

# Behind the scenes

Volume 2, Issue 3 & 4

July & September 2004

## Raffle Results

### *A big thank you to all Friends who bought raffle tickets!*

We are delighted to announce that 8 of the 13 raffle prizes were won by long-standing Friends of the Royal New Zealand Ballet!

**First prize** of a trip to Nelson to enjoy the World of WearableArt in September was won by **Marion Dallison**, of Christchurch who has been a Friends member since 1995.

**Second prize** of a digital camera went to **Helen White** of Auckland.

**Third prize** of a Lladro figurine was won by **Rhona & Tom Gibling** of Auckland and Friends of the Ballet since 1996.

**Fourth to Thirteenth prizes** of passes to a performance of the Royal New Zealand Ballet were won by **Kathleen Robson, Dudley Vosser, Barbara Webb, Heather Hay, Shirley Smythe, and Lindsay Rowe**, all of whom have supported the Friends over many years. Other winners were **Lois Bell, Ginny Trass, Judith Ward, and Elizabeth Strathern**.

The Friends would especially like to thank **Konica Copy and Photo, Timaru, Stewart Dawsons, Wellington**, and the **Royal New Zealand Ballet** for the generous donation of prizes.

## Rowan Cann reflects on the UK tour – “An incredible experience!”

The first performances on the UK tour were at the Lowry Theatre on the shores of the Manchester ship canals. The good reviews were promising, however the highlight for Rowan was visiting Old Trafford, the home of the Manchester United football club.

Then it was on to London and the famed Sadler's Wells Theatre. Rowan decided it was a great place once he got used to the rabbit warren of stairwells and passages to get to the dressing rooms. “Everyone felt pretty tense before the first performance, but we were inspired by the support of so many ex-pat kiwis we could hear in the audience.”

On to Glasgow “We had the best accommodation – we got our own rooms! The Theatre Royal was very old and it took three flights of stairs to get to our dressing rooms!”

Edinburgh was the highlight of the trip for Rowan. “There was so much to see that by the end of the week I felt like a mad tourist!” The dancers rode an open top bus, visited the castle, saw the Scottish crown jewels and took a night tour of Greyfriars Cemetery which was pretty scary “even for the boys!”. All this and keeping enough energy to give top class performances at night too!

Another highlight was a visit by Matz Skoog, former Artistic Director of the Royal New Zealand Ballet when they performed at High Wycombe.

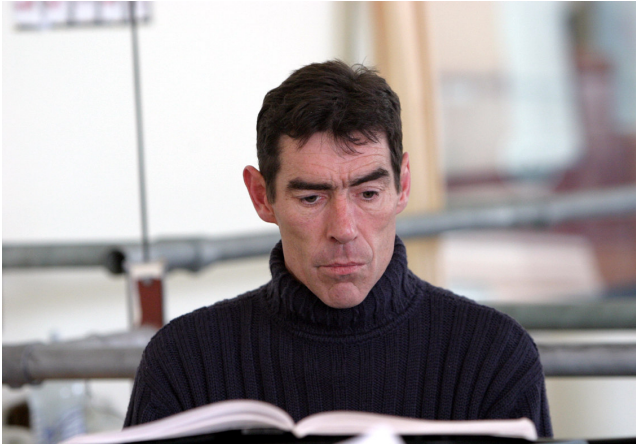
The tour finished in Bath in a wonderful little theatre where it was a real challenge to squeeze the set and dancers onto the stage, and audiences were full to the extent of filling the boxes as well as the auditorium.

Rowan summed up the tour as “an incredible experience that those of us lucky enough to be part of, will remember for a long time”.

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## Nicholas Giles-Palmer – Company Musician



Nicholas Giles-Palmer at work.

Photo: Bill Cooper

Peter Cowley talked with Nick about his life and his work as the **Company Musician**. He was interested in finding out more about his work at the company, which is mostly “behind the scenes”.

