



CHOREOGRAPHER'S NOTES

ROBERT CURRAN

Louisville Ballet premiered this local version of *Coppélia* in October 2015 – the first season I fully programmed as the Company's Artistic Director. I had dreamt of creating my own interpretation of this ballet classic for many years. *Coppélia* has such a special story to tell, with so many levels and details to dive into over and over again as a director, a dancer, or an audience member.

And here I was, a new Artistic Director and new member of the Louisville community, taking on the challenge of creating an updated classic; driving the development and construction of new sets and costumes; and breathing new life into the story and choreography.

The original ballet, based on the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, depicts a community celebrating a fall harvest – a time of romance, weddings, and the promise that love provides light – just before the cold darkness of winter. And the rich history of Louisville's own Germantown, especially at the start of the twentieth century, offered the perfect setting to bring this story to life in a new way.

This was a time of rapid, intense change, but no event was more universally felt than World War I. This war had a profound effect on the global psyche and changed the way we perceived the world; its effects were keenly experienced here in Louisville. Camp Zachary Taylor, one of the five major training camps for the United States military at that time, was located just outside the city – making the fall of 1917 in Louisville a time of intense patriotic fervor.

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Reflecting on my decision now, I can see what a challenge I had given myself. Who was I, as an Australian only just putting down roots in this community, to tell the story of German-Americans in this place during that time? Fortunately I knew, as I know now, to go to the experts and to trust their knowledge and insights. I started my work at The Filson Historical Society, diving into their archives, listening to their guidance, and tying the threads between this community I was getting to know and the ballet I knew so well.

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Much like a harvest celebration and the preparations for winter, this country and community busily prepared for a cold and challenging time of war.



Louisville's German-American community was deeply affected by these preparations. Second and third-generation German families faced challenges to both defend and prove their identities, particularly from widespread propaganda attacking their American loyalty. The *Courier-Journal's* Pulitzer Prize winning editor, Henry Watterson, was especially harsh in his public judgment. A battle of words waged between *The Courier-Journal* and the *Louisville Anzeiger*, the local German-language newspaper of the time, and clearly captured the struggle of this community.

This struggle is at the core of this production of *Coppélia*. But so is the joy and the resilience at the heart of this vibrant community and this ballet.

Our production is indeed joyful, funny, and visually beautiful. The choreography is still very much rooted in classical ballet and pays homage to all those who have both created and refined this ballet since its first performance in 1870, including Arthur Saint-Leon, Marius Petipa, Enricho Cecchetti, Dame Ninette de Valois, and Peggy Van Praagh.

Our *Coppélia's* sets were designed by Jacob Heustis, a Louisville-based visual artist, and based on the dramatic changes in the world of visual art during

that time. Just before the United States joined World War I, the famous Armory Show of 1913 brought Modernism to the country with Cubism and Futurism at the vanguard. The juxtaposition of our then Costume Master Dan Fedie's beautifully designed, constructed, and historically accurate costumes within the world of this set still makes me catch my breath.

I'm so proud of this work, and of the artists, designers, and artisans who helped make this production possible. I'm glad that I trusted their skills and their vision, and that they trusted mine. None of this would have been possible without them.

And, of course, our Company Artists and Studio Company dancers – both in 2015 and during this current season – have embraced this production with incredible artistry. My time with them in the studio has been filled with such joy. I must also thank our incredible artistic staff! for their partnership and support as we tied the threads of this production together once again.

We are all so excited to share Louisville's own *Coppélia* with you now.