

**Northern  
Ballet**  
Learning



# MERLIN

**A BALLET BY DREW MCONIE**  
**Music by Grant Olding**

**Resource Pack**

## Introduction

This resource pack gives KS2 and KS3 teachers and pupils an insight into Northern Ballet's *Merlin*. It can be used as a preparatory resource before seeing the production, follow up work after seeing the production or as an introduction to Northern Ballet or ballet in general.

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Terminology is [highlighted](#) and can be found at the back of this pack.



# The History of *Merlin*



Merlin, also referred to as 'Myrddin' or 'Merlinus' in literature, is a character in Welsh mythology who was considered to be a poet or a **prophet** in the 6th or 7th century.

Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1100 – 1155), a British writer and **pseudo historian**, is known for his works in Latin; *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136-1138, translated to *The History of the Kings of Britain*) and *Vita Merlini* (1148, *The Life of Merlin*), contributing greatly to **Arthurian legend**. In the *Vita Merlini*, a 1,500-line poem, Geoffrey tells the story of Merlin, a legendary Welsh **prophet** and prince, whose **prophecies** formed one part of the *Historia*. In the years following Geoffrey's death in c. 1155, his *Historia* became widely accepted as factual and influenced serious historians of the Britons and the English for centuries.

Later, in 1485, Sir Thomas Malory wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* (*The Death of Arthur*), which is considered the most extensive and influential telling of **Arthurian legend** as it is a compilation of legends including some of the most prominent Knights of **The Round Table** and the life and death of King Arthur.

There are several versions of the Merlin character, often depicted or referenced as a powerful magician and wizard in works of fiction, film, music and media through the ages. Some believe he was born with his powers, others believe he gained them in later life. In modern culture the character features in *Camelot The Musical* (1960), Walt Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *Excalibur* (1981) and the BBC One series *Merlin* (2008).



## About Northern Ballet's *Merlin*

Northern Ballet's Artistic Director David Nixon OBE approached Drew McOnie to **choreograph** a piece to celebrate Northern Ballet's 50th anniversary after seeing McOnie's full length re-telling of *Jekyll and Hyde* for his own dance company, **The McOnie Company**. The creative process started with conversations between Nixon, McOnie and Northern Ballet's Chief Executive, Mark Skipper about creating something rich, dynamic, emotive and narrative, that would be suitable for all ages.

Northern Ballet decided on *Merlin* because they wouldn't be bound by an existing narrative as there are several stories which feature the character. *Merlin* allowed the team to create a family production which feels both medieval and contemporary, with rich and deep emotional themes delivered by its characters.

McOnie took inspiration from animated films which create a world where the action takes place, which he describes as 'visually rich and joyful'. The world in which *Merlin* the ballet takes place is reminiscent of the fictional time period seen in films and television programmes, such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*.

During his early research, McOnie spent time with Gwyneth Hughes, a documentary director who specialises in history and true crime. After discovering the brutality of Merlin's legend, McOnie realised that telling this story in a literal sense would not have lent itself to creating a family friendly ballet. McOnie wanted to introduce the audience to a story they are unable to predict and to take them on a journey, with family being the main focus.

**Have a look at McOnie in rehearsal with some of the dancers.**

# Characters

## The Gods

### The Lady of the Lake & Helios the Sun God

Merlin's birth parents. They sit above the human world, just out of reach in Merlin's imagination and offering a helping hand where needed to ensure peace is found.

The Lady of the Lake commands the water as she moves and is a calming influence on Merlin. She encourages Merlin by demonstrating the strengths of her own magic. Helios the Sun God is a powerful figure who guides Merlin and teaches him how to use his magic in a controlled manner.



## The Solar Kingdom



### Merlin

Adopted by the Blacksmith, Merlin is a working-class young man who struggles with his identity and wrestles with having to keep his supernatural abilities hidden. When faced with difficult choices, and despite being in love with Morgan, Merlin is determined to do the right thing and unite two warring kingdoms.



### The Blacksmith

A hard-working, strong and independent woman who struggles to make ends meet, the Blacksmith came across Merlin alone as a baby and took him in as her own. She sometimes struggles to understand Merlin's magic, believing that hiding his powers will keep him safe.

# Characters



## Morgan

The authoritative senior general in the Solar Kingdom's army, Morgan is ambitious and has her heart set on Uther, though this is **unrequited**. Disappointment and a lust for power lead her to a dramatic transformation where she becomes Morgan La Fae, after she betrays Merlin's trust and takes his powers.

Antoinette Brooks-Daw, Northern Ballet Premier Dancer, tells us more about her character, Morgan:

"When we first meet Morgan she is a senior general in the Solar Kingdom army. There is a confident air about her, both ambitious and determined to rise through the ranks of the army. On their first meeting she gains the attention of Merlin who becomes fixated on her. Later on in the ballet, we see her use this power over him as she turns into the infamous Morgan La Fae.

I love her character development throughout the story. She definitely has a journey and I look forward to exploring this more when we get to the stage."



## Vortigern

The King of the Solar Kingdom, he is a looming presence of evil and one of the major forces keeping the kingdoms at war. He has a difficult relationship with his son Uther.