### **When did you first become interested in music?**

I am told I started out at about age 3. My love of music comes from my grandparents on both sides of the family. My mum is of Norwegian descent and her grandfather was a cello professor in Norway and dad’s father, Gordon McBeth, was a composer. Dad’s mother was of Basque descent and was a fine pianist and singer. I was never actually taught piano in the early years, I just picked songs up by ear from the radio and created something similar on the piano. The formal training came later on.

### **Can you tell me about your musical career?**

In 1982 I worked with the Royal New Zealand Ballet for about 18 months. I left to complete my music studies, then from 1984 to 1997 I worked with both the company and the NZ School of Dance. In 1997, I visited China where I worked for 3 months with the Chinese National Ballet and at the Beijing Academy of Dance. Since then I have been with the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

### **We seldom see you “front of house” as the music for a performance is usually an orchestra or recorded music. Do you have an impact on the final score of the ballet?**

Perhaps much more than most people realise. There is a lot of collaboration with the Artistic and Rehearsal Directors.

Often the ballet has to be trimmed to fit a time frame, so the music has to be trimmed too.

This has many implications and I need to look at the conductor’s score and consider things like whether a player can change instrument in time, or does the key change and how can that be accommodated, how the phrasing works. People easily pick up small changes in music so changes have to be done with surgical precision or it would be an obvious cut and join. Tempo is critically important and has to fit the physical time for dance movement. A complete understanding of all the dance steps and what the movement expressions mean is important - the music has to meld into and enhance the movements.

In the company classes, there is more freedom to improvise but this improvisation still has to cover the dancers’ needs. I have a large repertoire of music to be used at any time.

In 1983 I was so inspired when I heard *Trois Gymnopedies* being played, I thought how wonderful it would be to play it for the ballet in New York. Ten years later in 1993, I was asked to play *Trois Gymnopedies* for the Royal New Zealand Ballet when they performed *Monotones* in New York as part of their United States tour – it was a dream come true for me!

### **What is your favourite music?**

There is a very big difference in music I listen to or play for my own pleasure, and the music I play for the company. At work I have to be very considerate of the dancers’ needs. For my own listening and playing pleasure, J.S. Bach is the one composer whose music can get me into my own soundscape of relaxation and excitement. Particular genres or composers don’t really matter, it is more what the music says to me rather than a particular style.

### **I understand Nick, that you have an especial interest in vintage films and in particular playing for silent film.**

I do enjoy the improvisation that comes with playing for silent films and remember one occasion when I played the music to a silent film I had never seen before, live, for ten hours of vintage film. I really get a thrill from the eye-to-hand-to-music process where the improvisation is almost totally subconscious.

I feel the same way with dance, how much stronger the charge is when the dance and the music fuse and meld into one entity of motion and music, visual and aural, where our two most used senses are used together, in harmony, to enhance the totality of the performance.

## Ou Lu and Li Cunxin:

### Two Stories from Mao's China

Behind the Scenes in this issue brings together two dancers, both born in China in 1961, both destined to leave China to dance in the west, and one to spend many years in Australia, the other in New Zealand.

One of those dancers is Li Cunxin whose gripping autobiography is reviewed on this page, and the other is Ou Lu, who danced leading roles in virtually all the Royal New Zealand Ballet productions from 1992 until his retirement in 2001.

Unlike Cunxin, Lu came from a middle class, intellectual family and might well have been banished to toil in the fields as a peasant during the Cultural Revolution. Lu had never danced a step and had hoped to become a lawyer or a doctor, but at age 11 he, like Cunxin, was selected as one who had the rare combination of physical attributes that might make a ballet dancer and he had no choice – he was sent to Beijing where he embarked on the same punishing regime as Li Cunxin did when he arrived from his home in the country.

By another twist of fate, Ou Lu returned to China in 2001 to be the Deputy Director at the Beijing Dance Academy - the very place where Li Cunxin arrived in 1972 to begin his career as a dancer.

Before he returned to China Ou Lu was made an Honorary Life Member of the Friends of the Royal New Zealand Ballet and on Page 4 we bring you a letter from Ou Lu from China telling of his experiences in leaving New Zealand and returning to live in China after a long absence.

