

Romeo & Juliet: A Theatrical Concert – February 13 - 15, 2026

The concert you will enjoy this month marks a groundbreaking collaboration between the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and Concert Theatre Works, with its acclaimed director and founder Bill Barclay. The concert, a co-commissioned production, with support from the Royal Albert Hall in London and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, features live actors in full costume, dynamic staging and sword fights, in a side-by-side performance with HSO musicians. For this issue of *Prelude*, we went behind the scenes for an in-depth conversation with Bill Barclay, the founder and creative force behind all of the productions offered by Concert Theatre Works.

Bill Barclay, founder of Concert Theatre Works, is living proof that dreams do come true. Early in his career as a music director and composer for theater, he was struck by the need to create a new way for audiences to be drawn to symphonic music. Sitting in the balancing space between theater and music, he had a realization: Musicians are great story keepers, while actors are great story tellers, so why not find a way to combine the two art forms that would bring a new way for audiences to engage in symphonic music?



Bill Barclay at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC

That germ of an idea began to coalesce in 2014 and ultimately grew into the company he founded, Concert Theatre Works (CTW). Ten years later CTW boasts productions in cities throughout the United States and England, all original works conceived and created by Bill. In Bill's own words on the website, he describes the work of CTW as follows:

"Humans are inherently interdisciplinary. Concertgoers are usually theatre audiences too, and we all possess finely attuned ears from a lifetime of listening to a broad range of music. Our [Concert Theatre Works] productions collapse the illusion of distance between the performing arts by revealing the incredible stories lurking just behind the standard repertoire. This makes musicians more visible, advocating for the survival of your local orchestra, and the preservation of music education. The resulting close collaborations allow artists to grow and appreciate their peers in new ways."

For those who know him, it is hardly a surprise that Bill Barclay is the creative power behind CTW. At an early age, he was enthralled with music and theater, finding it difficult to choose which he loved most. Growing up in a musical household, Bill sang in church, as did his father, and his older brother played guitar. At the age of 12 Bill discovered the music of

Leonard Bernstein. In sharing his experience, Bill laughingly refers to Bernstein’s music as his “gateway drug” to the enormous body of work within musical theater and classical music.

Smitten with all of it, Bill was determined to be a part of the broad community of actors and musicians, which he defined as everything from Shakespeare to Moliere, from musical theater to opera, and everything in between. As he planned for college, unable to choose between music or theater, Bill selected Vassar, which allowed him to pursue a double major in music and drama. After graduation Bill attended Boston University, and after earning his MFA in playwriting, then pursued further studies at the National Theater Institute, the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Waterford, CT.

At the young age of 20, Bill was hired as the resident Music Director for Shakespeare & Co., the renowned theater company in Lenox, MA. He held the position for twelve summer/fall seasons while he simultaneously worked on more than twenty productions with the Actors’ Shakespeare Project in Boston. In 2011, he left the United States to become the Music Director for the Shakespeare Globe Theatre in London. During his seven years at The Globe, Bill collaborated with countless actors and directors including the acclaimed Mark Rylance, and in addition to overseeing the music for roughly 130 productions, Bill’s original scores were featured in 15 of them. By the time he departed The Globe in 2019, Bill was already working on Concert Theatre Works, an idea that was jumpstarted by an outreach from the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2014.

In 2014 BSO staff reached out to The Globe to explore a possible collaboration in celebration of Shakespeare’s “double anniversary” 2016: the 450th anniversary of the playwright’s birth and the 400th anniversary of his death. The inquiry was forwarded to Bill’s attention, and when The Globe declined to pursue the idea, Bill received permission to do the work on his own. From that introduction, Bill forged a relationship with both the BSO and the LA Phil, and within a few years he had created four separate shows that were scheduled for performances. But in 2020, with the onset of the global pandemic, the entire performing arts world came to a screeching halt.

It was a tough setback, but Bill was determined to keep moving forward. CTW productions began touring in 2021, and now, the list of available productions on the CTW website ([About - Concert Theatre Works](#)) makes clear that Bill’s dreams are big, uncensored and still growing. He excavates music that might otherwise be lost, simultaneously infusing each score with a compelling story that draws in the audience. Bill explained that his vision is simple:

“Each work is 50/50 music and story, and answers the question: what happens when actors and musicians are regarded as equal in an egalitarian production? In theatre, where the ‘pit’ musicians are housed below the actors, the actors might never even meet the musicians. In opera, the same arrangement is visible, but everyone is there to serve the music, while the story takes a backseat. My productions strive to create a 50/50 balance between the story and the music, something that has not been done before.”

The CTW website reveals the wide range of Bill’s creative genius. Productions now include four of Shakespeare’s plays, works about composers (such as Bach, Mozart and Joseph Bologne, also known as The Chevalier), the Fauré Requiem, two operas (*Peer Gynt* and *The Magic Flute*), compelling musical stories such as *Letters to a Young Poet* (which combines Ravel’s String Quartet in F with Rilke’s Letters) and more.



Bill Barclay as Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet*.



Production photo from *Romeo & Juliet*, featuring James Udom (Romeo) and Kelley Curran (Juliet) dance at masked ball (Hilary Scott)

Each work is a stunning combination of theater and music, in which musicians and actors share the stage and the story. *Death of Gesualdo*, commissioned by The Church of St. Martin-in-the-Field and the National Centre for Early Music in York, England, celebrates the music and life of the madrigalist, Carlos Gesualdo, incorporating puppetry, six actors and music by *The Gesualdo Six*. The world premiere was held in mid-January 2026 at St. Martin-in-the-Field, and the U.S. Premiere will take place on Friday, February 13, 2026, at St. John The Divine Cathedral in Manhattan.