## The Dragon

Every hero needs a trusty side-kick to come to the rescue, and Merlin has that very friend in the Dragon. A young creature, without known parents, whose fiery temperament and mistrust perhaps reminds us of Merlin's spirit.



## Uther

Prince of the Solar Kingdom, Uther is heroic and rebellious but hides his sadness behind arrogance. He longs to flee the kingdom with the woman he loves, Ygraine, who is from the opposing Kingdom of Tides.

## The Kingdom of Tides



## Ygraine

The Princess of The Kingdom of Tides, Ygraine is free-spirited and strong-willed. She wants nothing more than to see the two kingdoms unite so she can rule in love and fairness with Uther, with whom she falls pregnant.

# Story: Act 1

## Prologue

An otherworldly ritual brings with it two mighty Gods. Their union creates an orb that falls to earth and reveals a baby within - Merlin.

A young Blacksmith finds this helpless child, taking him in as her own.



## Act 1

On the eve of Merlin's 18th birthday the Blacksmith, fearing that Merlin's powers will cause him trouble, pleads with him to hide his difference.

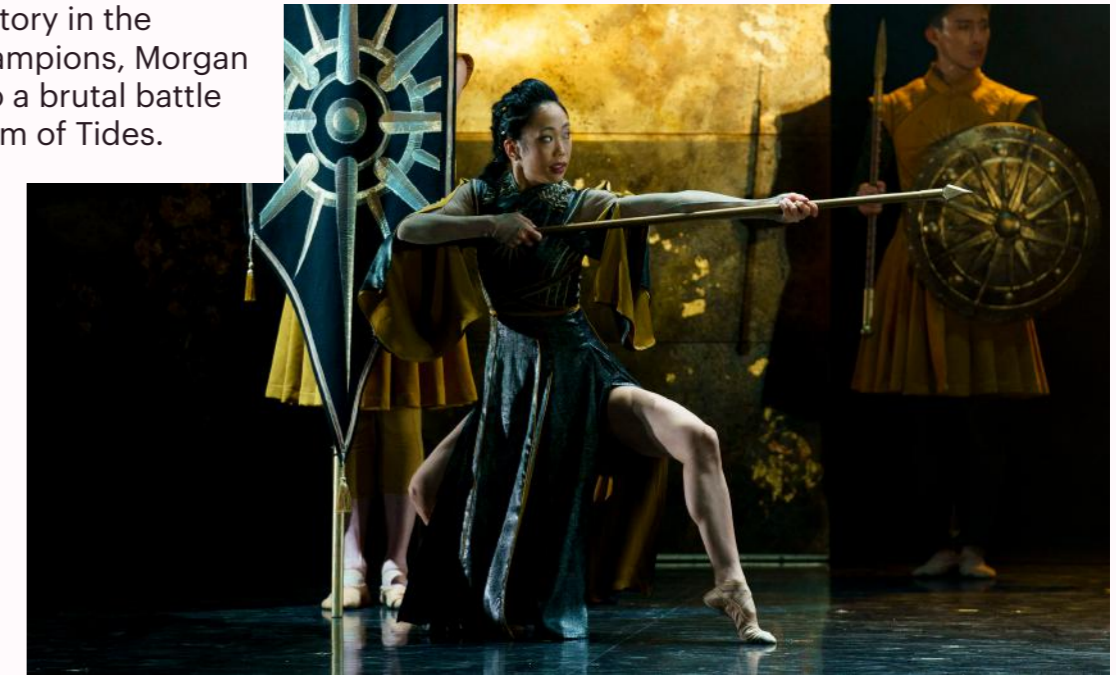
Morgan arrives, a Senior General in the Solar Kingdom's Army who Merlin has feelings for. The Kingdom is at war and Merlin will be drafted into the Army. Bullied by passing Solar warriors and humiliated by the Blacksmith's attempts to protect him, Merlin finds comfort in imagining his birth parents and their acceptance of him.



The Blacksmith presents Merlin with a magnificent sword - Excalibur. Struggling to hide his disappointment, Merlin and the Blacksmith part at odds.

During his military training in Camelot, Merlin struggles to fit in. He is desperate to impress Morgan, but she only has eyes for Uther, the son of the Kingdom's oppressive leader, Vortigern.

After a surprise victory in the Tournament of Champions, Morgan leads the army into a brutal battle against the Kingdom of Tides.



Merlin's life flashes before his eyes; he sees himself being ripped from his birth mother's arms. Anger rises within him and bursts through Excalibur, killing everyone around him. Morgan witnesses Merlin's power.



Merlin flees to the Caledonian Forest. He meets the Lady of the Lake who conjures a vision of two soldiers from opposing Kingdoms coming together, and Helios who shows him how to map out the stars. Following shooting stars through the forest, Merlin encounters a fiercely tempered Dragon.

# Story: Act 1

Back in Camelot, a great celebration is underway. Morgan, who has been attributed with the Kingdom's recent victory, is presented to Uther as a potential bride.

Uther slips away and runs to meet Ygraine, the princess of the Kingdom of Tides. The forbidden lovers dive into each other's arms. Witnessing this, Merlin suddenly understands the Lady of the Lake's vision and what must be done.



