Endnotes

1 C. Cummins, 'Review: Sun Music, The Australian Ballet', *The Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 9 October 1968.

2 M. Cook, *Swan Lake. The Making of a Ballet*, Golden Press, Sydney, 1978, pp. 65, 75.

3 E.H. Pask, *Ballet in Australia: The Second Act 1940–1980*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p. 287.

4 E. Westwood, The Australian Ballet, *Giselle* programme, 2006, p. 10.

5 Marilyn Rowe quoted in The Australian Ballet, *The Merry Widow* programme, 2011, p. 22.

6 Vicki Attard quoted in The Australian Ballet, *Madame Butterfly* programme, 2011, p. 18.

7 M. Potter, *A Passion For Dance*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1997 p. 135.

8 David McAllister quoted in The Australian Ballet, *Edge of Night* programme, 2010, p.4

Free events

Arts Centre Melbourne

Thursday 21 June 2012

Colin Peasley, Artist in Residence, The Australian Ballet discusses the works that helped shape The Australian Ballet in its formative years.

Wednesday 18 July 2012

Hugh Colman, Designer, discusses the creative process of designing costumes for The Australian Ballet.

Thursday 16 August 2012

David McAllister, Artistic Director and Nicolette Fraillon, Chief Conductor and Music Director, The Australian Ballet discuss 50 years of Australian Ballet performance.

Wednesday 29 August 2012

Stephen Baynes, Resident Choreographer, The Australian Ballet discusses the creative process of making a ballet.

Bookings essential
Phone 03 9281 8754 or email
spotlight@artscentremelbourne.com.au

Time 1pm to 2pm
Venue Gallery 1

Scheduled events are correct at the time of printing.
For further details and updates visit artscentremelbourne.com.au

State Library of New South Wales

Wednesday 14 November 2012

Colin Peasley, Artist in Residence, The Australian Ballet discusses the works that helped shape The Australian Ballet in its formative years.

Tuesday 27 November 2012

David McAllister, Artistic Director and Nicolette Fraillon, Chief Conductor and Music Director, The Australian Ballet discuss 50 years of Australian Ballet performance.

Tuesday 4 December 2012

Stephen Baynes, Resident Choreographer, The Australian Ballet discusses the creative process of making a ballet

Time 6pm to 7pm

Bookings essential
Phone (02) 9273 1770 or email
bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au

cover photo:
Natasha Kusen, The Australian Ballet
Serenade
Choreography G Balanchine
©The George Balanchine Trust.
Photograph Justin Smith 2004

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Time in Motion
50 Years of The Australian Ballet

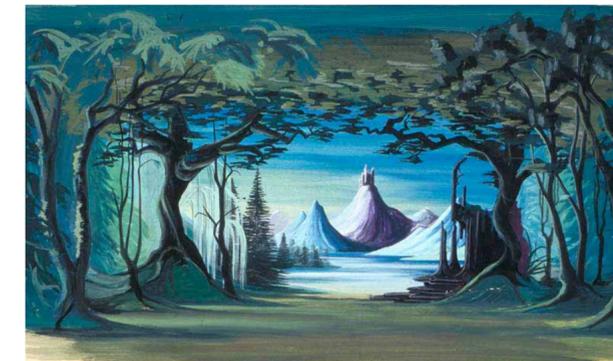Arts Centre Melbourne
9 June – 23 September 2012

State Library of New South Wales
12 November 2012 – 10 February 2013

Introduction

Time in Motion: 50 Years of The Australian Ballet celebrates the enduring style, strength and passion of The Australian Ballet and its creative output over fifty years. Drawn primarily from Arts Centre Melbourne's Performing Arts Collection and the archives of The Australian Ballet, this exhibition re-visits some of the company's most memorable works, illustrating its dynamic rise to the heights of international success.

