

# Behind the scenes

Volume 5, Issue 3

2007

## Staying on your toes!

*Wellington Friend Judith Doyle talked to Ali Kyle (pictured below) who runs the Pilates studio for the company, using Pilates techniques with the dancers for both prevention of injuries and rehabilitation.*



"I was lying on the hospital bed — in traction after a bad back injury — and I was saying to myself 'I've got to stop dancing. What am I going to do?' And Pilates was what I decided I wanted to do."

Well, finally she did achieve that goal, but the Pilates regime that she threw herself into after her injury (having persuaded the surgeon not to operate on her back!) was so successful that she danced for another 10 years. "I was dancing better than I had before," she exclaimed.

This experience reinforced her belief in Pilates which she had already been practising for seven years during her dancing career with the English National Ballet and London City Ballet — in fact she'd learnt from one of the first Pilates teachers to come to Britain from the United States.

She explained the fascinating background to Pilates: Joseph Pilates, a German, had been a sickly asthmatic child who grew up determined to retain good health. He gradually developed his extraordinary techniques which take features from yoga, boxing, dance, acrobatics, Feldenkreis and even skiing.

*continued on page 2*

## Those Crystal Chandeliers!

When the curtain goes up on the ball scene in Christopher Hampson's brand new *Cinderella*, the effect is breathtaking! Suspended over the ballroom are 5 sparkling chandeliers, the largest of which is 3 metres across. Each chandelier consists of hardboard covered with vinyl and a bubble jet printer has been used to print the intricate design onto the vinyl. Perspex, lights and crystals as well as mirrors have been added to enhance the effect.

The magic does not stop there — 3 kilometres of fibre optic cables have been used to create a firmament of twinkling stars for Cinderella and her prince to dance under.

A team of 4 worked solidly for over 3 months to complete the complex and detailed set for Cinderella.



### Pointes to note

- A close inspection of the poster for The Lion Foundation season of *Cinderella* will reveal that the Friends' partnered dancer, Abigail Boyle features as Cinderella. Abigail, however, will not be dancing the role of Cinderella — she will be appearing as one of the ugly stepsisters — a chance for her to revel in a character role. Abigail will also dance the Fairy Godmother in some performances.
- Qi Huan, fresh from a hugely successful season as the Prince in *Swan Lake*, retains his princely role in *Cinderella*. Qi is especially looking forward to the coming tour in China where he will be dancing before an audience including his family who will travel to Beijing to see him dance. This will be the first time they have seen him dance in a ballet company.
- Kate Venables, taking a break from dancing with the company has stepped in as the new RNZB receptionist, and is also taking a 10 month course in Pilates teaching with Ali Kyle.
- Visit [www.nzballet.org.nz](http://www.nzballet.org.nz) for up to date news during the company tour to China.

*continued from page 1*

Central to his new philosophy was the linking of the mind and the spirit with the physical side of the body.

Joseph came to Britain to pursue a career as a circus performer and acrobat. But World War I broke out and he was interned as an alien. He continued to develop his methods (initially called controllogy) practising on other internees. He used the springs on the beds in some exercises (forerunner of the current Pilates machine called the Cadillac). The internees retained such good health that none of them succumbed to the great flu epidemic that broke out after the war ended.

By the 1930s, Joseph Pilates was back in Germany. The military build-up of that time was proceeding apace and his technique was eyed by the German Army as being a useful keep-fit method for its troops. So Joseph fled from Germany to the United States.

Here, with his new wife, he opened a studio. By chance, there was a ballet studio above it, and the dancers (actors and singers too) became interested, especially in the huge focus on breathing that is integrated into the exercises and the promise of long lean muscles. His techniques gradually became established in the States but it wasn't until the 1970s that some of the teachers he'd trained came over to the UK and introduced it there.

Changes were afoot in Ali's life in the last few years before the turn of the century. She retired from dancing; married Nick Kyle; had a baby... When Nick was offered the job of production manager with the RNZB, the couple immigrated to New Zealand (they were later divorced). Ali opened a studio at the School of Dance in Newtown, soon after her arrival here. Then three years ago, she set up her own Pilates studio for the RNZB for whom she works part-time — she also has a studio in the CBD.

