

MB
MILWAUKEE BALLET

Hunchback of Notre Dame



March 23-26
MARCUS CENTER



AUDIENCE GUIDE

Milwaukee Ballet brings 15th-century Paris to life with Michael Pink's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The famed novel by Victor Hugo follows the intersecting lives of Quasimodo, reviled for his deformities, Archdeacon Frolo, the adoptive father of Quasimodo, and Esmeralda, a Roma dancer. Set against the Cathedral of Notre Dame, which conjures both sanctuary and dungeon for those who traverse within, these characters' actions illustrate the love and kindness possible amidst impossible cruelty.

THE BALLET

Pink's ballet is formatted like a 19th-century classical ballet, with all the main characters dancing an introductory solo supported by music that identifies the characters. Structured like a pyramid, Act I is enormous, leaving the audience almost overwhelmed with much information, while Acts II and III begin to narrow in narrative focus. Act III is the shortest, centered on Esmeralda, Quasimodo and Frolo, but presents the most poignant conflicts and piqued emotion in anticipation of the tragic fate that awaits them all.

THE SETTING

The Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris provides the setting for *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. This historic Gothic cathedral rests off the River Seine in Paris, France. The sound of the bells of Notre Dame throughout the ballet provide a haunting refrain toward the tragic conclusion.



Victor Hugo adored the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, finding in it the contrasts he sought to express in his work. The sculptures of the immense façade juxtapose the sublime and the grotesque, saints and monstrous gargoyles. His knowledge of the cathedral was thorough - its spiral staircases, its mysterious little stone rooms, and its inscriptions, old and new. On one wall he deciphered the Greek word Ananké (Fate), and it was this word that provided the germ cell for his book as he tried to imagine what lost soul had thus confessed its suffering.

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THE CHARACTERS

ARCHDEACON FROLLO

Archdeacon Frollo is a scholar in the Catholic church who adopts Quasimodo when he is abandoned as an infant in a church. His benevolence in adopting Quasimodo is self-serving, intending to secure his place in heaven. In fact, Frollo sequesters Quasimodo in Notre Dame's bell tower and has raised him to believe he's a monster and a disgrace. Frollo's religious dogma is paired with an interest in alchemy which has led to rumors that he is a sorcerer. His religious zeal is further distorted into a shameful infatuation with Esmeralda and he relentlessly pursues her, his obsession becoming an all-consuming and destructive force.



QUASIMODO

Born disfigured, Quasimodo is raised by his adopted father Frollo in a loveless environment, where no one touches or comforts him. Never the less, Quasimodo has grown into a young man who takes great pride in his job ringing the bells of the cathedral, his home. When Esmeralda comes into his life, she is the first and only one who can see past his physical form, and Quasimodo is immediately smitten by her beauty and kindness. At the end, Quasimodo realizes that Frollo, who took him in and saved his life, is also the man that could destroy Esmeralda, and he must choose between loyalty and love.



ESMERALDA

Esmeralda is a beautiful, young Roma woman who earns money by dancing. Because she dances with fire and has trained a little white goat to dance and do tricks, people think her sacrilegious, a pagan, and even a devil. The church and what it represents tells people to be afraid of her – if people responded to her temptations, they were deemed bad and evil. She *is* virtuous despite what everyone believes about her because of her ethnicity, how she looks and how she dances. Though she is a victim to the men around her who all want to lay claim to her, she is stronger than any of them, remaining true to herself no matter the cost.



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CAPTAIN PHOEBUS

A soldier of noble birth, Captain Phoebus is dashing and arrogant. He is betrothed to Fleur-de-Lys as an economic advantage, but continues his philandering nonetheless. He is briefly heroic in saving Esmeralda, but his true aims are revealed when, shortly thereafter, he attempts to seduce her. Esmeralda is falsely charged with his murder after Frollo kills him in a jealous rage.

FLEUR-DE-LYS

Betrothed to Phoebus, Fleur-de-Lys believes she is above Esmeralda and others like her (in the ballet, notice her dancing is set above the street level). Described as “graciously cruel,” Fleur-de-Lys and her fellow aristocratic women are jealous of Esmeralda’s grace and beauty and they treat Esmeralda just as the crowd treats Quasimodo.

GRINGOIRE

Gringoire is a poet and a playwright, who in Hugo's novel says of himself, “I was, for one reason or another, fit for nothing. So, I decided to become a poet and rhymester. It’s a profession one can always take up, if one’s a vagabond; and it’s better than stealing...” He is enamored with Esmeralda and she saves his life with a marriage in name only. He betrays her in the end by turning her over to Archdeacon Frollo.

CLOPIN

Gringoire runs into Clopin at the Court of Miracles, a place both humorous and deadly. As the King of the Beggars, a group of criminals and outcasts of Paris, Clopin plans to execute Gringoire for trespassing. Esmeralda agrees to marry Gringoire to save him.

THE TOWNSPEOPLE

The Townspeople show the immense cruelty possible to those that are different or perceived as weaker. They elect Quasimodo as the King of Fools, but the celebration is meant to humiliate. Later, the beggars in the Court of Miracles want to hang Gringoire so that they can watch an execution, which they perceive as a form of entertainment. The Townspeople epitomize an era of extraordinary inhumanity towards others.

