

Wuthering Heights



Introduction and Background

“...he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same... I am Heathcliff - he’s always, always in my mind...”

Emily Brontë - *Wuthering Heights*

This information pack is designed to give an insight into Northern Ballet Theatre’s (NBT) production of **Wuthering Heights**. It can be read before seeing the performance to gain an understanding of the production, or used after to clarify any questions. It can also be used by teachers as a stimulus for work in the classroom.

NBT’s production of **Wuthering Heights** is based on the classic English novel by Emily Brontë which was first published in 1847. A passionate tale of jealousy and undying love, *Wuthering Heights*, tells the tempestuous story of the headstrong, passionate Catherine and her dark, brooding Heathcliff, set against the wild, windswept Yorkshire moors.

With an original score by celebrated musical theatre composer Claude-Michel Schönberg, when David Nixon first decided to create the ballet he was excited by the

prospect of working with such a renowned composer but also slightly daunted by the task. “The offer to create the ballet to his score became one that I could not refuse, or I would regret it all my life. At first I was so over whelmed by the challenge of serving the music that I became fearful of the project, as I felt incapable of doing work that would merit the opportunity.” (David Nixon)

Nixon enlisted the help of Patricia Doyle, Theatre Associate and Dramaturge, to create a detailed scenario which stayed true to the essence of the novel and gained a greater understanding of the characters. Further collaborations with Ali Allen, Set Design and David Grill, Lighting Design, enabled the ballet to be produced within a year. This is the first time it has been revived with several scenes being reworked.

Synopsis

Prologue

A storm upon the moors. Haunted by memories of Cathy, Heathcliff rages through the night. Finally the storm dies down and a memory returns, of Cathy and Heathcliff in their youth, a memory of innocent and trusting love.

Act One

A memory takes form in the mists, the kitchen at Wuthering Heights where two children play. Cathy and Hindley are waiting for their father and when he enters they rush to him in search of presents. They find nothing but a ragged child, hidden beneath his cloak. They both regard the new addition to the family – Cathy with fascination, but Hindley with dismay.

As they grow older Cathy and Heathcliff spend all of their time together upon the desolate moors, but amid the untamed brutality of the landscape there is an elemental bond between them. Hindley becomes master of Wuthering Heights on his father’s death and takes his revenge upon Heathcliff, delighting in his degradation and humiliation. It is only with Cathy, on the moors, that Heathcliff can find happiness.

Upon the moor they discover Thrushcross Grange, the home of the Lintons and an oasis of tamed tranquillity in such a desolate landscape. A party is taking place and Heathcliff and Cathy cannot resist making fun of Edgar and Isabella Linton. They are discovered, but as they run away Cathy trips and is unable to stand. Edgar is enchanted and, as he helps her to her feet, Heathcliff is forgotten.

Cathy is convalescing at Thrushcross Grange. Edgar is falling in love with her and she, in turn, is captivated by his prettiness and refinement. Heathcliff remains alone with only thoughts of Cathy and questions her as to her long absence. As she leaves for home she is sorrier to leave the riches and luxury she has enjoyed during her stay than she is to leave Edgar. On her return to Wuthering Heights she regards its gloomy interior with dismay, but when Heathcliff steps out she greets him, laughing. However, with Edgar at Cathy’s side, Heathcliff cannot conceal his jealousy and after a struggle with Hindley he runs from the house. Cathy attempts to follow him, but he has gone and she has chosen her destiny.

Act Two

It is Cathy and Edgar's wedding day and in the midst of the festivities an unexpected guest arrives. Heathcliff has returned – richly dressed and genteel. As Cathy and Heathcliff are left alone, the rest of the world ceases to exist – they are back on the moors again. As Edgar returns Cathy remembers she is married and slips from Heathcliff's grasp.

At Wuthering Heights Hindley is drinking heavily and gambling away huge sums of money. Heathcliff gives money to Hindley, allowing him to fall deeper into debt. As Hindley becomes more desperate, losing not only the game but Wuthering Heights as well.