The Australian Ballet debuted as the nation's first government-subsidised, professional ballet company in 1962. The prospect of full-time employment for Australian dancers and the subsequent establishment of The Australian Ballet School in 1964 were instrumental in developing a strong framework for the development of dance in this country. Under the guidance of Peggy van Praagh, the company was soon well established on the world stage, attracting the support and active participation of leading international artists and mounting highly successful tours overseas. The company's repertoire grew to encompass the great full-length classics as well as contemporary ballets created by major Australian and international choreographers, and now includes over 380 works.

Set design by Anne Fraser for *Swan Lake*,
Borovansky Ballet, 1957; also used by
The Australian Ballet, 1962
Gift of Anne Fraser, 1996
Arts Centre Melbourne,
Performing Arts Collection

In the beginning

The Australian Ballet took its first steps with the nineteenth-century classic *Swan Lake* at Her Majesty's Theatre in Sydney on 2 November 1962. The audience for this long awaited debut was a discerning one, cultivated over decades by the visits of leading international dancers, such as Adeline Genée, Anna Pavlova and members of the Ballets Russes companies. The sets and costumes for this production had previously been commissioned by Edouard Borovansky for his company's first full-length version of *Swan Lake* in 1957.

The success of The Australian Ballet's early performances owed much to the Borovansky Ballet and the classic European repertoire it had made popular with Australian audiences. Peggy van Praagh had led the Borovansky Ballet in its final years and was well positioned to take on her new role of Founding Artistic Director with The Australian Ballet. The works she selected for the company's early seasons set the scene for years to come and included popular classics from the Borovansky repertoire, with more recent ballets by leading international choreographers and brand new Australian commissions from a pool of immerging local talent.

Rex Reid's Melbourne Cup was the first work to be commissioned. Based on the inaugural running of the legendary horse race in 1861, *Melbourne Cup's* place in The Australian Ballet's first season fulfilled van Praagh's wish to present new repertoire featuring Australian themes. Two years later audiences were introduced to the darker aspects of Australian culture through Robert Helpmann's *The Display*. Using the courtship rituals of the male lyrebird, Helpmann explored the brutal perception of the Australian male in this one act work. Featuring a score by Malcolm Williamson and décor by Sidney Nolan, *The Display* proved to be a suitably home-grown showpiece for the company's first major international tour in 1965.

By this time The Australian Ballet had benefitted from van Praagh's world-wide connections, playing host to such famous names as Erik Bruhn, Sonia Arova, Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev. Its profile hit new heights overseas when van Praagh unveiled her new production of *Giselle* in Birmingham,England, on 10 November 1965. With Fonteyn and Nureyev in the lead roles, and sets and costumes designed by Kenneth Rowell, the production was an instant success, going on to win the Grand Prix of the City of Paris when it was performed there a week later.

Kenneth Rowell designed many of The Australian Ballet's most popular works in those formative years. His designs for *Coppélia* were originally commissioned by van Praagh for the Borovansky Ballet in 1960. This production became a firm favourite with Australian audiences and remained active in the company's repertoire until 1979. Rowell's designs for Sun Music were considered a 'magnificent achievement by critics when the ballet premiered in 1968'.[1] Choreographed by Helpmann, *Sun Music's* abstract themes of soil, mirage, growth, energy and destruction were drawn from Peter Sculthorpe's avant-garde score and gave the company its first non-narrative success.

Costume design by Kenneth Rowell for the title role of *Giselle*, The Australian Ballet, c.1965
Gift of The Australian Ballet, 1998
Arts Centre Melbourne, Performing Arts Collection

In production

The Australian Ballet's presentation of large-scale theatrical productions attracted the attention of influential guest artists and an emerging industry of highly skilled designers, costume and prop-makers, scenic painters and lighting technicians. When Helpmann joined van Praagh as Associate Artistic Director in 1965 he brought with him a wealth of theatrical experience from his early career with London's Vic-Wells Ballet and the Old Vic Theatre. His understanding of entertainment influenced the early development of the company and informed his decision to invite Rudolf Nureyev to stage his own production of *Don Quixote* with The Australian Ballet in 1970.