She takes a Pilates mat class once a week in the studio for all the dancers. They learn core stability, core control and re-balancing muscles. As well as this preventative work, there is also individual work with dancers who feel the need, perhaps have a slight injury or are taking time out to recover from an actual injury.

Pilates works the mind and body together. "It was one of the first exercise regimes where you have to really think about what you're doing; you're working on neuro-muscular control and changing neuro-muscular imbalances — from the brain, via the nerves into the muscles... You have to be really focussed. That's how the body changes, remembering this new muscular pattern."

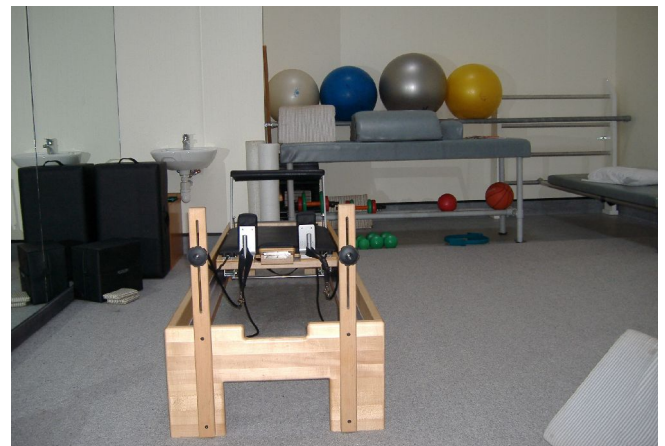
The body can get into bad habits, Ali said. It can take on the path of least resistance. For instance, if the vertebrae are loose in one area of the spine, you can guarantee they'll be tight in another area.

The difference between a physiotherapist and Pilates is that "we work the body holistically," said Ali. "Physio tends to say 'you've got a dodgy ankle, let's work on the ankle.' I would look at the whole body and say that the reason the ankle is dodgy is because, if you look further up, the core stability is completely out; that hip is slightly twisted. Let's look at that first. If we re-balance the legs into the proper alignment, then those muscles will follow."

Pilates has changed and developed, of course. "Some of what I learned 20 years ago is almost old hat now," said Ali. "But Joseph set down the principles and the whole philosophy — it's not just a set of exercises, it is a philosophy." But with research, certain exercises have been further developed, some have been dropped.

The Cadillac looks like a four-poster bed. The springs are used in resistance work as springs can work as muscles do. The other important machine is the plié machine (also called the reformer). It's rather like a rowing machine where you lie on your back and can work on the knees, the arms, on core stability, lengthening the leg muscles and spine mobilisation. Other equipment is used but these two are the main ones.

Pilates exercises happen to a background of light music. "Depending on my mood," said Ali. "Nothing too soft or people fall asleep and nothing too noisy."



The "reformer" or plié machine in the RNZB Pilates studio

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[www.nzballet.org.nz/support-friends.html](http://www.nzballet.org.nz/support-friends.html)

# Wellington Friends

## Dance Events

### A Day in the Life

Sunday 12 August, Te Papa at noon

Free Entry

### Behind the Scenes Forum

Saturday 25 August

9:30 – 10:00 Morning tea \$5.00

10:00 – 11:00 Forum

Come along and hear all the inside info from Gary Harris (Artistic Director), Tracey Grant Lord (set design) and Christopher Hampson (Choreographer). We may also have a Cinderella and a Prince to ask questions of. Bring a gold coin for the raffle!

See booking form included

### Young Friends Dance Bonanza

Saturday 25 August- 10:15- 11:15

With Sir Jon Trimmer

Parents are welcome to join us for morning tea and the Forum. Cost: \$5.00

See booking form included

### Masterclasses

Saturday 25 August : 9:00 – 10:15

Intermediate students

Saturday 1 September : 10:30- 12:00

Senior students

### Dress Rehearsal

Thursday 30 August – 7:30pm

Tickets \$25.00 each and seating is in the Grand Circle and unallocated so you need to be fairly early for a good seat.

See booking form included



### Repertoire for Girls

Sunday 2 September – 10:00

For passionate classical ballet students aged 12 years and over. Learn excerpts from the company's repertoire taught by the Royal New Zealand Ballet dancers and members of the artistic team.