Morgan, who has followed Uther, discovers them. Scorned, she summons the Solar warriors. Merlin leaps into action and just as they think the game is up, the Dragon arrives. Merlin flees with Ygraine back to the **Forge** where he begs the Blacksmith to help her hide.

Merlin returns to the forest to find the Dragon, but warriors emerge from the darkness. He is surrounded.

# Story: Act 2

## Act 2

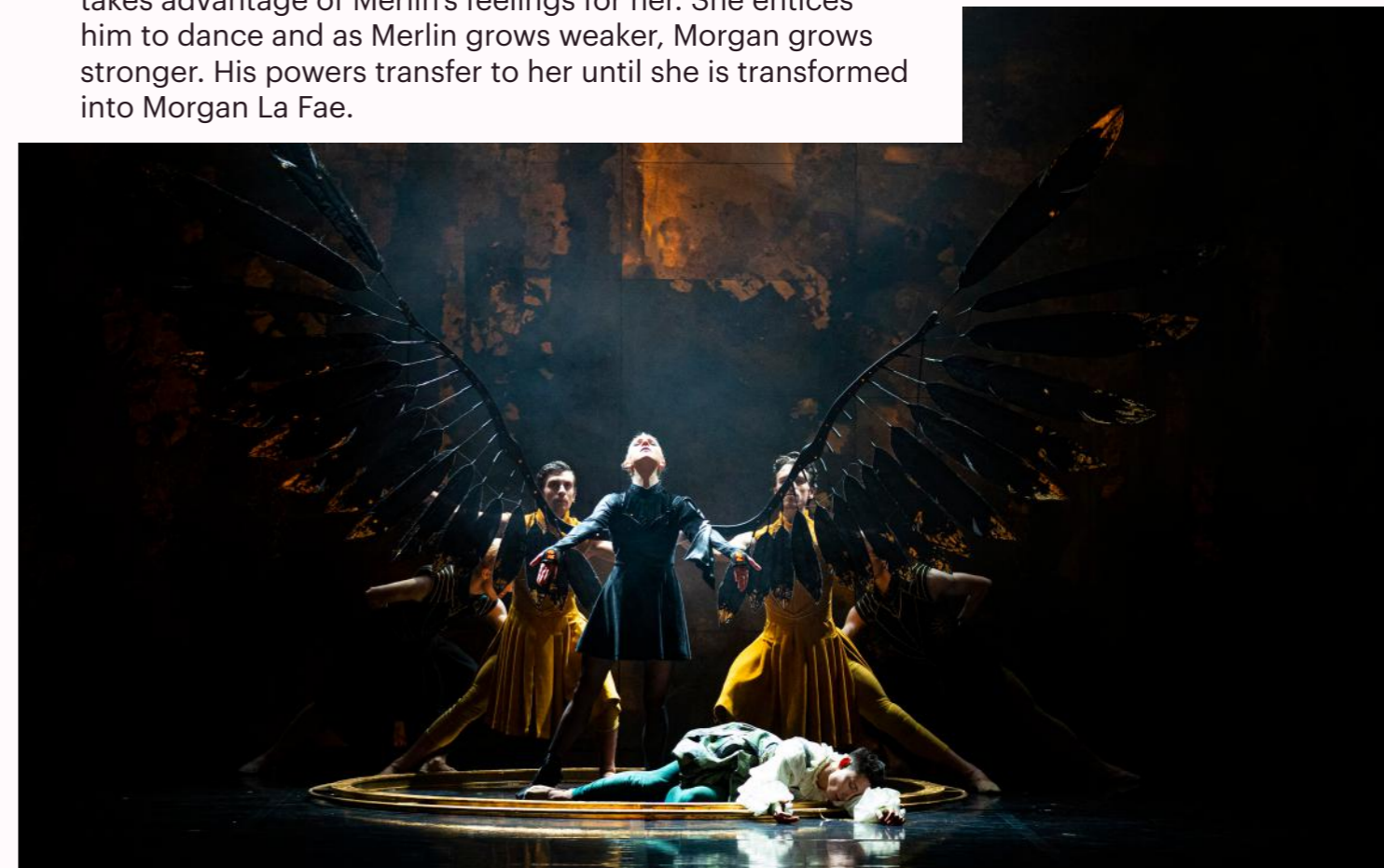
Back inside the **Forge**, the Blacksmith and Ygraine form an unlikely bond before Ygraine travels home and the Blacksmith sets out on an adventure of her own.



Vortigern gathers the Knights of the **Round Table** to plot the Solar Kingdom's next move.

Uther, who has been badly beaten, watches as Merlin is once again humiliated, dressed as a **jester** for entertainment.

Failing to reconcile her relationship with Uther, Morgan takes advantage of Merlin's feelings for her. She entices him to dance and as Merlin grows weaker, Morgan grows stronger. His powers transfer to her until she is transformed into Morgan La Fae.



# Story: Act 2



Back home in the Kingdom of Tides, Ygraine thinks she may be pregnant.

In Camelot the imprisoned Merlin realises he has lost his powers. The time has come for Uther to choose a bride and Morgan uses her new dark magic to manipulate him into proposing.

The news reaches Ygraine who, feeling betrayed, declares war on the Solar Kingdom.