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[www.nzballet.org.nz](http://www.nzballet.org.nz)

## Mao's Last Dancer

*By Li Cunxin, Published by Penguin, \$35*

*Reviewed by Diana Masters, National Committee*

From starving peasant child to leading dancer to stockbroker is one very grande jete. Li Cunxin tells his story of growing up in China knowing only hardship and hunger, but always supported by the love of his family. He knew nothing of ballet or the arts, only the day to day struggle for survival.

Part of Chairman Mao's philosophy for the New China was to enable peasants to engage with intellectuals. When Li was 11, Madame Mao's representatives visited his school to choose children to be trained for ballet and he was chosen to be sent to Beijing to begin six year's training. The children were told that their chances of joining the school were one in a billion.

The training and life were still very hard with, by our standards very little care for their physical well-being. The dancers were also shielded from Western ideas. Li's description of their perception of the story of Giselle, will now colour my insight into that ballet. The young communists saw it as an example of a rotten capitalist society and a young girl who desired the trappings of the rich. Her quest for 'filthy material values', and love for an aristocrat led to her undoing.

Li did well at school and when a cultural delegation from the USA visited Beijing he was selected to attend ballet classes, and as a result was offered a scholarship to work with the Houston Ballet.

Most dance lovers are familiar with the training and backgrounds of young dancers in the Western world. This story of the Chinese peasant boy describes a very different experience– he becomes principal dancer in leading ballet companies and is befriended by the President of the United States Mao's Last Dancer is a very interesting and enjoyable account of Li Cunxin's extraordinary life and stories.



Dear Friends of the Ballet

After eleven years working with The Royal New Zealand Ballet, because my mum was very ill I decided to go back to China to look after her for a while.

It was like the fate is playing a game with me, or, everyone is too reluctant to let me go; two weeks before our departure, one morning when I was dropping off my daughter to her school, someone had broken into my house. Since my house was quite empty and there was a very little to take in terms of valuables, instead the burglar took our passports, air tickets along with some cash - that was the worst thing that I have ever experienced.

I counted the days - two weeks before our departure; it was just in time for me to apply for our new passports and for the airline reissuing our air tickets.

After my last season "Carmen" tour with the Royal New Zealand Ballet, I farewelled my dear Friends of the Ballet in Auckland, I came back to Wellington, boarded the plane and headed back to Beijing. There was kind of a weird feeling coming back to the place where I have lived for more than twenty years, it was because Beijing has changed so much in every ways and I had been absent for a such long time so that I am not used to it any more.

It was good to catch up with my mum and dad and my big brother. We stayed in my home town over the Chinese new year and we decided to go to Beijing and look for a job. We got our jobs working at The Beijing Dance Academy in March, and then, a month later, SARS broke out.

The SARS epidemic was so bad and so scary - it could be passed on to any body at any moment at anywhere here in Beijing. Thousands of people had been infected and hundreds of people have died from it just in Beijing. People here started to take the extreme measures by sealing up the gates and isolating themselves from outside in order to fight SARS. Because the apartments where we live is within the campus of the Beijing Dance Academy, so we had been isolated from outside too, no one goes out and no one comes in. Basically, every body of the Academy had been quarantined for nearly four months until SARS disappeared in late July and then everything gets back to normal.

And then, just when you think it was all over, this year, the bird flu...

My family and I are happily living in Beijing despite all the things that shouldn't be happening, but we are fine. Right now, I am taken up the Deputy Director's job working at the Ballet Department of the Beijing Dance Academy, my wife Ying is working at the Grading Centre of Chinese Dance, and my daughter Catherine has grown up a lot and is happily doing her secondary school.

The year 2004 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding of the Beijing Dance Academy, and I was given a task by the President of the Academy; to put on full length classical ballet "The Sleeping Beauty" at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. So, there are a lots of thing waiting for me to sort out and I think that I am doing all right.

