

Behind the scenes

Volume 1, Issue 1

2003

From the National President



Dear Friends

Welcome to this new format of the Friends' newsletter. Your local branch will of course still be sending out the news of their activities and promotions, but by having a national section with a national focus, we hope that you, our members, will receive even more information about the company, the dancers, and the Friends.

We do hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and if you have any suggestions, we would love to hear them.

Kind Regards
Jenette Borrell, National President

Blues fan joins Ballet



Rowan Cann is the latest RNZB dancer to be partnered by the Friends of the Ballet. He follows in the footsteps of Natasha Purcell, Craig Lord, Douglas McCubbin, Pieter Symonds and most recently Rachael Robertson.

"Sometimes it's hard to believe I have made it this far! I'm loving every second."

Rowan grew up in Auckland and first started learning ballet from his mum, Elizabeth Cann, when he was 4 years old. He continued his tuition with Phillipa Campbell, Joyce Lowe and Dorothea Ashbridge and in 2000 he was accepted into the Australian Ballet School. After 3 years at the school, he was offered a place with the Royal New Zealand Ballet. Rowan says, "Sometimes it's hard to believe I have made it this far! I'm loving every second!"

Rowan's first season was the demanding Tutus on Tour and more recently Friends will have seen him in Romeo and Juliet where he was cast in various guises – priest, wedding guest, and as one of the Montague lads toughing it out in the magnificently choreographed street fights with the Capulets. Unfortunately in the rough and tumble on the last night of Romeo & Juliet, Rowan took a tumble for real and sprained his foot. He is now learning some fancy new moves as he gets around with his leg taped up.

Rowan is an avid Blues fan and besides his passion for dance, is pretty keen on motorcycles too.

See the following page for news on Rachel Robertson.

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Rachael moves on

For the past two and a half years Rachael Robertson has been the Friends' sponsored dancer. During 2003 many Friends will have seen her photo promoting our pointe shoe project on the Friends page of the programme. She has also been the face for the Young Friends of the Ballet, and has been in great demand for photo opportunities and autographs.

After four years with the Royal New Zealand Ballet, Rachael is going to look for work in contemporary dance in Australia. The Friends wish her every success in this new phase of her career.

A Time to Dance

From its brave beginnings with minimal resources in 1953, to its proud standing today as an innovative company of international reputation, Jennifer Shennan traces the colourful past of the Royal New Zealand Ballet in *A Time to Dance: the Royal New Zealand Ballet at 50*.

Peter Kitchin reviewing this book said, "A *Time to Dance* is readable, well-illustrated and expertly researched". For ballet lovers of any age, these richly illustrated pages are sure to bring memories flooding back of productions great and small over the years. *A Time to Dance* is both historical survey and souvenir album in one.

Order your copy from Royal New Zealand Ballet:
PO Box 27 050, Wellington.
Phone: 04 381 9000 or 0800 432 623.
Email: inquiry@nzballet.org.nz
Price: \$25 softback, \$120 limited edition hardback

Lunch to honour Trimmers

Jonty and Jacqui have been closely associated with the Royal New Zealand Ballet for the past 40+ years. On Sunday 26 October, Wellington Branch of the Friends of the Ballet will be hosting a lunch to acknowledge their contribution to dance in New Zealand.

Numbers will be limited and details are still being finalised but if you would like to join them for this occasion please register your interest to P O Box 1782 Wellington.

Supporters' tour to the UK

Other exciting news is the announcement that in April/May 2004 the RNZB will tour the stunning new production of *Romeo & Juliet* and a Triple Bill programme including Christopher Hampson's earlier work of *Saltarello* and Mark Baldwin's *Frenzy*. They will perform at Sadler's Wells in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, High Wycombe and Bath.

Such a tour would also include performances by some European ballet companies.