One of Bill's latest projects, *Copland & Twain*, fuses Copland's music with Twain's words, performed by five ethnically diverse actors. Another unique project, *What Music Is*, explores humanity's unique relationship with music. The explanation of this novel production reads:

"Humans have been making music for over 50,000 years yet its role in evolution has remained a mystery. In this show, we propose music's purpose in human life, the critical role live music plays in civic wellness, and how we can leverage music's powers for human flourishing."

For a glimpse of this unusual production, we invite you to enjoy this link: [What Music Is - Show Trailer - YouTube.](#)

To date, Bill has written roughly 25 different productions for CTW, and his goal is to "house the total concert theater gestalt for the industry." Bill firmly believes his works will appeal to every audience, of every age and background, and the viability of his beliefs are tested with every production, with every collaboration and with every audience.

Finding the right venue and the right musical ensemble is a challenge, and the HSO is eagerly looking forward to the collaboration with Bill and CTW on the February production of *Romeo & Juliet*. The work is written for a full orchestra, a small cast playing multiple roles, heart-stopping sword fights and an appeal to people of all ages. It is, after all, a story for and about young teenagers in love, and as Bill puts it, the production “hits a whole bunch of erogenous zones!”

This weekend, you are in for a rare treat: a combination of Prokofiev’s score for *Romeo & Juliet*, in conjunction with six actors performing multiple roles who will help bring the story to life. A clip from the world premiere of the production by the Boston Symphony Orchestra may be enjoyed here:

[**Romeo & Juliet: A Theatrical Concert by Bill Barclay \(TRAILER\).**](#)

James Udom as Romeo
(Hilary Scott)



Bill Barclay



JOIN US!

Please join the HSO on February 13 - 15, 2026, to enjoy an exciting performance of *Romeo & Juliet*, as you’ve never seen it before, in an exciting blend of Shakespeare’s classic play with the thrilling music of Prokofiev’s *Romeo & Juliet*, led by HSO’s Music Director, Carolyn Kuan.

Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you’re a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org. We’ll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!

Interested in learning about more of the productions by Concert Theater Works? We invite you to view the trailers for the productions below.

Death of Gesualdo, the music of Carlos Gesualdo: [Death of Gesualdo TRAILER.](#)

The Secret Byrd, the music of William Byrd: [Trailer: Secret Byrd \(The Gesualdo Six\).](#)

The Four Seasons, a re-imagining of Vivaldi's work, with music by Max Richter: [Vivaldi's The Four Seasons: Trailer.](#)

Letters to a Young Poet, with music by Ravel: [LETTERS TO A YOUNG POET Trailer.](#)

Peer Gynt, with music by Edward Grieg: [PEER GYNT Trailer 2 - Boston Symphony Orchestra with Concert Theatre Works, 2024 - YouTube.](#)

The Chevalier, with music by Joseph Bologne: [The Chevalier by Bill Barclay - trailer.](#)

Other works by CTW, including *Midsummer Night's Dream*, are available on the website: [Trailers - Concert Theatre Works.](#)



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Here is HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage!

The music you will hear on this program is music for the *Romeo & Juliet* ballet composed by Sergei Prokofiev in 1935. It was originally written for a production by the Kirov Ballet (now the Mariinsky Ballet), in what was then Leningrad (now St. Petersburg.) However, even before Prokofiev began work on the score, the collaboration fell through, so the composer offered it instead to Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, but the piece was dismissed as "impossible" as dance music. Prokofiev then revised the score into two orchestral suites, intended as a ballet that would tell the story written by Shakespeare. Please enjoy this link to a performance by Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France:

[Prokofiev-Romeo and Juliet](#)

Did you know that there are four other versions of music written for Romeo and Juliet? We hope you will enjoy listening to these as well.

Please enjoy the Romeo and Juliet score by Tchaikovsky: [Tchaikowsky: Romeo und Julia - hr-Sinfonieorchester - Andrés Orozco-Estrada - YouTube.](#)

Another was written by Hector Berlioz in 1839 as a combination of symphony and opera. Berlioz was moved to compose the piece after attending a performance of Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet* in London. Juliet was portrayed by the actress Harriet Smithson, and though they had never met, Berlioz fell instantly and deeply in love with her. The full production – including the opera - may be enjoyed here: [Berlioz : "Roméo et Juliette" conducted by Daniele Gatti.](#)

Charles Gounod was moved to compose an opera, *Romeo et Juliette*, after writing his amazingly popular *Faust*. After three less-than successful attempts at a follow-up to *Faust*, Gounod was desperate for a "hit" and worked feverishly on a new opera based on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The entire opera was completed in just over a year, and the world premiere was held at the Théâtre Lyrique in Paris, in an Italian translation, in 1867. Please enjoy this video of the opera, in its entirety: ['Romeo et Juliette' by Charles Gounod - Mission Opera & VOPA.](#)

Finally, it was composer Nina Rota who wrote the music for the famous 1968 movie version of *Romeo and Juliet* by director Franco Zeffirelli. Here is the trailer for the movie: [ROMEO AND JULIET \(1968\) - OFICIAL TRAILER - YouTube.](#) The famous theme song, *A Time For Us*, may be heard here: [A time for us Romeo and Juliet 1968 - YouTube.](#)



Nigel Gore (Capulet) and Robert Walsh (Friar) with Kelley Curran (Juliet) (Hilary Scott)



Carman Lacivita (Tybalt) and Caleb Mayo (Mercutio) swordfight (Gabriel Scott)

SOURCE MATERIAL

[Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64 | Tragic Love Story, Ballet Suite, Soviet Ballet | Britannica](#)

[Six of the best: musical settings of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet | Classical Music](#)

<https://www.folger.edu/blogs/shakespeare-and-beyond/charles-gounod-romeo-and-juliet-opera/>