Isabella arrives at Wuthering Heights to return Heathcliff's riding crop and he greets her with an icy warmth. The charm he displays grows more aggressive, but when Isabella becomes hesitant Heathcliff invites her to leave. Rather than return to the loneliness and tedium of her life at Thrushcross Grange, Isabella submits to him.

Cathy is sitting in the garden at Thrushcross Grange when she sees Heathcliff and Isabella enter the grounds. Heathcliff kisses Isabella and Cathy jealously confronts him. Heathcliff angrily accuses her of betraying their love, making it clear that he will not give up Isabella and means to have revenge.

Left alone, Cathy sadly contemplates her current life and that of her carefree youth, spent on the moors with Heathcliff. Drawn, irresistibly, back to the moors she is caught up in the gathering storm and comes face-to-face with Heathcliff. Suddenly the anger is gone, replaced by love. When they are discovered by Isabella, Cathy races from the scene and Heathcliff turns the full violence of his rage on Isabella.

The night spent on the moors in the rainstorm has left Cathy gravely ill. A grief-stricken Edgar finally shows all the love and passion missing, until now, from his life. As he leaves to get the doctor, Heathcliff enters the bedchamber through a window.

He gathers her up in his arms and they embrace one another fiercely as he rains kisses down upon her face. As Edgar returns Cathy collapses and Heathcliff hands her back to her husband.

Epilogue

Heathcliff is back upon the moor. An old man, he is desperate to embrace death and be reunited with Cathy. He has lived a lifetime without her. Finally his tired heart gives way and he falls to his knees with his head to the heavens. As snow begins to fall the youthful lovers return. The anger of the past is buried as, liberated from anger and betrayal, they are reunited in their innocence and love.



Characters

Heathcliff: An orphan brought to live at Wuthering Heights by Mr. Earnshaw, Heathcliff falls into an intense, unbreakable love with Mr. Earnshaw's daughter Cathy. After Mr. Earnshaw dies, his resentful son Hindley abuses Heathcliff and treats him as a servant whom he seeks revenge on. A powerful, fierce, and often cruel man, he is bitter and tormented by the loss of his love Cathy.

Catherine Earnshaw: The daughter of Mr. Earnshaw, Cathy falls powerfully in love with Heathcliff. Cathy loves Heathcliff so intensely that she claims they are the same person. However, her desire for social advancement motivates her to marry Edgar Linton instead. Cathy is free-spirited, beautiful, spoiled, and often arrogant. She is given to fits of temper and is torn between her wild passion for Heathcliff and her social ambition. She brings misery to both of the men who love her.

Hindley Earnshaw: Cathy's brother, and Mr. Earnshaw's son. Hindley resents it when Heathcliff is brought to live at Wuthering Heights. After his father dies and he inherits the estate, Hindley begins to abuse the young Heathcliff seeking to degrade him for winning the love of his father. Subsequently, he loses his inheritance to Heathcliff through gambling.

Edgar Linton: Well-bred but rather spoiled as a boy, Edgar Linton grows into a tender, constant, but cowardly man. He is handsome and refined, but struggles to express his feelings for Cathy.

Isabella Linton: Spoilt and naïve, she is Edgar Linton's sister, who falls in love with Heathcliff and marries him. She sees Heathcliff as a romantic figure, like a character in a novel. Ultimately, she ruins her life by falling in love with him. He never returns her feelings and treats her as a mere tool in his quest for revenge on the Linton family.

Adaptation

Claude Michel-Schönberg originally composed the score of Wuthering Heights for English National Ballet, to be produced by the then Artistic Director, Derek Deane. However, when Deane left the company suddenly, Schönberg sent the music to other ballet companies to find another collaborator. At the time David Nixon received the music he was unsure what Northern Ballet Theatre's next production would be as he had only recently joined the company. But when he heard Schönberg's music he immediately fell in love with it. Nixon was excited to produce movement for such a passionate and turbulent story and as it is set on the wild moors of Yorkshire, NBT's home county, it felt appropriate for the company to create the work.