Friends who would be interested in joining a supporter's tour should contact:
Friends of the Ballet
P O Box 27 050, Wellington
Ph 04 381 9009, Fax 04 381 9003
Email: susie@nzballet.org.nz

Shoes glorious shoes

Each year the RNZB buys over a thousand pairs of pointe shoes for the dancers. Each pair costs approximately \$80.00 and in 2003 the Friends of the Ballet have undertaken to dedicate the money they raise to foot this bill. So far this year the Friends have given more than \$50,000 towards this ambitious project.

Dedicated committee members in the Friends branches around the country have been busy fundraising and have been helped by donations from our generous members. This year six of our branches undertook the challenging task of presenting New Zealand Post Tutus on Tour in their area and have had much pleasure in donating the proceeds towards the dancers' shoes.

Young Friends

This year has seen the launch of another initiative from the Friends – Young Friends of the Royal New Zealand Ballet, which is aimed at 7-16 year olds.

It is envisaged that Young Friends will be both fun and educational. There will be opportunities for Young Friends to meet the dancers, take backstage tours, and receive newsletters. On joining, Young Friends receive a membership card, autograph book, and are also entitled to a (20%) discounted seat at a suitable ballet performance on presentation of the membership card.

So far Young Friends organisations have been launched in Auckland, Wellington, Wairarapa, Waikato, Manawatu/Wanganui and South Canterbury.

Binoculars for sale

A great gift idea!

The Friends of the Ballet are offering high quality binoculars 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. These NorWest binoculars are 8 x 21 and can be ordered from your branch for \$40 plus postage.



Stamps



You can still order your Royal New Zealand Ballet Anniversary stamps. To place your order, contact the Stamps Centre, Private Bag 3001, Wanganui, New Zealand, phone 64 6 349 1234, fax 64 6 345 7120, or visit www.stamps.co.nz

Wellington Friends

Calendar of events

Toasting the Terrific Trimmers

Lunch with Jon and Jacqui Trimmer

Special Guests: Arts Icon, Russell Kerr ONZM, QSM and the Hon Judith Tizard - Minister of Consumer Affairs, Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, Associate Minister of Commerce, Associate Minister of Transport, Auckland Issues

When: Sunday 26 October 11:00am

Where: "The Pines",
50 The Esplanade, Houghton Bay

Cost: \$27 per person

See booking form included
Close date Monday 20 October

Peter Pan – Forum & Company Class

Art Icon Russell Kerr, ONZM, QSM, and former Artistic Director of RNZB will speak.

When: Saturday 1 November 12:00 noon

Where: Westpac St James

Cost: \$5.00 per person

See booking form included
Close date Monday 20 October

Peter Pan – Technical Rehearsal

A special Friends function - see the final dress rehearsal!

When: Thursday 30 October 7:00 pm

Where: Westpac St James

Cost: \$20.00 per person

See booking form included
Close date 20 October

MasterClass

Intermediate & Advanced

When: Saturday 25th October 9:30am

Where: Westpac St James

Cost: \$20.00

Registration closes – 10th October

Advanced 1 & Above

When: Saturday 1st November 9:00am

Where: Westpac St James.

Cost: \$20.00

Registration closes 17th October

See included sheet for all the details

Forum on *Romeo & Juliet*

"*Romeo and Juliet* is about love and passion". Our ballet company was founded with love and passion, so it seemed just the right ballet for the company's 50th anniversary. And Christopher Hampson was the obvious choice as choreographer because he's so good at the classical genre." So said Gary Harris, RNZB artistic director, introducing the fascinating forum, which was run before opening night of *Romeo and Juliet*, by Wellington Friends. A very full crowd in the Green Room of the St James positively lapped it all up.

Christopher and Gary — old mates — gave an amusing, witty and enthusiastic account of the process of working together, complicated initially by Christopher being in London, Gary in Wellington and designer Tracy Grant in Auckland.



Deciding on the *image* of the production came early in the discussion. A starting point was the Versace website with its rich reds plus the classy designer look of Prada, Gucci, Jackie Onassis ... all adding up to a feeling of La Dolce Vita. Two costumes interpreting this theme were there for us to see and also some swishing feathery head-dresses.

