

PROKOFIEV ●

Monty Jones

When he first wrote the music
for his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*,
Prokofiev let the lovers live,
so that as the curtain began to fall
they twirled together into the wings.

When all his friends complained,
telling him he must be crazy,
he explained, most patiently,
that this is after all a ballet
and the dead don't dance.

His friends said, "That's all
very well, but why in that case
even call them Juliet and Romeo?
Call them Eddie and Imogene
or Frank and Louise
and then change the title
to *Happy Happy Happy*."

"Would it be *Julius Caesar*,"
they went on, "if the great man
gets re-elected four times
and dies only of tired old age?
Or would it be *War and Peace*
without all that snow?"

They spoke at him with one voice,
like a Greek chorus,
or a Committee on Arts Affairs.

Moved by their argument,
and after counting the receipts
from the first lame production,
Prokofiev stopped being provocative

and reworked the piece
so it ended in its expected desolation,
Juliet hanging in Romeo's arms,
then Romeo drinking from the vial,
the Kirov's wide stage purged of love,
few dry eyes among the Commissars.

Even now, as if fed up with death,
someone will try again the happy version,
but it meets our needs no better
than it did in Prokofiev's time.