Nixon's vision for the ballet was for the audience to feel fully involved in the passionate relationship between the main characters Heathcliff and Cathy and how this tempestuous relationship develops and ends in thwarted love. Nixon also wanted to show the close association between Cathy and Heathcliff and the natural elements, the wildness of the moors. He wanted to include the time when Cathy and Heathcliff were children, running and playing on the moor, a time when everything was perfect. By returning to this time throughout the story, it reminds the audience what was so special about their relationship when they were young, as equals, and how they lose this as they grow into adults. Young Heathcliff and Cathy represent a time of absolute harmony and joy; they are completely fulfilled by each other and do not need anyone or anything else. They are only reunited in this way at the end of the ballet through death, and we see the potential of what could have been if they had stayed together as they return to the best time of their lives.



When Cathy is introduced to the Linton's society she becomes aware of a new world which is a complete contrast to her upbringing. It opens her eyes to what else she could have in life and gain through becoming one of them. On her last day at the Grange she has a new view of the world and a new suitor in Edgar Linton. Sorry to leave the luxury and grandeur of her temporary home, it is a shock for Cathy to return to Wuthering Heights which is harsh and rugged. Cathy is at war with her feelings; she has missed Heathcliff, much more than she now misses Edgar, but pushes him away as she doesn't to be reunited with her "old" life.

Cathy betrays her true nature when she marries Edgar Linton and we see a theme played out that is still relevant today: Do you marry for love or for money and status? She chooses a marriage of convenience which has a devastating affect on all around her.

Being true to your natural behaviour, to who you are, is a theme that we can also see in Heathcliff's character. He reinvents himself in an attempt to win Cathy back. He moulds himself into a form that he thinks will be more attractive to Cathy, but ultimately becomes a worse person, more sadistic, especially in his treatment of Isabella. He demonstrates humanity's darkest side and the wildness and ruling power of love, passion and obsession. He never stops loving Cathy but ultimately cannot forgive her for causing her own death through illness and starvation.



In the original production, Nixon wanted to avoid having two party scenes. To solve this he created a garden party scene where the Lintons and their friends play badminton. This provides a contrast between the earthiness of Cathy, Heathcliff and the Moors and the triviality and luxury of the Lintons' lifestyle. This has been re-worked to avoid the problems it caused with volleying the shuttlecock which the dancers found difficult to keep going!

While reviving the production David Nixon has made a few changes to further develop the characters. An example of this is in Act 1, where Heathcliff is seen thinking about Cathy while she is at the Grange. Nixon felt that Heathcliff's anguish at her prolonged absence needed to be more prominent, showing the contrast between Cathy indulging in newfound riches and Heathcliff missing the old Cathy, and so Schönberg composed a new section of music and the extra scene was added.

Choreography

Nixon wanted to capture a different feeling for the movement of Cathy and Heathcliff as children and adults. The movement material is at times the same but performed with a different dynamic to show how they, and their relationship, have grown and changed over time. Cathy wears soft slippers to show she is connected to the earth.

Young Cathy and Heathcliff

Both characters are shown to be equals. The movement is very playful with Cathy and Heathcliff moving over, under and around each other, entwining and almost moving as

one. They jump powerfully, play fight and run together demonstrating Cathy's tomboyish side. The dynamic is fast and energetic.

There are moments of stillness where they simply stop and look at each other, sit or lie close together gazing up into the sky, not having to talk and not needing anything or anyone else. A motif which emphasises their bond shows the youngsters lying with their heads close together, almost rolling over each others face, showing that they are always on each others mind.

Adult Cathy and Heathcliff

Adult Cathy and Heathcliff perform many of the same or similar movements but with a different dynamic. Nixon wanted to show how as we get older our movement and pace of life slows down and so the speed of movement is slower and more sustained. The music reflects this and has a slower tempo which almost helps to settle the characters. In their pas de deux in Act 1 we see Heathcliff and Cathy's strength of character as there are many big lifts and risky, off balanced movements. Heathcliff continually lifts Cathy, literally putting her above him, almost as if she is levitating. He puts her on his back as if he can make her fly and they move together effortlessly as if one.



During moments of stillness they only look at each other, rather than the sky. Cathy cradles Heathcliff's head, building to a point where Heathcliff almost kisses Cathy but withdraws as he knows he cannot cross that line in their friendship.