Disguised as a Solar warrior, the Blacksmith successfully sneaks into Merlin's prison cell, helping her son to escape. She apologises to Merlin for telling him to hide what is special about himself. Merlin realises that his unique history is what makes him powerful and his magic returns. He storms the battlefield with Excalibur in hand.



Merlin lifts Excalibur high and roars with pride, dismantling Morgan's power. Uther, now released from Morgan's control, begs for Ygraine's forgiveness. Their union brings peace across the Kingdoms. Ygraine's pregnancy means a new King is on his way – a King called Arthur perhaps?

Returning to the Caledonian Forest, Merlin drives Excalibur into the ground, where another unlikely lad might need it one day. He sees the two Gods dancing through the trees, now realising they are his birth parents. They beckon for Merlin to join them. As they do, the Blacksmith arrives.

He has a choice to make. Merlin chooses to stay with the Blacksmith who he now sees as his real mother.







# Themes

## Family

At the centre of the story is the relationship between a mother and a son. Merlin's adoptive mother, the Blacksmith, and Merlin both go on their own journeys of self-discovery. The Blacksmith has difficulty accepting Merlin's magical abilities and has no guidance in raising a magical being. Her misunderstanding of Merlin often leads to arguments and disagreements between the pair. The Blacksmith eventually realises she must accept Merlin as a magical being, allowing him to thrive and use his magic for good, uniting kingdoms and preventing further evil. Merlin struggles with self-acceptance as he feels misunderstood by those around him. He blames the Blacksmith for a lot of his heartache and struggles to accept her as his mother. The Lady of the Lake and Helios, Merlin's birth parents, visit him in his dreams, leaving Merlin with a strong desire to be with them.

When Merlin finally encounters them both in the Caledonian Forest one after the other, he instantly feels connected to them. They are symbolic of guardian angels, encouraging Merlin, embracing his difference and teaching him lessons, as parents would.

There are elements of the ballet that McOnie described as highly emotional, for example the Blacksmith dances a solo telling Merlin that although he didn't grow in her tummy, he grew in her heart. McOnie feels he is able to relate to both the Blacksmith and Merlin on his own journey to become an adoptive parent and for feeling misunderstood as a teenager.

**Hear more from Drew McOnie on his personal connection to Merlin.**



## Self-acceptance

McOnie wanted to celebrate the things that make us different as they are also the things that make us unique. Merlin struggles to relate to the woman who raised him and often dreams of his birth parents who he feels he belongs with; he is able to relate to them as they are both also magical beings. His encounters with them allow him to grow in self-confidence and begin his journey of self-acceptance. Once the Blacksmith begins to accept Merlin's magical abilities this also strengthens his belief in himself, as well as his relationship with her as mother and son. Accepting himself and his abilities allows him to use his magic for good, uniting the two warring kingdoms.



## Gender representation

The creative team thought about gender representation and wanted to avoid stereotypes, presenting the women in the ballet as strong individuals. Being a blacksmith is historically associated with men but McOnie wanted to represent the strength and independence of this lead female character who has her own business and supports herself. Ygraine is a powerful, rebellious, head strong young princess and Morgan is a determined and focused leader, leading male and female warriors to battle.



## Good vs. Evil

Throughout the ballet, we see characters who are good and characters who are evil. There are several examples of good overcoming evil, including:

- The Solar Kingdom is ruled by the evil dictator Vortigern who embarrasses his own son in a tournament against Morgan. When Vortigern's evil is overthrown, he is forced to dress as a **jester** and entertain the courts.
- Morgan takes advantage of Merlin's feelings towards her, abusing his trust so she is able to steal his magical abilities. She uses Merlin's magic to continue to abuse the trust of others and claim Uther as her own. Merlin is able to defeat Morgan La Fae and uses his magic for good, uniting the two kingdoms.

# Illusions

Northern Ballet worked with Chris Fisher, an illusionist who also worked on *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, to create the magic in the production. The way the set and costume are designed allows the process of creating the magic to remain hidden, whilst impressing the audience with the illusions. We're not going to reveal how the magic happens but here are some illusions to look out for in the production:

- A ball of anger which bursts out of Merlin's chest
- Merlin magically appearing at different moments
- Merlin controlling a magical floating orb of light
- Merlin's magical hands that light up when he's making magic
- Merlin's sword floating in the air
- Merlin shooting fire from his sword
- Merlin making a goblet start to smoke and fall over
- Merlin making flowers magically appear
- Merlin plucking stars from the sky and throwing them



