

GUIDE TO CHARACTERS & ILLUSTRATED SYNOPSIS

# ATLANTA BALLET

GENNADI NEDVIGIN · ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

# COCO CHANEL

The Life of a Fashion Icon

Music by **Peter Salem**  
Choreography by **Annabelle Lopez Ochoa**  
Artistic Collaboration by **Nancy Meckler**  
Set and Costume Design by **Jérôme Kaplan**

**North American Premiere, February 9, 2024**

Presenting Underwriter  
**Chris Carlos in honor of Thalia N. Carlos**

With additional support from  
Katherine Scott, Nancy Field & Michael Schulder, an anonymous donor,  
Arrow Exterminators, Kathleen & Kirk Knous, Ginny Brewer,  
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A Co-production of Hong Kong Ballet, Atlanta Ballet and Queensland Ballet

# COCO CHANEL

The Life of a Fashion Icon

## A GUIDE TO THE LEAD CHARACTERS\* IN THE BALLET



Dancers: Emily Carrico and Brooke Gilliam

**Coco Chanel**, our complex protagonist, is guided and observed throughout the ballet by **Shadow-Chanel**, her future self.



Wealthy heir **Etienne Balsan** helped Chanel open her first store in Deauville, France and introduced her to Parisian high society.

Dancer: Marius Morawski



**Arthur Edward "Boy" Capel** financed Chanel's first shops in Paris and was the love of her life. Their affair lasted nine years until his death. In Act II, Boy Capel's spirit wears grey.

Dancer: Munkhjin Ulzijargal



**Pierre Wertheimer**, Jewish director of the Bourgeois perfume company, provided the capital to launch Chanel No. 5 and later defied Chanel's attempts to take control of the company.

Dancer: Jordan Leeper



Dancers: Fuki Takahashi and Mikaela Santos

**Igor Stravinsky**, Russian composer of *The Rite of Spring*, had a short-lived affair with Chanel, who was a silent donor to the Ballet Russes.

Dancer: Anderson Souza



**Logo**, performed by two dancers, symbolizes the famous interlocking 'double C' Coco Chanel logo.

Dancers: Severin Brotschul and Sojung Lee



**Baron von Dincklage**, a Gestapo spy who met and lived with Chanel during the German occupation of Paris, gave her access to high-level Nazi officials.

Dancer: Patric Palkens

Photos by Shoccara Marcus

\*This production was inspired by real-life people and historical events. Appearances, names, characters, and timelines have been fictionalized.

# COCO CHANEL

## The Life of a Fashion Icon

### AN ILLUSTRATED SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

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#### PROLOGUE



We see young Coco, a penniless seamstress, sewing garments of the rich and fashionable in order to survive. She is observed from a distance by her future self, Shadow-Chanel.

#### ACT I

##### Cabaret

Coco and her sister Julia dance for their supper in a noisy Parisian bistro, receiving cash for their efforts. Balsan, a wealthy man, notices Coco



and tries to seduce her. At first, Coco resists, but Shadow-Chanel urges her to dance with him, showing her a way out of poverty into a world of luxury and power.

##### Life with Balsan

As simple chairs become exquisite chandeliers, Balsan's world appears. Shadow-Chanel convinces Coco to visit Balsan's manor, where a huge party is underway. The party guests find Coco, this strangely dressed outsider, a curiosity. Soon the party descends



into wild and drunken behavior, but Boy Capel emerges as a vision of calm and gentleness.

##### Hats

Chanel starts her design career by creating hats. Actress Gabrielle Dorziat comes to visit and has her silhouette dramatically transformed by the hand of the designer herself. Coco's reputation grows. Capel offers to help Coco buy her own shop. Not wanting to lose her independence, she refuses, but Shadow-Chanel convinces her to accept his offer.

##### Deauville

Inspired by male clothing she sees on the streets of Deauville, Coco creates sailor-inspired outfits for women that will become all the rage in the 1920s. She is overjoyed when Balsan and Boy Capel buy her a shop. The two men are clearly in competition for Coco's



attention. However, they eventually leave to re-join their upper-class world, and she is left alone and lonely. Shadow-Chanel reminds her that nothing should distract her from her real calling. Work is the answer.

Photos: Emily Carrico; photo by Shoccara Marcus. Marius Morawski, Fuki Takahashi, Mikaela Santos; photo by Shoccara Marcus. Garry Corpuz, Yang Ruiqi; photo by Tony Luk, courtesy of Hong Kong Ballet. Sergio Maseru, Mikaela Santos, Marius Morawski; photo by Shoccara Marcus.

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

### Coco's Empire

As she oversees the army of seamstresses, Coco is tough and demanding. Actress Gabrielle Dorziat gets another transformation in one of Coco's signature garments. Coco's fame grows. Boy Capel applauds her success, and they dance their love for each other.

### Chanel N° 5

Five groups of flower ladies dance. Which one will be chosen as Chanel's perfume scent?



Wertheimer, a businessman who is interested in financing the perfume, has a business proposal for Coco. Shadow-Chanel encourages Coco to accept the deal—something she will regret her whole life since Wertheimer now owns 70 percent of all income from Chanel N° 5.

### The Logo



There are a few myths about the origins of the famous Chanel logo. According to the French brand, Chanel designed the interlocking Cs in 1925 as an homage to a monastery in Aubazine where she spent most of her childhood. A more romantic myth posits that the two Cs represent the first letters of Chanel and Boy Capel, her business partner and love of her life.

### Loss

In 1919, Boy Capel dies tragically in a car crash.

## ACT II

### Moving on and Stravinsky

Devastated by the sudden loss, Coco mourns Boy Capel but eventually realizes that she needs

to move on. When she meets Igor Stravinsky, she is so enamored by his creativity and talent that she commits to funding his iconic *The Rite of Spring*. Their short-lived love affair comes to an end by the reality of Stravinsky's wife and children. Once again, Coco faces solitude but is urged by Shadow-Chanel to dive deeply into her work and grow the Chanel empire.

### The War Years

When France is occupied during World War II, Chanel closes her shop and lives the high life at the Paris Ritz Hotel. She mingles with the Nazis and starts a romance with a senior Nazi officer, Baron von Dincklage. Using the Aryanization laws that target Jewish-owned businesses, Chanel denounces her business partner Pierre Wertheimer to gain control of



her perfume No. 5. Unfortunately for Coco, Wertheimer had anticipated German seizing laws and sold the company to a Frenchman for the duration of the war.

### Exile and the Nouvelle Vague

After the war, Coco is rejected by Parisian society for her collaboration with the Nazis. She flees to Switzerland and lives in exile for eight years. Meanwhile in Paris, her perfume No. 5 remains a huge success, even as the city streets fill up with Christian Dior's Nouvelle Vague fashion. Chanel is distressed by the popularity of this new silhouette with its yards of superfluous fabric and a tight waistline.

### The Comeback

Coco has a nightmare vision where she and her team rip the Dior dresses off all the women. Satisfied, Coco puts the women back into her signature look and silhouette. Her comeback is funded by her former partner, Wertheimer. Finally, she becomes the icon that was her destiny. In the distance, the spirit of Boy Capel watches over her.

Photos: Hong Kong Ballet dancers; photo by Tony Luk, courtesy of Hong Kong Ballet. Erik Kim, Madison Penney, Fuki Takahashi; photo by Shoccara Marcus. Angel Ramirez, Mikaela Santos, Munkhjin Ulzijargal; photo by Shoccara Marcus.