The Lintons

Nixon wanted to create a clear contrast between the earthiness of Cathy and Heathcliff and the wealthy, artificial world of the Lintons who have no connection to the environment that surrounds them on the moors. He wanted the audience to wonder why Cathy is interested in becoming one of them and presents their society as being trivial and slightly ridiculous, playing games and eating cake.



Edgar's movement vocabulary is classical and pure. The control and elegance he displays suggest that he is a class above Heathcliff and Cathy who are more grounded. On his first meeting with Cathy, we see Edgar's difficulty in expressing himself. He either babbles or can not find the words to say. He dances alone, almost in his own world oblivious of Cathy, and when he does approach her he falters and withdraws, unable to connect with her.

Cathy also displays uncertainty with Edgar, not knowing how to behave in this new environment. When she dances with him she is always a step behind and moves tentatively until she grows in confidence. It is clear they are from very different worlds, which is explored further in the Wedding scene.

The Wedding scene

In this scene we see the difference between Cathy's relationships with Edgar and Heathcliff. When dancing with Edgar, Cathy remains quite still, like a doll, while Edgar takes the space and consequently the spotlight. Her movement is contained and neatly placed with precise footwork.

Later in the scene when she finds herself alone with Heathcliff, we see the same movement from their earlier pas de deux return as he takes her back to the time they were happiest, on the moors. Cathy's quality is free with movements taken to the extreme and there is a sense of defiance in the duet. The physicality and passion contrasts boldly to her encounters with Edgar, and they dance as equals, sharing the space together. Heathcliff tries to overpower her, finding ways to seduce her, but she pushes him away as the wedding party return and she realizes what her destiny will be.



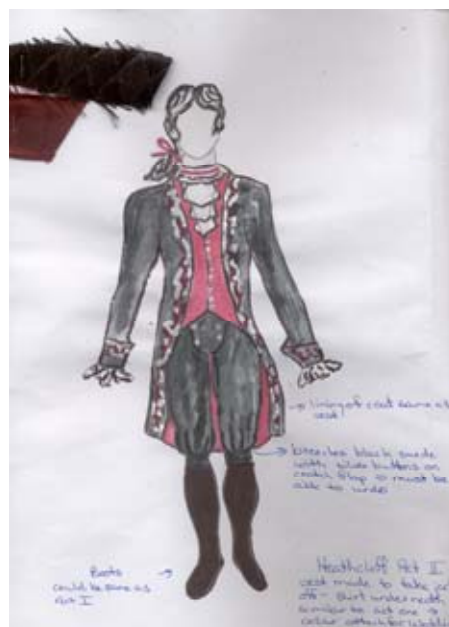
Costume

The costumes were designed by David Nixon who, as with several other productions he has created, took the silhouette of the period but adapted it to make them work as a ballet costume. To do this he had to consider how the garment would move with the dancer, flattering line, and not get in the way of the movement.

Colour is used symbolically to convey the characters' nature and is reflective of the landscape and location of where they live. The texture of fabric contributes to this. We also see the transformation of the characters through their costume.

Heathcliff

In Act 1 we see Heathcliff's connection to his environment as he wears shades of brown in heavy fabric. Later in Act 2 his reinvention of himself is shown through a striking change in costume. He appears at the wedding in red and black in a tailored jacket made from fabric of a much finer texture, displaying greater financial wealth and a change in manners. This makes him stand out and look at odds with the rest of the wedding party.



The Earnshaws – Cathy and Hindley

The Earnshaws wear earthy browns and greens, reflecting the environment they live in.



In the same way that Heathcliff's transformation is demonstrated through his costume, this is also true of Cathy.

In Act 1 Cathy wears earthy browns and green, marking her as being part of her natural surrounds, peaceful and young.

In Act 2 she wears white for her wedding and the luxurious fabric and decoration displays the wealth of the family she's marrying into and grandeur of the occasion. She later changes into much darker colours including a rich red to show her troubled state.



The Lintons - Edgar and Isabella

The Lintons wear mainly pale blues representing light, pretty, but quite empty personalities. The fabric is rich to show their wealth and status. The wedding party are in white and gold, again demonstrating their wealth.



