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**CONTACT:
SHAUNA TYSOR
713 535 3226
KIM ESPINOSA
713 535 3224
pr@houstonballet.org**

HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES 2011-2012 SEASON

**World Premieres by Stanton Welch in March 2012
and Nicolo Fonte in May 2012 Highlight Season**

Company Premiere of Mark Morris's *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes* in May 2012

Ai-Gul Gaisina Stages New Production of *Giselle* in September 2011

**Classics Return to the Stage: Sir Frederick Ashton's *Les Patineurs*, George Balanchine's
Theme and Variations, Sir Kenneth MacMillan's *Song of the Earth*,
and Jerome Robbins's *In the Night***

HOUSTON, TEXAS - Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch has announced the company's 2011-2012 season. Four new works enter Houston Ballet's repertoire, including world premieres by Stanton Welch in March 2012 and Nicolo Fonte in May 2012, company premiere of Mark Morris's **Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes**, as well as a new staging of **Giselle** by the Kirov-trained dancer Ai-Gul Gaisina in September 2011.

"The 2011-2012 season is very exciting. We have reached a milestone in Houston Ballet's history, and we will be ushering in a new era with our move into the Center for Dance in the spring of 2011," comments Mr. Welch. "We have three of the most famous, beautiful, and moving story ballets – **Romeo and Juliet**, **Cinderella**, and **Giselle**. Our orchestra will also play two great scores by Prokofiev in **Cinderella** and **Romeo and Juliet**, which makes for exciting performances musically as well."

In a move designed to propel Houston Ballet to the next phase of its development, the company broke ground on July 15, 2009 on the Center for Dance, a new 115,000 square-foot facility located in downtown Houston. The \$48 million building's grand opening will be April 9, 2011. The six-story building will boast nine dance studios, a dance laboratory for presentations as well as rehearsals, and artistic, administrative and support facilities for Houston Ballet and its academy. The new facility will more than double the space that Houston Ballet has at its current home, and become the largest professional dance company facility in the United States.

***Return of the Masters* Launches the 2011-2012 Season in September 2011**

From September 8-18, 2011, Houston Ballet launches its 2011-2012 season with a mixed repertory program entitled **Return of the Masters**, featuring Sir Frederick Ashton's winter wonderland **Les Patineurs**, Sir Kenneth MacMillan's poetic **Song of the Earth**, and Jerome Robbins's **In the Night**, an emotional look at relationships.

"**Return of the Masters** features treasures from Houston Ballet's past, masterworks in our repertoire that the company has not performed in at least a decade," states Mr. Welch, "All three works are significant in ballet history."

Sir Frederick Ashton's charming and lighthearted **Les Patineurs** is a one-act divertissement, which transforms dancers into skaters, who on a crisp winter evening, waltz on an ice-covered pond. The stage is full with a party of joyous ice skaters, couples romantically skating hand-in-hand, a teenager showing off his skating ability to the crowd, and beginners struggling not to fall on the ice. The wintery atmosphere is complete with falling snow and fur lined costumes. **Les Patineurs** showcases the wit and warmth of Ashton's style for which *The New York Times* enthuses: "**Les Patineurs** simply dazzled by its prettiness."

Set to music by Giacomo Meyerbeer, selections from the opera *Le Prophete* and *L'Etoile du nord*, arranged and orchestrated by Constant Lambert, **Les Patineurs** was an instant success at its Sadler's Wells Theatre premiere on February 16, 1937. The 27 minute ballet's scenic and

costume designs are by William Chappell, with lighting design by Christina R. Giannelli. **Les Patineurs** received its company premiere in 1989, and was last performed in Houston in 2000.