Free to attend but must call RNZB to register – 381-9001

### Coffee & Conversation

Friday 7 September – First Interval

For just \$5.00 you can have a cup of coffee or tea and a wee nibble along with conversation with friends and any artistic staff and/or dancers who can join us.

See booking form included

### Ballet for Boys

Saturday 8 September – 10:30

This is a fantastic opportunity for boys to meet and work with professional male role models. Boys aged 10 years and over can meet the male dancers of the Royal New Zealand Ballet, watch them in company class and then participate in open class.

Free to attend but must call RNZB to register - 381-9001

### Q & A

Saturday 8 September – after the matinée performance.

An informal post-performance chat for dance lovers and the curious first-timer; the perfect time for the questions you've always wanted to ask. An opportunity to find out about the company, the dancers and the many facets of our current production.

## Presidents Report

My second year as President has been busy, but has progressed extremely well due to the exceptional support from my small but dedicated committee. My personal thanks go to each of you for your hard work during the past year:

**Pete Cowley** – Treasurer (books have been well kept and documented), as newsletter editor (some really superb articles – which I am sure members found extremely interesting), and as membership data coordinator.

**Shirley & Ken Shanks** – Minute secretaries – very accurate and prompt delivery of all minutes.

**Pam Reader & Ingrid Witkowski** - Young Friends membership & events - increased membership and great events.

**Valerie Hellberg & Glenda West** – to Valerie – many thanks for your support and assistance with functions and to Glenda – well done chasing those lapsing members.

Ingrid and I have been members of the National Committee, and with the support of Wellington Branch have been in a position to encourage the national organisation to move forward in a positive manner.

Whilst our functions have not been to the fore this financial year, we have sponsored the "Tower - Tutus on Tour" performance at Upper Hutt. This was most successful - a full house plus extra seating. This was achieved by the committee's hard work in pre-selling to members and friends at a reduced ticket price. We continue to provide funds for the shoe fund and this year have forwarded **\$8000.00**.

Young Friends is into its fourth year and numbers have reached **85**, **Pam and Ingrid** (or **Jete and Arabesque** as they are known to our young friends) have worked tirelessly during the past year, arranging workshops – or dance bonanza's (the new name), colouring competitions and encouraging the members to write articles on the events they attended. Those published in the Young Friends newsletter receive a certificate for their articles. The dance bonanza's are now conducted by **Stacey White**, who is the

Royal New Zealand Ballet Education Manager.

Masterclasses – student numbers have increased this year with eleven attending Intermediate classes and nineteen attending Senior classes. Both classes have been instructed by **Turid Revfeim** (Ballet mistress), and have been extremely successful. Those attending have been taught a short excerpt from the current work the company is performing and students have been most appreciative of this. A special thanks to **Turid** for all her hard work, giving of her time and dedication in instructing and tutoring these young students.

Numbers attending forums seem to fluctuate and we need to encourage more members and Friends to attend these. A greater audience is always appreciated, and attendees are provided with an in-depth look at the company's current production. Speakers usually include the artistic director, choreographers, dancers and others. The forums are very informal and there is always an opportunity given for questions, a chance for people to ask what they have always wanted to know and to meet others who have a similar passion for dance.

Membership numbers have reached **383**, with **8** international members, an increase of **23%** from the 2006/07 year. This is most promising and in an endeavour to keep numbers up, we ask that each of you encourage a friend or acquaintance to become a member – the success of an organisation is to keep introducing new members. If you have friends residing overseas, or are moving internationally yourself, please remember you are still eligible for membership.

Wellington Branch has a very small committee and we would like more assistance. If any member would like to join the committee they would be most welcome. Please contact any committee member for further details.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Wellington Friends, to welcome **Amanda Skoog**, the newly appointed General Manager of the Royal New Zealand

Ballet – we look forward to working along side her during the coming years.

Special thanks must go to **Susie Clarke**, National Administrator of Friends of the Royal New Zealand Ballet, and to **Robert Lahman**, Arts Partnership Consultant, of the Royal New Zealand Ballet for their continued support of us during the past year.

**Bev Robinson**

**President – Friends of The Royal New Zealand Ballet – Wellington Branch**

## Blast from the Past

**NZ Herald ,Friday March 21, 1969**



**The two guest principles, Gerard Sibbritt as Prince Charming and Patricia Cox as Cinderella, appearing in the ballet "Cinderella" which opened at the St. James theatre last night.**

## Ballet In Step With Festival Mood

The world première of a new version of "Cinderella" made a really special event of the opening night of the New Zealand Ballet's season at the St. James Theatre last evening.