# Creative Team



## Drew McOnie

### CHOREOGRAPHY & DIRECTION

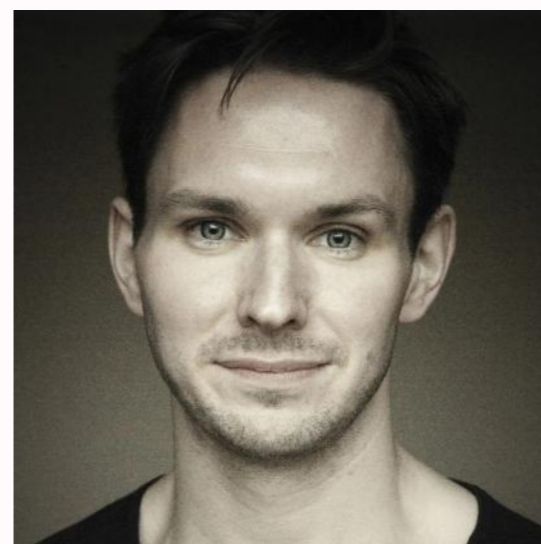
Drew McOnie is an award-winning **choreographer**, director and founder of The McOnie Company. He trained as a ballet dancer at Tring Park and has worked in theatre and film. His previous works as director and **choreographer** include *King Kong* (Broadway), Baz Luhrman's *Strictly Ballroom* (West End) and Michael John LaChiusa's *The Wild Party*. Film and TV credits include *Me Before You*, *Recordare: Days of Remembrance* and *British Style* (collaboration with Matthew Bourne at Buckingham Palace, BBC).



## Grant Olding

### MUSIC

Award winning Grant Olding trained as an actor and had a successful on-stage career before composing full time and becoming the Bridewell Theatre's resident **composer** in 2003. He now composes for theatre, dance, television and film. Olding previously collaborated with McOnie on a musical production of *James and the Giant Peach* and The McOnie Company's first full length dance piece, *Jekyll and Hyde*. He has also written **scores** for the Royal Shakespeare Company including *Don Quixote*, *The Rover* and *The Fantastic Follies of Mrs Rich*.



## Colin Richmond

### SET & COSTUME DESIGN

Colin trained at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, graduating in Theatre Design in 2003. The same year he was a finalist in the Linbury Award for Theatre Design at the National Theatre London and was awarded the prize to design for West Yorkshire Playhouse (now Leeds Playhouse), he has now designed more than 20 shows at the venue. Future work includes *The Magician's Elephant* (Royal Shakespeare Company), *Carmen* (Opera North) and *The Wizard of Oz* (Curve).

# Creative Team



**Anna Watson**

## LIGHTING DESIGN

Anna Watson is a lighting designer who works extensively across the UK and has previously worked alongside Olding and Richmond on *The Fantastic Follies of Mrs Rich*. Other previous works include *A Christmas Carol* (British Old Vic), *Cendrillon* (Glyndebourne), *A Time To Reap* (Royal Court) and *Don Carlo* (Grange Park Opera).



**Chris Fisher**

## ILLUSIONIST

Chris Fisher is a member of The Magic Circle and works all over the world as International Illusions and Magic Associate for *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child*. He has always had an interest in magic and has spent a huge part of his career working backstage in **stage and company management**. He now gets to combine magic and theatre as an illusionist. The job of an illusionist is to make the impossible seem possible.



**Rachael Canning**

## DESIGN & DIRECTION OF PUPPETRY

Rachael Canning is an experienced award-winning set, costume and puppetry designer and director of theatre. She is the Co-Artistic Director of theatre company The Wrong Crowd. Canning studied at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. She won the 2014 Best Set and Costume Design award at the Wales Theatre Awards for *The Sleeping Beauties* for Sherman Cymru. Other works include *Oliver* (Puppet design and direction, Leeds Playhouse), *Pinocchio* (Set, Costume and Puppet Design, The Citizen's Theatre), and *Peter Pan* (Puppet Design, Birmingham Rep).



**Julie Anderson**

## COSTUME DESIGN ASSISTANT

For 25 years Julie ran a successful bridal shop while also working on ballet, film, theatre and opera. She now concentrates solely on her career in costume work with Northern Ballet. Her costume design work for film and TV includes Spielberg's *Back to the Future*, Disney's *Jungle Book*, *Fat Friends*, *My Mother's an Alien*, *Emmerdale* and *The Body Farm*. Julie's work on dance includes Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance*, *Feet of Fame* and *Spirit of the Dance* in New York, China and Las Vegas and the world tours. She has been involved in all Northern Ballet's recent productions.



# Costumes

Northern Ballet has their own in-house Wardrobe & Wigs department who source materials and create almost all of the costumes you see on stage in a Northern Ballet production. The team is made up of costume makers, cutters, wig designers and creators and many more. They work tirelessly to bring the costume designer's visions to life.

Making costumes for a ballet production is slightly different to designing and making costumes for a play for two main reasons:

1. Dancers need to be able to move in specific ways in their costumes, so the costumes cannot restrict the way the dancers move.
2. Ballets often have multiple casts, meaning on different performances a different cast of dancers will perform, to prevent dancer injuries. A dancer will play multiple roles across those casts for example Matthew Koon might play the role of Merlin in one cast and Uther in another. Due to COVID19, most of the cast have their own costume for each role they perform. Historically, dancers often would share costumes.

# Costumes



## Merlin

Merlin wears layers of green knitted, worn-down fabric, which moves with him, resembling his environment. To achieve the magical elements, he wears cleverly concealed gloves with LED patches, which make his hands glow different colours.

Dressed as a **jester**, he wears a **Harlequin** fabric handmade outfit, with each diamond being sewn together individually. His **jester's** pointy hat is a stereotypical wizard aesthetic – a nod to McOnie's desire to move away from the stereotype of Merlin as an old wise wizard in a pointy hat. When Merlin becomes a prisoner, he wears a smock which has a cross over a circle on it, showing him as a traitor to the world, and underneath he wears leggings.