Nureyev's *Don Quixote* premiered as part of the Adelaide Festival that year, featuring Nureyev himself in the role of Basilio. A fast-paced, colourful work infused with Nureyev's technical prowess and sense of humour, *Don Quixote* was an instant success with audiences and Nureyev returned to make a film version with the company in 1972. The filming took place in three abandoned aircraft hangars at Melbourne's Essendon Airport, where the dancers, extras and substantial crew worked long into the night over five weeks to meet Nureyev's exacting standards. The film's world

premiere took place at the newly built Sydney Opera House in September 1973.

When Anne Woolliams took over as Artistic Director in 1976, The Australian Ballet was well prepared to realise her grand vision for a new production of *Swan Lake*. With thirteen years' experience as Assistant Director of the Stuttgart Ballet, Woolliams introduced Australian audiences to exciting new works by leading international choreographers such as Jiří Kylián and John Cranko. She took a more traditional approach to *Swan Lake*, retaining much of the original choreography, but worked closely with designer Tom Lingwood to adapt the fairytale narrative and emphasise the central theme of good versus evil. Lingwood's highly detailed designs for costumes, scenery, props, furniture, back drops and gauzes took over five weeks to produce.[2] At a cost exceeding all previous productions by The Australian Ballet, Woolliams' *Swan Lake* was a major investment for the company and a box-office success that ensured its future at the heart of the repertoire for twenty-five years.[3]

Maina Gielgud was appointed Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet in 1983 and became known for her love of classical ballet. She presented her own production of *The*

Sleeping Beauty with designer Hugh Colman in 1984. Like Woolliams, she remained true to the traditional form of the work, but modified aspects of Petipa's choreography to showcase particular strengths of the company. Gielgud took the same approach to *Giselle* in 1986, working with designer Peter Farmer to update the look and feel, while maintaining its appeal for a new generation of classical ballet fans. It was *The Nutcracker's* turn in 1992 and, keen to unburden the 100-year-old classic from its sugar-sweet trappings, Gielgud turned to choreographer Graeme Murphy.

Murphy was no stranger to the challenges of re-visiting historic works, having created his own interpretations of classic pieces from the Ballets Russes' repertoire. The traditional European themes and imagery of *The Nutcracker* held little appeal for him, until, in collaboration with designer Kristian Fredrikson, he found a way of making it relevant to an Australian audience by linking it with the story of the Ballets Russes in Australia. Murphy's *Nutcracker – The Story of Clara* has become an Australian classic, a daring departure from the original, but a calculated risk that paid off for The Australian Ballet.

Clockwise from left:
Graeme Murphy with Miranda Coney and artists of The Australian Ballet rehearsing *Nutcracker - The Story of Clara*, The Australian Ballet, 1992
Photograph by Jim McFarlane
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

Rudolf Nureyev with artists of The Australian Ballet during the making of the film *Don Quixote*, The Australian Ballet, 1972
Photograph by Paul Cox
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

Joanna Seidel and Garry Cox constructing costumes for *Swan Lake*, The Australian Ballet, 1977
Photograph by Michael Cook
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

In character

Many of The Australian Ballet's most popular works have a story to tell. The female characters at the heart of these stories vary from heart-broken heroines to mischievous village girls, and require a highly skilled balance of drama and dance if they are to be performed well.

The title role of the classic ballet *Giselle* has been a milestone in the careers of the world's leading dancers since it was first performed by Carlotta Grisi at the Paris Opera in 1841. *Giselle's* story is played out over two acts as she slips from the heady heights of true love to the depths of betrayal. Her ensuing madness and ultimate demise makes Act One a harrowing experience. The ghostly movement sustained through Act Two, when Giselle emerges from the grave, requires a dramatic shift in mood and a level of control that makes it one of the most demanding roles in the classical ballet repertoire.[4] The Australian Ballet has produced many memorable interpretations of the role, starting with those of Kathleen Gorham, Elaine Fifield, and Marilyn Jones in van Praagh's award-winning production of 1965. Gielgud's re-staging of *Giselle* in 1986 introduced a new generation of dancers to the role and featured heart-breaking performances, including that of

Fiona Tonkin, who continues to inspire dancers taking on the role today.

