

# CASANOVA

A BALLET BY KENNETH TINDALL

## AUDIENCE GUIDE

The story of *Casanova* is full of facts far more compelling than fiction. The historical Casanova took on many roles, from priest to prisoner to philosopher to Parisian socialite, embracing himself as equal parts passionate, intelligent, and sensual and earning a place as one of the most notorious figures in history. The ballet sharing his name is much the same, taking you inside the heart and mind of a revolutionary man and exposing a story so sensational you won't believe it's real. From award-winning choreographer Kenneth Tindall, *Casanova* makes its Milwaukee Ballet debut in the 2024/25 season with lavish dance and costumes set to an attention-grabbing score by composer Kerry Muzzey.

### ABOUT THE CHOREOGRAPHER

Kenneth Tindall is a freelance award-winning choreographer and director specializing in narrative dance. A former principal dancer himself, Kenneth's first professional commission won the Production Prize at the 26th International Choreographic Competition in Hanover. As his debut full-length ballet, *Casanova* received much critical acclaim and standing ovations throughout its 2017 tour of the U.K, including a sell-out week at Sadler's Wells. Tindall has since gone on to choreograph nationally and internationally, working with ballet, dance, and theatre companies worldwide. His catalog encompasses over 30 works and has achieved considerable critical acclaim in his multi-disciplinary creative career, including participation in Milwaukee Ballet's *Genesis* competition.



### HISTORY

Casanova was truly a man of many masks. In his own day, he was known as a writer, polymath, adventurer and aspiring philosopher. He wrote mathematical treatises, studied for the priesthood, worked variously as a violinist and professional gambler, escaped from the prison of the Venetian Inquisition and translated for the first time the *Iliad* into modern Italian. He might therefore be a tad bemused to find himself popularly known as some sort of 18th century sex-machine due to the success, a generation after this death, of a personal memoir never intended for publication. However, it is indeed his sensual encounters that make him so notable in the scheme of history.

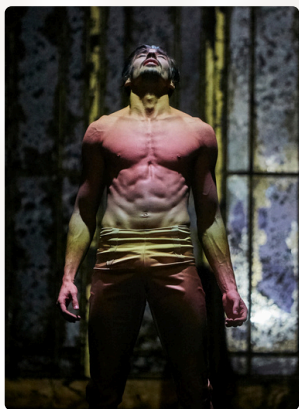
Casanova is at the centre of what historians term the 'First Sexual Revolution', the eighteenth century 'quest for a secular morality' that included a new sexual toleration, in some urban circles, seen now as as one gift of the European Enlightenment to modern culture. His encyclopaedic chronicling of his life is now widely regarded as one of the more important documents to survive from the years leading up the French Revolution, claiming the title as the first great modern autobiography. In large part, its modernity hinges on Casanova's willingness to address the totality of his sensual experience, including an open examination of his sexual self. Post-Freud, this might not seem so exceptional an idea – but in the 1790s when Casanova was writing – it was revolutionary.

-Courtesy of Ian Kelly, biographer and co-creator of this ballet's original scenario

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## THE CHARACTERS



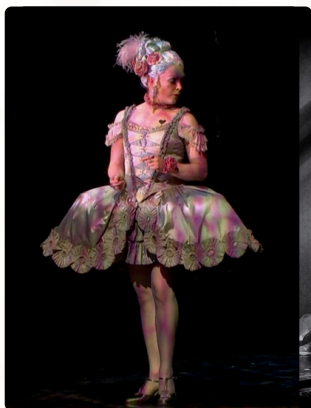
### GIACOMO CASANOVA

Aspiring priest, writer, polymath and genius. With a vast sexual and intellectual energy, he is plagued by depression and a fear of never being treated seriously.



### SENATOR BRAGADIN

Venetian dignitary, party thrower and connoisseur. He falls instantly in love with Casanova and declares him his heir.



### MADAME DE POMPADOUR

Official Chief Mistress to King Louis XV and the most powerful woman in France.



### SAVORGNAN SISTERS

Casanova's first love interest(s). Their seduction of him results in his expulsion from the church.



### BELLINO

A woman masquerading as a man in order to work as a singer. She and Casanova fall in love.



### HENRIETTE

Dressed as a soldier and running from an abusive husband, she is torn between her love for Casanova and that for her children.

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## SYNOPSIS

### ACT ONE: VENICE, 1740

In Venice, a mass is held in honor of Cardinal de Bernis. There, Father Balbi sneaks a forbidden text to aspiring priest Giacomo Casanova, who leaves before Balbi is arrested by Three Inquisitors. Meanwhile, Casanova is seduced by his pupils, the Savorgnan sisters. The Inquisition defrocks Casanova for his transgression.

Exiled, Casanova joins the orchestra of Senator Bragadin, as does Manon Balletti, a cellist. At the ball, Bragadin is more interested in Casanova than his guests, but Casanova rejects his advances to pursue Balletti. Outside, Casanova is robbed and Balletti flees. Bragadin takes him in and tends to his wounds. Casanova begins to respond to his advances, but they are interrupted when Bragadin suffers a heart attack. Casanova saves Bragadin's life and is named his heir.

A mass is said in celebration of Bragadin's recovery. As Casanova leaves, he receives a note from "M.M.". Meanwhile, at Il Piombi, under torture to confess who has the forbidden book, Father Balbi gives up Casanova's name. Following the note's instructions, Casanova arrives at Cardinal de Bernis' private apartments. M.M. arrives and sets about a staged seduction of Casanova for the benefit of her hidden lover, de Bernis. They are interrupted by Bragadin, who warns Casanova that the Inquisition is coming for him. Casanova flees but is soon caught and imprisoned.

### ACT TWO: PARIS, A YEAR LATER

Two women, Bellino and Henriette, take on new identities. Bellino dresses as a man so she can work as a singer while Henriette disguises herself as a soldier to escape her abusive husband.

At a Parisian gaming salon, Casanova tells of his escape from Il Piombi. Observing everything, the aristocratic Madame de Pompadour feels that she and Casanova are kindred spirits and so becomes his benefactor. Casanova—now rich, carefree, and reckless—sets about the social and sexual conquest of Paris. He auditions musicians for a party, amongst them his old acquaintance, Balletti. Bellino too earns a place and Casanova, unknowing of her true gender, is intrigued by her. Later, as he pursues his intellectual aspirations, Bellino arrives to visit Casanova and shares the secret that she is a woman. Liberated, she leaves a dejected Casanova behind.

Casanova gathers his papers to take to the printers. He bumps into Henriette, who reveals that she is a woman; Casanova takes her in and they make love. Madame de Pompadour arrives with Casanova's intellectual idol, Voltaire. Suspecting Casanova is hiding someone, she and Voltaire leave. Casanova begs Henriette to wait for him and rushes off after Voltaire, who mocks him.

In Casanova's absence Henriette's husband arrives and convinces her to leave with him. Despondent, Casanova attempts to escape into the world of sensuality. Henriette unexpectedly returns and, finding her worst fears about Casanova confirmed, rejects him forever. Casanova goes to throw himself into the abyss but is saved by the simple thought of writing. Former lovers and figures from his past dance in his mind's eye, all to be memorialised in his History of My Life.