It was the sort of première, largely New Zealand made, that one hopes to find in an Auckland Festival, and all too rarely encounters.

The choreographer is Ray Powell, now of the Australian Ballet, who has had for his collaborators Oswald Cheesman, the arranger of the Rossini score, and Raymond Boyce, designer of the sets and costumes.

For his story Mr Powell has gone back to Rossini's "Cenerentola," through obviously influenced too by the version which Ashton made for Prokofiev's score. There is less bite to this older music but it is an eminently happy score and the ballet itself keeps that mood admirably.

It gets away to a bright start given by the Symphonia's good account of the overture and the light-hearted spirit set there is held consistently, with most of the comedy coming from the two ugly sisters, danced by Viven Anderson and Marieke van Melle.

### Witty

For them Mr Powell has devised some very witty steps in the opening scene and some clever burlesque in the second act.

Patricia Cox is the Cinderella and Gerard Sibbritt her Prince, a talented and well matched pair who have the major dancing roles, emotionally understanding and technically smooth and proficient without particular brilliance.

Raymond Boyce's sets are, as always, original and attractive, but the ballroom scene, probably designed for adaption to various stages, seemed too small last night and a fractious window that refused to stay shut congested things still more.

As a contrast to the story ballet of "Cinderella" the programme last night offered the abstract ballet "Symphony," which is Russell Kerr's choreographic interpretation of Bizet's Symphony in C major.

This ballet has no décor and needs none, for the charming little symphony is essentially played by the Symphonia and Mr Kerr has expertly translated into movement the bustling energy of three of its movements and the lyrical vein of the slow one.

It is danced in classical terms and though purely abstract has no lack of feeling, both in the dancing of the principals – Jillian Luke, Gillian Francis, Jenny Tate and Harold Collins – and of the well polished corps de ballet.

Ashley Heenan conducts the Bizet and Rossini scores whose weight is just right for the Symphonia and the whole programme presents good entertainment for all ages, with no controversial elements and a lot of commendable artistry in all departments.

L.C.M. Saunders

## New members

We extend a warm welcome to all new members who have joined us this year. It is so great to see an increasing number of supporters of dance in general and ballet in particular.

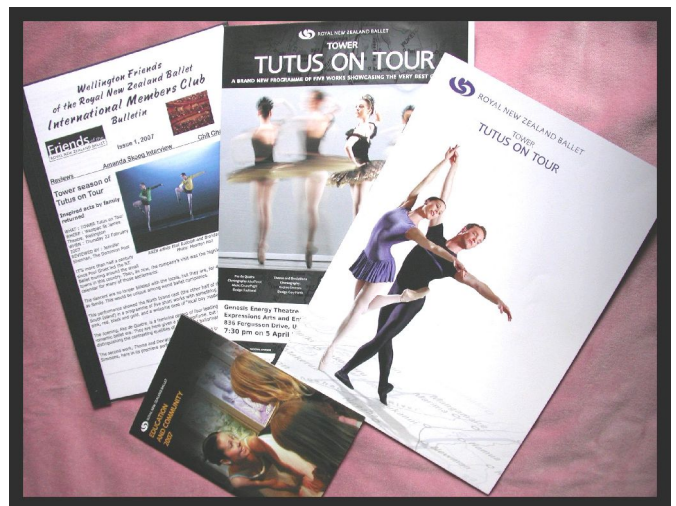
I would like to ask all members to pass on the enclosed membership form to any of your friends who you think may be interested in dance, and especially the fantastic performances our Royal New Zealand Ballet company put on.

## International membership

Did you know ... we have eight international members?

If you know someone overseas who would love to be kept informed about what is happening with ballet in New Zealand, then let them know we have an international membership option.

There is a form enclosed with this newsletter which explains all the items that they receive.



Just some of the goodies International members receive each season.

## Ballet Christmas Cards

Our very talented Friend, Angela de Bres, has designed a Christmas card especially for us – it has a very “New Zealand, down-under and summer” flavour. Yum!

See the attached order form.

### Committee Members 2006/2007

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