Set

The set was designed by Ali Allen who previously collaborated with Nixon on Madame Butterfly. Trained in Fine Art at Newcastle University, Allen has worked as a designer internationally in musical theatre, opera, carnival, pantomime and festivals. This has included companies such as Red Ladder, Glyndebourne Opera on large scale outdoor projects, award winning designs for Pilot Theatre Company and a host of large sculptural pieces for touring exhibitions and festivals.

In Emily Brontë's novel, the moors are constantly referred to. They are wild, expansive and cannot be cultivated and through Cathy and Heathcliff's time spend playing there in childhood, become symbolic of their love affair. For this reason Allen ensured the landscape was always visible in her set designs. Harsh, rugged and dark, it is a constant reminder of the bond between Cathy and Heathcliff. Scrapped metal is used, alongside other rough materials, to achieve this affect. The Grange looks out over the moors, while the Heights is in the moors, completely surrounded. The trees are bent out of shape by the elements showing the severity of the environment.

The two family's houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcroft Grange, provide a contrast in a similar way to the families who inhabit them. Symbolic of nature and wildness, Wuthering Heights is dark and barren and becomes a gloomy prospect for Cathy to return to after spending time at the Grange. While complimentary in shape, Thrushcross Grange represents refinement, cultivation and convention, and Allen

decided to make it more beautiful than it would have been historically to assist the audience's understanding of why it was such a special and exciting place for Cathy. Contrasting materials are used to emphasize this point, as well as colours. For example, at the Grange, rich materials in gold and red are draped to soften the scene and the outside is surrounded by colourful flowers. In contrast, the Heights is furnished with a simple table, using brown and grey colours and is dimly lit.



Gauzes are used to create a layering effect for the sky. This is lit in different ways to reflect the location and emotive content of the scene creating a dramatic backdrop to the action. The sky also provides the catalyst of what happens to the family in the future, giving the audience a premonition of the drama to come.



Music

Claude-Michel Schönberg is famous for composing musicals, writing the scores for *Les Misérables* and *Miss Saigon* amongst others. **Wuthering Heights** is his first ballet which was orchestrated by William David Brohn. Brohn is a recognised composer and orchestrator having worked with artists such as Twyla Tharp, Sir Kenneth McMillan and Plácido Domingo.

“As a composer of musicals I know how to tell a story with music, singers and lyrics; I know what kind of mood a melody can deliver and how to write a song, but I never thought of writing a ballet – this was unknown territory for me. The idea of turning *Wuthering Heights* into a ballet was initially developed with my friend Derek Deane and hearing of NBT’s reputation for successful narrative-led productions, I contacted the company’s new artistic director, David Nixon. I soon found myself deeply involved in the challenge of creating my first ballet score.”

Surprisingly, for such a renowned composer, Schönberg can not actually read or write music himself. He composes on a keyboard then sends a recording of the pieces to Brohn who orchestrates them. This gives the music a sense of being played on the piano, something it shares with the classical ballet *Les Sylphide* which was choreographed to orchestrated versions of Chopin. This makes it challenging for an orchestra as they have to create a feeling of the tempo being pulled around (*robato*).

The music, along with the set and costume, helps to create the scene for the different settings within the ballet. When the action is out on the moors, the music is atmospheric, creating a soundscape for the characters. At the Grange, the music is more melodic, adding to the carefree atmosphere of the Lintons’ lifestyle.

Schönberg wrote the work in nine months, working eight hours a day from his home in the south of France. “Inspiration was there, my fingers sometimes running on the keyboard much faster than my brain. It felt like the characters Heathcliff, Cathy, Edgar, Isabella, were talking to me.”

“After *Les Misérables*, *Miss Saigon* and *Martin Guerre* it was a land of freedom, no borders imposed by the voices, ranges, change of keys, structure of the words. I’m not saying that it was any easier, just different. Not hiding behind singers, I am more exposed as a composer so I also had to improve my technique of writing. At the age of 57, I was learning more about myself and was certainly not the same man by the time I reached the last bar of the score.” (Schönberg)

As the music was originally written for the English National Ballet, the score has since been re-orchestrated to suit the smaller orchestra of NBT.



Bibliography

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