I do miss New Zealand a lot, miss my life in New Zealand and all of my dear New Zealand friends. I used to dream about I was back to NZ again, I dreamed about I was in the ballet company; the ballet company has changed a bit with a lot of new faces. I even once dreamed about our ballet company has moved to Kelburn area for some reason. I also dreamed of my house, when I woke up, I found myself in a terrible home sick, and my home is in Wellington New Zealand.

**Ou Lu MNZM**  
Deputy Director  
Ballet Department of The Beijing Dance Academy

## Wellington Friends

### COPPELIA SEASON

#### Lunch, Company Class & Forum

**When:** Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 12:30 noon  
**Where:** Westpac St James, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
**Cost:** \$5.00 per person

**See booking form. Close date Monday 18 Oct**

#### Full Technical Dress Rehearsal

**When:** Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October 7:00 pm  
**Where:** Westpac St James, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
**Cost:** \$20.00 per person

**See booking form. Close date Monday 18 Oct**

#### Masterclasses

#### Junior (Intermediate & Adv Foundation) Senior Students (Advanced I & II)

**When:** Junior – 16<sup>th</sup> Oct, Closes 8<sup>th</sup> October  
Senior - 30<sup>th</sup> Oct, Closes 22<sup>nd</sup> October  
**Where:** Westpac St James, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
**Cost:** \$20.00 per student  
**Email:** Beverly.robinson@nzcer.org.nz

#### Coppelia, Coffee & Cake.

Enjoy a cup of coffee, cake and good conversation after Coppelia on 4<sup>th</sup> November – special prices!!

**See booking form. Close date Monday 18 Oct**

### Support The Friends with Xmas gifts for your friends

These high quality binoculars are for sale – they come in a smart soft black case (9.5 x 7 x 4 cm) perfect for a close up view at the ballet, opera or sports and very easy to carry in purse or pocket.



These NorWest binoculars are 8 x 21 and can be ordered from us for \$40 plus postage.

Order these from us at: [sales@wn-friends.org](mailto:sales@wn-friends.org)

**We have two new easy-to-remember web site names:  
[wn-friends.org](http://wn-friends.org) or [balletfriends.org](http://balletfriends.org)**

## Madame Butterfly Forum

Stephen Woodgate, former Senior Artist with the Australian Ballet and now Ballet Master with Houston Ballet talked to another well attended forum about the staging of Madame Butterfly.

A (very) brief History: Stanton Welch's Madame Butterfly, commissioned by the Australian Ballet, received its world premiere performance in Melbourne at the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, on 24 February 1995.

Since its premiere Madame Butterfly has been restaged on several occasions by the Australian Ballet, most recently in 1998. It is also in the repertoire of many companies around the world including Atlanta Ballet, Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, Singapore Dance Theatre and now by the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Stephen informed us that the whole set and costumes were not allowed to be altered in any way without the express permission of the Australian Ballet. This meant for the costumes particularly that there had to be some matching up of sizes. Fortunately ballet dancers tend to be of "fairly uniform" sizes and the costumes have built in allowances for slightly different sized dancers.



Photo: Peter Cowley, Wellington Friend

Stephen talked about the logistics of transporting and setting up the set in different theatres some of which have narrow stages. Fortunately the rooms at the back of the set that are multi purpose during the performance can be somewhat shortened as necessary but the wings area can be extremely tight for space.

**(see [wn-friends.org](http://wn-friends.org) for more photos!!)**

## Otago Festival of the Arts

### The RNZB will be on stage - 5 October 2004 in Dunedin

Celebrating its first appearance at the Otago Festival, the Royal New Zealand Ballet premieres new work from Kiwi choreographers in its triple bill line-up.

Dunedin dance hero Daniel Belton choreographs *The Happy Prince*, a modern-day translation of the Oscar Wilde fairytale. Enchanting and profoundly affecting, this special festival commission features costumes by local fashion luminary Tanya Carlson.

A private passion, an intimate embrace: Wellington's Turid Revfeim turns up the heat for the tango-infused *Si Supieras* (If You Knew), a new work to music by Jonathan Besser.