Born in Ecuador in 1904 and raised in Peru, Sir Frederick Ashton was founder choreographer of The Royal Ballet and served as director of that company from 1963-1970, creating a body of 80 major works that have become the cornerstone of the British ballet repertory, including **Symphonic Variations** (1946), **Cinderella** (1948), **La Fille mal gardée** (1960), and **A Month in the Country** (1976). He lifted English ballet to a worldwide reputation by helping to shape and define “the English style:” a soft, fluid, lyrical, musically sensitive classicism. The English critic Alastair Macaulay has written, “The ballet style shown in Ashton’s ballets is a particularly intricate one, with upper and lower body maintaining a lively activity, and many internal embellishments of head, arms, épaulement and footwork.” Ashton was also the founding choreographer of another seminal British dance troupe, Ballet Rambert, now known as Rambert Dance Company, Britain’s oldest professional dance ensemble. He died on August 18, 1988, in Sussex, England. Along with George Balanchine, Ashton is regarded as one of two greatest ballet choreographers of the twentieth century.

Rarely performed in America, Sir Kenneth MacMillan’s **Song of the Earth** is a symphonic masterpiece of music and dance, inspired by an ancient Chinese poem from the 8th century T’ang Dynasty. MacMillan described **Song of the Earth** succinctly: “A man and a woman; death takes the man; they both return to her and at the end of the ballet, we find that in death there is the promise of renewal.”

“During the 1980s, Sir Kenneth had a very significant influence on the company when he served as artistic associate and gave Houston Ballet five of his works,” remarks Mr. Welch. “Performing only one of the three leading roles in **Song of the Earth** is a great achievement for any dancer, both artistically and technically.”

Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (*Song of the Earth*) is an orchestral masterpiece epitomizing the very spirit of late Romanticism, featuring a large scale orchestra with 63 players, a solo tenor and a solo mezzo-soprano. The piece expresses a dualism of feeling – ecstatic pleasure shadowed by dark foreboding – and the performance of this work serves as the

crowning musical achievement of the Houston Ballet Orchestra and music director Ermanno Florio. The text of the songs, in German, from ancient Chinese poems is bitter-sweet reflections on human joys, concluding with a farewell to the world.

MacMillan had long contemplated a **Song of the Earth** ballet but was at first refused permission to stage it by the board of directors of London's Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, who disapproved of using Mahler's work for dance. Premiered by the Stuttgart Ballet on November 7, 1965, MacMillan's choreography for **Song of the Earth** was different from anything he had devised before. He introduced Orientalisms to pointe work, asking the dancers to slide with flat feet, tilt their torsos while bending their arms at the elbows and wrists. In the song *Of Youth* the women kneel demurely as if by water, later changing to upside-down positions. The central couple in a group of light-hearted young people are blissfully unaware of their own mortality. Der Ewige – the Messenger of Death – is among them with a colorless half-mask over his face.

At the start of the ballet the Messenger shadows the leading man; he is present throughout the ballet briefly at the end of every song. (MacMillan added him in the fourth song in 1990.) The contemplative second song, *Autumn Solitude*, reveals the leading woman's loneliness, her fear of death and her longing for a companion. She is the 'outsider,' sensing that she does not belong to the group who amuse themselves during the songs that follow. In a long pas de deux she finds a lover, only to lose him to death. In her final solo, she accepts her loss, returns to her isolation and resigns herself to a fate beyond her control: the inevitability of death.

The ballet is set against a plain cyclorama backdrop with colors changing through blues to pale green-yellow. The dancers are adorned in simple tunics, T-shirts and tights in blue-green and purple shades. Der Ewige appears in dark grey with a flesh-coloured half-mask. Writing in [International Dictionary of Ballet](#), critic Noël Goodwin observed, "Kenneth MacMillan's intensely musical response to Mahler's song-symphony achieved what is widely regarded as one of his finest ballets and a great work by any standard." The work went on to enter the repertoires of leading companies across the globe, including London's Royal Ballet, the Paris Opera Ballet, The Australian Ballet, and the National Ballet of Canada.