Coppélia remains similarly intact as a traditional work and Swanilda's battle to regain control of her fiancé's affections provides dancers with an opportunity to explore a more light-hearted and comical character. For van Praagh, Swanilda was a life-long companion. She first danced the role in 1942 with Sadler's Wells (later Royal) Ballet, developing a strong association with the ballet over many acclaimed performances. She introduced her own production of *Coppélia* into The Australian Ballet repertoire in 1962 and re-visited it in 1979, calling upon film and theatre director George Ogilvie to dampen the famously sunny spirits of the ballet and add dramatic depth to the characters.

Helpmann's decision to translate Franz Lehár's famous operetta *The Merry Widow* into dance in 1976 appeared to be out of step with the worldwide trend for more serious dance works. Ever the showman, he directed the production like a Hollywood film. Choreography by Ronald Hynd, *The Merry Widow* had a sweeping score arranged by John Lanchbery, extravagant sets and costumes designed by Desmond

Heeley and a cast of glamorous characters taking on the role today.

Marilyn Rowe was in the early stages of her career when chosen to create the role of Hanna Glawari, and found her to be 'a complex character, a very merry widow, yes, but beneath the dazzling surface, very vulnerable'.[5] The role of Hanna requires a sense of worldliness that comes with maturity and some of the most memorable performances have been from dancers nearing the end of their career.

In 1995 The Australian Ballet's resident choreographer Stanton Welch embarked on his own adaptation of an opera, choosing Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. He worked with designer Peter Farmer to create a strong sense of time, place and character for the story of Cio-Cio-San and her tragic fate at the hands of Pinkerton, the American naval officer. Vicki Attard created the role of Cio-Cio-San and found Farmer's costumes an integral part of the process. Farmer's choice of soft pastel shades and layers of delicate silk chiffon and organza emphasised the fragile nature of the character and helped Attard achieve the 'ethereal and weightless illusion' required for the role.[6]

In the studio

The Australian Ballet has continued to commission cutting-edge works by leading international and Australian choreographers over its fifty-year history, maintaining an active participation in the worldwide development of classical ballet as an art form. This dynamic body of work has unearthed a new wave of Australian choreographic talent and a collaborative spirit that has generated groundbreaking moments in the history of Australian dance.

In 1973 van Praagh approached world-renowned American choreographer Glen Tetley to create a new work for the company. Famous for his ability to fuse classical and modern dance, Tetley took four of the company's principal dancers – Marilyn Rowe, Carolyn Rappel, Gary Norman and John Meehan – into the studio and created *Gemini*. His style was new to the dancers and required a level of learning that went beyond steps to a whole new way of moving. *Gemini's* success marked a turning point for The Australian Ballet, proving that both the company and its audience were ready to take on cutting-edge contemporary works from around the world.

While remaining open to new challenges from abroad, The Australian Ballet has always nurtured choreographic talent from within. Graeme Murphy was still a dancer with the company when given a twelve-month residency in 1976. He went on to choreograph a number of works, including *Beyond Twelve* in 1980, in which he explored the ageing

process, a recurring theme throughout his extensive body of work. Stephen Baynes and Stanton Welch were both leading soloists with the company when appointed Resident Choreographers in 1995. Although markedly different in their approach, they both share a deeply held belief in the relevance of classical ballet as a means of expression in a modern world. For Baynes this is demonstrated through the purity of classical technique and the serenity it evokes in works such as *Beyond Bach*, which premiered to critical acclaim in 1995. For Welch it is shown through works like *Divergence*, a masterful blend of classical and contemporary ballet fuelled by the innate 'twentieth-century frenetic energy' he is known for. [7]