Riveting and ritualistic, Javier De Frutos' *Milagros* is set to Stravinsky's iconic *Rite of Spring*. The critical sensation of the Ballet's recent UK tour; *Milagros* was declared a "brilliantly imagined, dazzling response to the score" by *The Financial Times*.

### Your Help Wanted:

We are going to hand out 'Help us keep the dancers on their toes!' donation forms at the start of each show. We need people to help do this for one hour before the show.

If you would like to help, please contact Mary on:

971-7143 (Evenings)

021-701-598 (Daytime & evenings)

Email: [weddell@paradise.net.nz](mailto:weddell@paradise.net.nz)

### Wellington Friends PO Box has changed!!

Our new PO Box number is **14-495, Kilbirnie** please change any records you have. For the next two months, anything sent to the old PO Box will be automatically forward to the new number.

### Get ready for ROAD TOUR in 2005

Next year Wellington Friends is hosting one of the RNZB Road Tour shows. This will be held at the Little Theatre in Lower Hutt on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2005. Put this date in your diary now – watch for booking details early next year.

**Next newsletter will have more details....**

### The World of Wearable Art

In case you do not know, the Wearable Arts show has outgrown Nelson and is moving to Wellington next year (September 2005). This makes the show much more accessible for us who live in the best place in the country!!

## News from New Zealand

### Launch of the 14+ Foundation. New Scholarship for Dance.

A new dance foundation is about to be launched that will provide funding for dance study scholarships.

The Royal Academy of Dance is one of the most prestigious organizations in the world with a long history of commitment to the training of young dancers and dance teachers. They have traditionally awarded scholarships for fulltime study - recipients of this award go back 63 years and include New Zealanders Rowena Jackson, Alexander Grant, Yvonne Cartier, Kerry Anne Gilberd and Mary Jane O'Reilly. Recently a decision in London meant that funding to continue this scholarship was withdrawn and in real Kiwi fashion there has been a rallying here in New Zealand to find a way to ensure that this tradition is not allowed to stop!

Spearheaded by Shirley Baker, the result is the new 14+ Scholarship Foundation. The aim was to have 14 New Zealanders prepared to pledge support for ten years to ensure the ongoing funding and to make this scholarship a truly New Zealand initiative. Support from key dance enthusiasts from all over the country has exceeded the original proposal and we are thrilled to announce that there are 25 Founder Member contributors forming the beginning of this new fund.

The Inaugural Scholarship will be named for one of our most illustrious dance pioneers, Jeane Horne. She virtually started the Royal Academy here in New Zealand and was both a teacher and entrepreneur. Her students included Alexander Grant, and Deirdre Tarrant, both members of the foundation. Jeane Horne developed and nurtured the links and organization that established the Royal Academy of Dance here and she was very well known

in Wellington not only as an excellent teacher, but also for her work in the theatre and with the fledgling New Zealand Ballet Company. Much that she did involved opening doors and creating chances for young dancers to travel, study and perform. She herself travelled to Sydney to be awarded her own Royal Academy Teacher's Certificate in 1937. At the invitation of Dame Margot Fonteyn, she became the first and only New Zealander to serve on the Academy's Grand Council. It is really appropriate that this scholarship honours our dance heritage and such an important and pivotal personality in the history of dance and particularly ballet.

The 14+ Scholarship Foundation was launched on August 28th at Te Whaea, School of Dance and Drama, Newtown, Wellington. On the same day young dancers competed for the Jeane Horne Scholarship, the first award under the auspices of the foundation. Dance is a universal language and this scholarship will enable exceptional talent to study towards the reality of a career in dance. The first scholarship winner will be announced in October and will be presented by Carolyn Blackburn and Suzanne Glasgow, Jeane Horne's daughters and also members of the 14+ Foundation.