## The Blacksmith

The Blacksmith wears a dirt covered dress and apron over trousers with jazz boots. The clothes have a self-made look, using earthy tones, demonstrating her financial and economical struggle, similar to Merlin's costume.

## Uther

Uther wears an embroidered, military tunic which features leather inspired buckle work. The tunic he wears to battle has tightly crafted detailing resembling armour. Uther's wedding outfit symbolises the two kingdoms coming together, using blue and gold and featuring embroidered sun and water emblems. The costume is draped in heavy silk and he wears a crown.

## Vortigern

Vortigern wears a crown, white cream shirt with a small, embroidered sun emblem, black frock coat and dark trousers, reflecting his authority and showing his devotion to the Sun Kingdom. He is always in dark colours which matches the evil of his character. He wears a shiny, **Lycra**, all in one **Harlequin** outfit when he is overthrown, demonstrating that he is no longer respected.



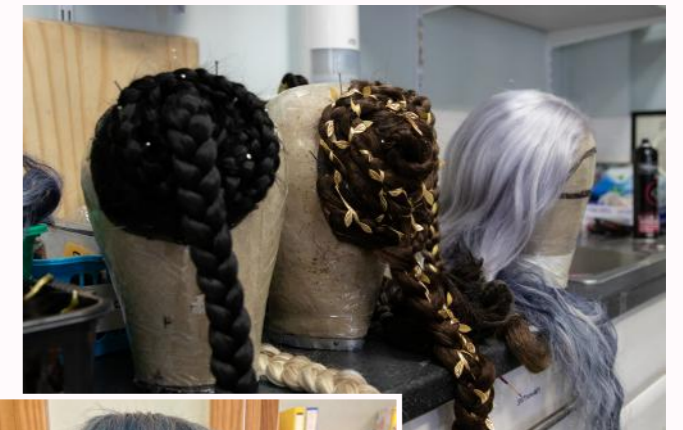
## Morgan/Morgan La Fae

Morgan wears a lot of black and gold, representing her status and showcasing her authority. Her costumes are glamorous, featuring layers of chiffon and silk. She has strong shoulder pads with armour detail, creating a military feel. One of her later costumes features a hooded cape.

When she becomes Morgan La Fae, she develops a pair of huge black wings. The wings are puppeteered by other dancers, allowing Morgan La Fae to move freely. Magic also comes from gloves worn by Morgan La Fae.

## Ygraine

Ygraine wears a fluid, romantic blue pleated dress that is heavily encrusted around the waist as well as a head dress tiara. She wears a longer blue dress when she declares war. The dress has a split to allow the dancer to move more freely. For her marriage to Uther she wears a floaty wedding dress made with lace.





# Sets

It is the job of the set designer to understand the **choreographer's** vision and translate the ideas to the stage. The creation of the set begins a year before the production premieres and a lot of compromise is involved. Various factors are considered during the initial creative team meeting including the budget, the size of the set and the time it will take to create.

*Merlin* is set between two worlds, The Solar Kingdom and The Kingdom of Tides. The production exists within a restricted colour palette of gold, bronze, copper, silver and aqua, representing fire and ice.

The ballet begins with a burnt metal oppressive wall which is framed with reflective gold. As the **overture** begins, a glowing ring is suspended off the floor rotating anti-clockwise to symbolise going backwards in time. A lot of the magic happens in darkness to conceal the hidden elements. The first illusion is a floating orb which magically falls to earth and turns in to Merlin.

## Merlin in production

In this video, Northern Ballet's Technical Director Steve Wilkins and Puppet Designer and Director Rachael Canning discuss the creation of the sets and puppets for *Merlin*.

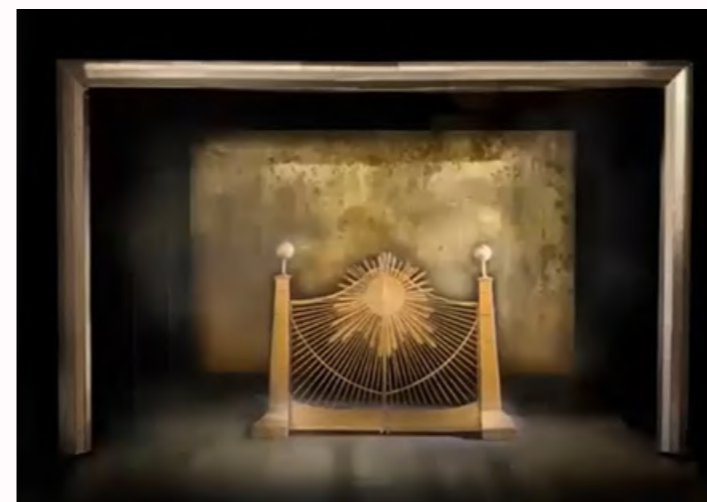


## Act 1: The Forge

Set in the forest, inside the **forge** there is a well-worn metallic furnace which lights up, with smoke coming from the chimney.

## Outside the Forge

There is a flag to show the Kingdom is under an oppressive regime. There are lights on the **forge** door, which moves round throughout the ballet.



## Camelot

Oppressive gates which open, close, and move around the stage in front of a gold mirrored wall which catches the light, representing wealth and **austerity**.