Ross Stretton took over as Artistic Director in 1997 and introduced a number of contemporary works by leading international choreographers, including James Kudelka, Twyla Tharp and William Forsythe. In 1997 he instigated one of the company's most successful collaborations when he approached Stephen Page, Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, Australia's premier Indigenous performing arts company, to choreograph a work to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Although unfamiliar with the score, Page welcomed the opportunity to unite the two companies, bringing costume designer Jennifer Irwin and set designer Peter England with him on the journey. Inspired by the wild extremes of Stravinsky's music, he worked intensively with the dancers to combine two vastly different forms of movement into

one. The outcome was *Rites*, a work firmly rooted in the timeless Australian landscape that manages to transcend the origins of each company to become one truly original contemporary ballet.

David McAllister was a leading classical dancer with The Australian Ballet when *Rites* made its historic debut. He was appointed Artistic Director of the company in 2001 and made his mark early by commissioning Graeme Murphy to produce a new *Swan Lake*. Murphy took an innovative approach, constructing a modern-day narrative linked to the breakdown of Princess Diana's royal marriage as the basis for a radical departure from the company's previous productions. It was a triumph, and as *Swan Lake* made its third transition through the company's repertoire, the seeds were sown for his future re-imaginings of *Firebird* in 2009 and *Romeo and Juliet* in 2011.

McAllister has introduced a number of innovative new works to Australian audiences. In 2009 he invited British choreographer Wayne McGregor to create a work as part of the worldwide celebrations of the Ballets Russes' centenary. McGregor responded with *Dyad 1929*, taking dancers on a journey of self-discovery that echoed the making of Tetley's *Gemini* decades earlier. McAllister continues to showcase the work of emerging choreographers from the company, including Tim Harbour, who conceived *Halcyon* for the company in 2010 with a commissioned score by composer Gerard Brophy.

Artists of The Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre rehearsing *Rites*, The Australian Ballet, 1997
Photograph by Tim Webster
Purchase, 1999
Arts Centre Melbourne, Performing Arts Collection

Stephen Baynes and Daniel Gaudiello rehearsing *Constant Variants*, The Australian Ballet, 2007
Photograph by Christopher Tovo
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

Stephen Baynes and Daniel Gaudiello rehearsing *Constant Variants*, The Australian Ballet, 2007
Photograph by Christopher Tovo
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

Vivienne Wong in *Warumuk – in the dark night*, The Australian Ballet, 2012
Photograph by Lynette Wills
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

Alice Topp and James O'Hara in *There's Definitely a Prince Involved*, The Australian Ballet, 2012
Photograph by Lynette Wills
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

Lana Jones and Adam Bull in *Narrative of Nothing*, The Australian Ballet, 2012
Photograph by Lynette Wills
Image courtesy The Australian Ballet

In the moment

As David McAllister entered his second decade directing the artistic vision of The Australian Ballet he embarked on a new journey with Murphy and Page, uniting them in a triple bill with Chunky Move's Gideon Obarzanek. The three choreographers share a passion for dance that has led them to form their own contemporary dance companies, where they have developed works of international renown. The combination of Murphy's *The Narrative of Nothing*, Obarzanek's *There's Definitely a Prince Involved* and Page's *Warumuk – in the Dark Night* made for an innovative mix of styles and reflected the company's ability to respond to different 'creative voices'[8].

The successful blending and dynamic delivery of such diverse choreographic talent says as much about The Australian Ballet in its 50th year as it does about its audience and the country it represents. The company has much to celebrate in 2012 and as a fitting tribute to Peggy van Praagh and those who have helped realise her vision, The Australian Ballet will unveil a brand new version of *Swan Lake*. The audience may have changed since the company first presented *Swan Lake* in 1962 but the expectations are just as high and the collective need for dance in this country is stronger than ever.