For further information, interviews, photo opportunity ... contact:

Janet Taylor. NZ Organiser. RAD. ph 04 382 8924  
Deirdre Tarrant. Trustee 14+ Foundation ph 021 533 725

FFP

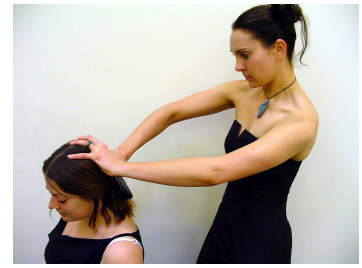
Fighting Fit Productions

34A, Moana Rd. Kelburn. Wellington

Email: [fitproductions@yahoo.com](mailto:fitproductions@yahoo.com)

[www.geocities.com/fitproductions](http://www.geocities.com/fitproductions)

Contact person: Jose Diaz (04) 977 5583



## Press Release - September 2004

### Superheroes and dance, an explosive mixture in FFP's new show

New Zealand based dance-theatre company Fighting Fit Productions, in association with Catch a Shooting Star, presents **Exposé** a new Dance-Theatre work.

**Where:** Wellington Performing Arts Centre, 36 Vivian St, Wellington

**When:** 30 - 31 October, 6 - 7 November 2004. Sat at 7:30, Sunday at 5:30

**Cost:** \$15 – \$20

**Bookings:** [fitproductions@yahoo.com](mailto:fitproductions@yahoo.com) (04) 977 5583

Remember the days when the princess was rescued by Prince Charming and everyone lived happily every after? When wolves were big and bad and lured us into the woods? The days when Spiderman or Wonder Woman would save the world, weekly at 7:30? We do, and have made a show about them.

That show is **Exposé**, a quirky, funny, powerful and accessible new work from Fighting Fit Productions.

Made up of a collection of childhood fairy stories and adult understanding, it contains the stories we have all grown up with. But it's not just nostalgia and cultural mix. Using the base of superheroes and fairy tales, today's issues are explored and probed.



The show is choreographed by Declan Patrick, who has produced original Kiwi work in New Zealand and overseas over the last 12 years. It is designed by Bronwyn Bent, whose recent work included the Red Mole Production: Unbearable Journeys and the Wellington Summer Shakespeare production: The Tempest.

The cast includes a huge cultural mix: English performer Louise Fielder, well known through her work as a dance educator for the Royal New Zealand Ballet, Kiwi Nicola Mischevski, creative dance artist and teacher, American samba performer Jenny Bloomfield and Maori/French "diva" Adam de Haar.

**Exposé** is an opportunity to experience dance in an enjoyable and understandable format, where superheroes are performers and performers are, in the end, real people.

###

## International News & Snippets

### New Prague Dance Festival 2005

It is with great pleasure we want to announce that we have updated our web sites <http://www.praguedancefestival.cz/> for the IX. edition of the New Prague Dance Festival - Competition 2005 from 1.7. - 7.7.2005 in the heart of Europe - Prague !!!

### Karen Kain appointed new Canada Council chair

OTTAWA - Karen Kain, one of the most celebrated ballerinas in Canadian history, will be the new chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, the federal government announced Thursday.

"Ms. Kain's vast experience and dedication to the arts make her an ideal choice as chair," Heritage Minister Liza Frulla said in a statement.

Frulla says that Kain will raise the profile of the Canada Council, and make a strong case for the support of Canada's artists.

"She's always really a staunch defender of not only dance, but...the arts in general," said Frulla.

For the full story see:

<http://www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2004/09/16/Arts/kaincc040916.html>

## Robert Lepage's fiery new Cirque show unveiled in Vegas

LAS VEGAS - The Cirque du Soleil unveiled KĀ, its fiery new Las Vegas production, on Wednesday with the help of collaborator Robert Lepage.

"It's not about creating a new show," the Quebec filmmaker and multi-discipline artist told those gathered for a news conference inside the production's 1,951-seat theatre at the MGM Grand hotel-casino.

"It's about creating a new world." KĀ tells the story of a set of twins – a brother and sister separated as children – who must complete a perilous journey before discovering their destinies.



End of act pose, Las Vegas's newest Cirque Du Soleil show, 'KA' (AP photo)

For the full story see:

<http://www.cbc.ca/story/arts/national/2004/09/16/Arts/kacirque040916.html>

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