"I aimed to put together things that I know work, but to do it through my own voice," Christopher said. "Not Renaissance, but fresh, with different but relevant settings." When he arrived in New Zealand he was amazed at how well Tracy had translated the ideas that had been discussed long-distance, into an innovative set that is flexible and moveable so that the action is never broken.

He showed us how this had been achieved in the model for the set which was there in front of us. It has a wall that swivels round to be Juliet's bedroom, a chapel or the town square.

Designers and choreographers have different time frames. The designer needs to work ahead of the choreographer who puts his ideas into reality by working with dancers. This process takes place first in rehearsal and then on stage and moves may be added, deleted or changed throughout this period. So might casting.

Although discussed to some extent beforehand, casting is basically a job for those frantic eight weeks before production. Christopher knew some of our dancers from the time he was here for *Saltarello* and this made the task a little easier. "Doing the casting is like a game of chess," adds Gary. "In this company, the dancers are good at giving me what I want," said Christopher. "They are conscientious about the characters and where they're coming from."

Because the production is set mid-20th Century, sword fights were not appropriate — it's more a case of martial arts, knives and baseball bats. For this, the company

employed a fight director. Because of films like *Lord of the Rings* and *The Last Samurai*, there are quite a few fight directors around, apparently. Working with dancers who are in such good control of their bodies is easier than working with actors without that specific training; though the dancers did have to be told to be less graceful!

This forum was a grand way to gain insights into this highlight production — the Royal New Zealand Ballet company's very own *Romeo and Juliet* and a worthy 50th Anniversary event.

They're great value, these forums! They give such a personal and close-up understanding of the theatrical process. Being aware of the nuances and some of the complications really increases your appreciation and enjoyment of a ballet. The crowded Green Room for R&J forum showed how many other people thought so too.

As well as the forum, the committee of Wellington Friends organised a Masterclass, produced a delicious lunch and managed to keep smiling!

Thank you, committee.

—From a Friend

News from Te Whaea

The Tales of Beatrix Potter"

Every year the New Zealand School of Dance presents a show catering especially for schools and this year we are opening it up to the public for one evening only.

Arts Laureate Russell Kerr's production of *The Tales of Beatrix Potter*, back by popular demand, is an enchanting outing for young and old alike.



When: 6pm, 10th October (1 hour duration)

Where: Te Whaea Theatre,
Te Whaea: National Dance & Drama Centre

Price: Adults \$9 Children \$5 –

Book on +4 380 - 1715 or email: karen@tewhaea.org.nz

Wellington Friends 2003/04 Committee

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Memories flood back

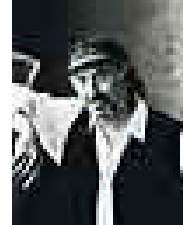
What a line-up for a 50th Anniversary celebration!

What **anecdotes!**

What *nostalgia!*

What laughs!

Legendary dancer Sir Jon Trimmer; former artistic director Harry Haythorne; ex-director NZ School of Dance Anne Rowse; designers Philip Markham and Raymond Boyce; composers David Farquhar and Jenny McLeod; and dance reviewer Jennifer Shennan who initiated the event.



Called *The First 50 Years*, the event was held on a Sunday afternoon as part of the 50th Celebrations in Lecture Theatre 1 (more user-friendly than it sounds), in the Old Government Buildings which is now Victoria University's Law School.

The event opened with a film of the historic performance *Prismatic Variations*. Produced by founder Poul Gnatt and Russell Kerr in 1959/60, the film was lent by Russell Kerr who couldn't be present. It opened the floodgates of memory for many present. Who were the dancers? What were the staging difficulties then? Who took the film?



It led to a fascinating discussion on dance heritage and the need to preserve these old classics, especially those that are unique to our company. Having a Festival of Classics every few years when such ballets were re-staged was discussed with enthusiasm.

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