a rage, insists she obey him, or he shall cast her out of the family.

### Act 3 Scene 5

**Lady Capulet.** Marry, my child,  
early next Thursday morn,  
The gallant, young and noble gentleman,  
The County Paris, at Saint Peter's Church,  
Shall happily make thee there a joyful bride.

**Juliet.** Now, by Saint Peter's Church and Peter too,  
He shall not make me there a joyful bride.

**Capulet.** Hang thee, young baggage!  
disobedient wretch!  
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,  
Or never after look me in the face:  
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;  
My fingers itch.

Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:  
An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;  
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in  
the streets,  
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,  
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:  
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn.

**Juliet.** O, sweet my mother, cast me not away!  
Delay this marriage for a month, a week;

**Lady Capulet.** Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word:  
Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee.

(Performed by Natasha Parry [Lady Capulet], Olivia Hussey [Juliet] and Paul Hardwick [Capulet], 1968 film, Dir. Franco Zeffirelli)

## Juliet Refuses to Marry Paris (No. 41 from the ballet)

In desperation, Juliet turns to Friar Laurence for help in avoiding the marriage. The friar devises a risky plan: Juliet is to drink a potion that will put her into a deathlike sleep for forty-two hours. When she is discovered, she will be assumed dead and placed in the Capulet family tomb. The Friar will send word to Romeo to return and rescue her when she awakens, and the two will escape to Mantua together.

### Act 4 Scene 1

**Friar Laurence.** Take thou this vial,  
being then in bed,  
And this distilled liquor drink thou off;  
When presently through all thy veins shall run  
A cold and drowsy humour, for no pulse  
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease:  
No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest;  
And in this borrow'd likeness of shrunk death  
Thou shalt continue two and forty hours,  
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep.  
Now, when the bridegroom in the morning comes

To rouse thee from thy bed, there art thou dead:  
Thou shalt be borne to that same ancient vault  
Where all the kindred of the Capulets lie.  
In the mean time, against thou shalt awake,  
Shall Romeo by my letters know our drift,  
And hither shall he come: and he and I  
Will watch thy waking, and that very night  
Shall Romeo bear thee hence to Mantua.

(Performed by John Gielgud [Friar Laurence], 1993, BBC Radio 3)

## Juliet at Friar Laurence's Cell / Interlude (No. 44/45 from the ballet)

Alone and frightened but determined, Juliet drinks the potion in her bedroom.

### Act 4 Scene 3

**Juliet.** Come, vial.  
What if this mixture do not work at all?  
Shall I be married then to-morrow morning?  
What if it be a poison, which the friar  
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead,  
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,  
Because he married me before to Romeo?  
I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not,  
For he hath still been tried a holy man.  
How if, when I am laid into the tomb,  
I wake before the time that Romeo

Come to redeem me? there's a fearful point!  
O, if I wake, shall I not then be distraught,  
Environed with all these hideous fears?  
And madly play with my forefather's joints?  
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?  
And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,  
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?  
Romeo, I drink to thee.

(Performed by Rebekah Murrell [Juliet], 2021 production at the Globe Theatre)

### Juliet Alone (No. 47 from the ballet)

Friar Laurence's message fails to reach Romeo in time. Instead, Romeo learns from his servant Balthasar that Juliet has died. Overcome with grief, Romeo buys poison and returns to Verona to see if what Balthasar has said is true. When he arrives at Juliet's tomb, he encounters Paris, whom he kills in a duel. Seeing Juliet in her sleeping state, Romeo believes her to be truly dead. Distraught, he drinks his poison and dies beside her.

#### Act 5 Scene 3

**Romeo.** My love! my wife!

Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,  
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:  
Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet  
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,  
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.  
Dear Juliet, Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe  
That unsubstantial death is amorous,  
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps

Thee here in dark to be his paramour?  
O, here will I set up my everlasting rest,  
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars  
From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!  
Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you  
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss  
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!.

(Performed by Leonardo DiCaprio [Romeo], 1996 Film, Dir. Baz Luhrmann)

### Romeo at the Grave of Juliet (No. 7 from Suite 2)

Juliet awakens to find her lover's lifeless beside her. Overwhelmed with grief and unable to live without him, she takes Romeo's dagger and kills herself.

#### Act 5 Scene 3

**Juliet.** I do remember well where I should be,  
And there I am. Where is my Romeo?  
What's here? a cup, closed in my true love's hand?  
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:  
O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop  
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;

Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,  
To make die with a restorative.  
Thy lips are warm.  
O happy dagger,  
This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die.

(Performed by Samantha Bond [Juliet], 1993, BBC Radio 3)

### The Death of Juliet (No. 6 from Suite 3)