## The Caledonian Forest

The trees are made from twisted copper, they move past the dancers making them appear as though they are travelling through the forest. The trees are on wheels, are operated from off stage and can move in different directions.

## The Battle of Arthuret

Ripped, metal perforated **gauze** allows light through and creates a hard edged and lethal feel. The **gauze** lifts as the soldiers march off into battle revealing heavy backlight, creating an abstract battle environment.

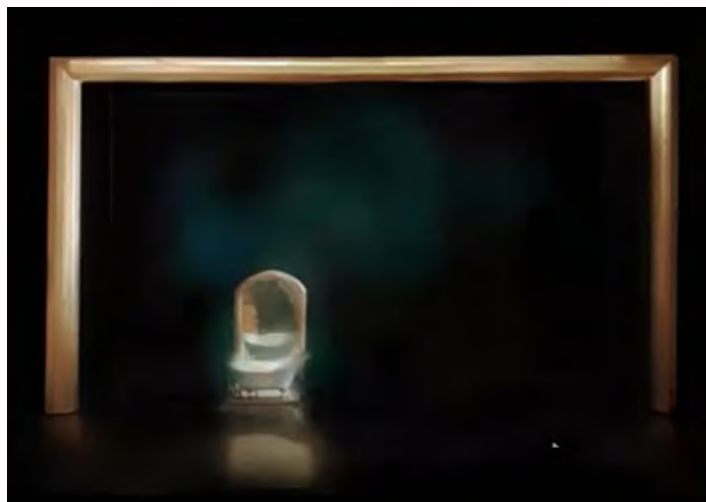


## The Old Apple Tree

A spray painted and burnt perforated metal tree, with roots hiding LED panels that go up into the tree branches. The lights turn to burning red when Morgan sets the tree on fire.

## Act 2: The Round Table

A large light up ring with handles to represent the Round Table.



## Ygraine's Chambers

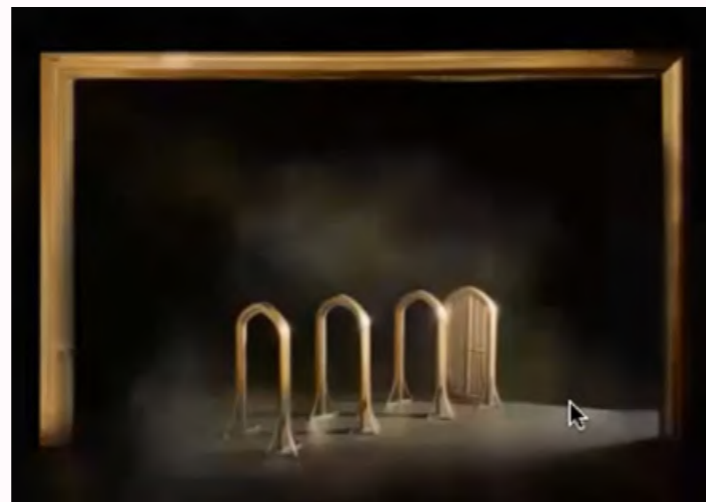
In the Kingdom of Tides, the chambers are where Ygraine gets dressed. She dances a solo in a bathtub filled with silver and blue confetti.

## A New Warrior

The forge door is used again here as the Blacksmith arrives to save Merlin.

## The Solar Kingdom Court

Arches which represent the spearheads used in battle. The arches are also used to form part of Uther and Ygraine's wedding.



## Merlin's Cell

An archway that is used as Merlin's cell and also throughout other points in the ballet to create corridors.



## We interviewed Music Director, Jonathan Lo, to find out more about the music, rehearsal process and working with composer Grant Olding.

### What was the inspiration for the music?

In the ballet, there are some specific settings and characterisation that helps us hear what we see - the **score** creates a total atmosphere so that the audience are really immersed in Merlin's world. In the **score**, not only will you hear sounds that are inspired by the medieval setting, you will also be swept away by the heroic melody of Merlin, be transported to the Blacksmith's workshop through the magic of orchestral colours, take centre stage in the golden, glorious, busy city of Camelot through the bustling rhythm and golden motifs of the brass, as well as be drawn into the seductive, fluid world of the water people.

The drama of the story is the inspiration for the music, with the end goal firmly fixed on creating a world where the audience can feel entirely immersed in the magic and colours of *Merlin*.

### What is the process of creating the music?

When I started working on *Merlin* I was immediately struck by how well Olding and McOnie know and understand each other. This is hardly surprising as they have worked on a number of projects before. I think this has been the key to this **score** that fits, narrates and propels the ballet so well. It has also helped that McOnie is immensely musical and extremely well-prepared, and I understand that when they were creating the music in conversation with each other, McOnie would have very specific phrases and, of course, ideas, about what the music is about, or what the music is trying to portray, or how the music makes him feel, and, because of their close relationship, Olding had no problems in translating that into music.

This is Olding's very first **score** for a classical, **acoustic** ballet orchestra. He and I worked very closely together throughout much of 2020, bouncing ideas about the **orchestration** and what works well for the Northern Ballet **Sinfonia**.

One of the joys in working with such a collaborative musician like Olding has been his conversations with the players. He has worked closely with our principal trumpeter to ensure we can tailor the sound required for our orchestra. Likewise, he has been in close conversation with our percussionist about the instruments available - after all, the percussion section does the majority of the heavy lifting when it comes to creating a medieval mystical magical world.

### What is a typical rehearsal like?

A typical rehearsal for a new **score** would often involve a complete play through of the whole piece without taking many stops. The idea is to give the musicians an overview of the piece, as well as giving them time to be immersed in the language of the **composer**. It is also an important opportunity for the players to get a feel of the logistics and stamina involved in playing the **score** through.

Many of the initial issues become evident after this initial read-through. We then play the piece again, with the musicians often correcting the issues they noticed quickly. This frees me up, as **conductor**, to start to polish - insert the dramatic intentions in the music, make the musicians aware of any specific choreographic corners where we have to be especially sympathetic with the stage, and setting interpretative details such as phrasing and articulation and dynamic adjustments.

All the while, as we rehearse a **score**, players will start to suggest things which will help the **composer's** intention speak better, and suggest alternative ways to achieve the sound that the **composer** is after.

**Are there any character motifs to listen out for or any specific sounds with meaning?**

Absolutely! All of the main characters have a **motif**, as well as some of the key objects such as **the apple tree** and **the Dragon**. There is also the magical **motif**, which is always present whenever Merlin does magic.

These **motifs** - whilst the audience might not always be aware - go a very long way in helping the audience understand the characters, as well as help to subconsciously propel the drama. This is especially so in the way the **motifs** develop - so a character's melody you hear at the start of the ballet, through the emotional and physical happenings to the character, will transform and develop as the story moves forward. Listen to the Blacksmith's motif **at the start** of the ballet, and **towards the end**.

**Are there any interesting, peculiar or uncommon instruments being played?**

The strings are asked to play **col legno** sometimes to create the rustic sounds of the medieval world, the harpist is asked to play with a piece of paper clipped in between the strings to create a percussive sound to help get the sense of punch in the battle scenes, and the brass use their mutes to find a particularly narrow and nasty sound to evoke **the sense of villain!** The percussion instruments to look out for would be the Anvil, used to mimic the sound in the Blacksmith's workshop - the dancers have to really know the music in order to sync up their action with these Anvil strikes! They also use a bell tree to create the sound of **starburst** as Merlin learns how to control the stars from his father.



# Music

Tony nominated **composer** Grant Olding wrote his first musical whilst performing in Nicholas Hytner's original production of Miss Saigon at Theatre Royal Drury Lane, and soon after this became a full-time **composer**. He is a storyteller and has the ability to deliver epic **scores** that create atmosphere and action.

The entire **score** is made up of newly composed music. During the national lockdown, the Northern Ballet **Sinfonia** had to rehearse remotely. Watch this video to see how they rehearsed together from home.



# Terminology

## Acoustic

Sound that does not have electronic amplification.

## Arthurian Legend

Based on the fictional life of King Arthur.

## Austerity

During austerity, a person or place is experiencing difficult economic conditions.

## Choreograph (choreography, choreographer)

To choreograph is to create the movement in the ballet.

The choreography is the movement itself.

The Choreographer is the person who creates the movement. The Choreographer often works closely with the dancers who will also create movement based on tasks and themes given by the Choreographer.

## Col legno

Col legno is when the strings play with the wood of their bow, rather than the hair, getting a percussive, stick sounding effect in the process.

## Composer

The Composer creates the music for the ballet. They will usually work with the Choreographer and the dancers so that the music can complement the steps and the characters.

## Conductor

A person who directs the performance of an orchestra or choir.

## Dictator

A ruler with total power over a country, typically one who has obtained control by force.

## Forge

A blacksmith's workshop.

## Gauze

A transparent open-mesh fabric of cotton or linen with a stiff finish for use in theatrical scenery and in curtains.

## Harlequin

A mute character in traditional pantomime dressed in a diamond patterned costume.

## Jester

A professional joker or fool at a medieval court.

## Lycra

Lycra is a highly stretchy fabric.

## Motifs

Refers to a short piece of melody, or music, that contains some kind of thematic or structural identity. In a ballet, a character might have their own motif of music that represents them in sound.

## Orchestration

The different instruments used to play the score.

## Overture

The instrumental introduction to a ballet.

## Prologue

An opening to a story that gives background details.

## Prophet

A person regarded as an inspired teacher with a special power to deliver the messages of God.

## Pseudo Historian

A writer who creates historical accounts that they present as factual, but for which there is no evidence.

## Score

The Score is the music that is created by the Composer and played by the orchestra. Most Composers will ensure the score is written on paper (notated), and that paper can be called the score, but the live music can also be referred to as the score.

## Sinfonia

A small orchestra. The Northern Ballet Sinfonia is made up of 27 players.

## Stage and Company management

Roles within a ballet company, generally Stage Management are responsible for the management of each performance. They ensure that the production continues to run with all aspects of it kept as directed and designed. Company Management work closely with all levels of cast and production staff. They act as a link between different teams involved in the performance.

## The Round Table

A symbol of equality between the knights in Arthur's court.

## Unrequited

When a feeling, especially love, is not returned.

# Gallery



## Photos



## Videos