Houston Ballet last performed **Song of the Earth** in 1988. The company has five works by MacMillan in its repertoire: the one-act pieces **Song of the Earth**, **Gloria**, **Elite Syncopations**, and **Solitaire**; and the full-length **Manon**.

Sir Kenneth MacMillan was born in Dunfermline, Scotland in 1929. His strength of purpose can be traced back to the very beginning of his career when he read an advertisement announcing that scholarships for boys were available at the Sadler's Wells (now Royal) Ballet School. He was determined to make his way there and he did. MacMillan completed his dance training at the Sadler's Wells School and in 1946 became a founding member of the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, a new company formed by Ninette de Valois. In 1966, MacMillan received an invitation to direct the ballet company at the Deutsche Oper in West Berlin. Encouraged to accept by Dame Ninette, he took over the company and staged his own productions of **The Sleeping Beauty** and **Swan Lake**. He also created the one-act ballet **Anastasia** which was subsequently to become the third act of his full-length **Anastasia**. MacMillan had proved himself as the natural successor to Ashton as director of The Royal Ballet, a post he assumed (at first in association with John Field) at the beginning of the 1970-1971 season. He received his knighthood in the 1983 Birthday Honors. In 1983, former Houston Ballet Artistic Director Ben Stevenson asked that he serve as Houston Ballet's artistic associate, a position he held until his death in 1992 at the age of 63.

Famed American choreographer Jerome Robbins's **In the Night** is a beautiful and poignant one-act ballet portraying the relationships of three couples evoking moods ranging from romantic serenity to agitation and aggression before the six dancers are united for a final ensemble. Set to Frederic Chopin's *Piano Nocturnes, Opus 27, No. 1; Opus 55, Nos. 1 and 2; and Opus 9, No. 2*. New York City Ballet premiered **In the Night** on January 29, 1970.

New York-born choreographer Jerome Robbins, one of the first great American ballet masters, had a wide-ranging career in the fields of both theater and dance – as a performer and choreographer in ballet and musical theater, and as a director and choreographer in theater, movies, television and opera. In a career that spanned five decades, he won four Tony Awards, two Academy Awards, an Emmy, and countless other awards for his achievements. He joined Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) in 1940 and choreographed his first work, **Fancy**

Free, for that company in 1944. This was followed by **Interplay** (1945) and **Facsimile** (1946), after which he embarked on a prolific and enormously successful career as a choreographer and later as a director of Broadway musicals and plays. He was simultaneously creating ballets for New York City Ballet, which he joined in 1949 as associate director with George Balanchine. Among his outstanding works for that company were **The Guests** (1949), **The Age of Anxiety** (1951), **The Cage** (1951), **The Pied Piper** (1951), **Afternoon of a Faun** (1953), **Dances at a Gathering** (1969), **The Goldberg Variations** (1971) and **Glass Pieces** (1983). Houston Ballet has three works by Jerome Robbins in its repertory: **The Concert**, which entered the company's repertory in 2007; **Afternoon of a Faun**, which received its company premiere in 2008; and **In the Night**, which the company first performed in 1987.

Giselle Brings Passion And Romance To The Stage;
Houston Ballet Revives The World's Most Famous Romantic Ballet

From September 22-October 2, 2011, Houston Ballet presents a moving new staging of **Giselle** by celebrated Russian ballerina Ai-Gul Gaisina and artistic director Stanton Welch's critically acclaimed **Indigo**. **Giselle** is one of the oldest ballets still performed, and its movement style contrasts sharply with the speed and attack of **Indigo**, the first work that Stanton Welch created for Houston Ballet in 1999.

One of the most famous and widely performed works of the Romantic era, **Giselle** tells the story of a beautiful peasant girl deceived by Count Albrecht, her transformation into a Wili (the ghosts of women betrayed on their wedding day) and her forgiveness of her errant lover which results in his salvation. The ballet was choreographed by Jules Perrot and Jean Coralli to a commissioned score by Adolphe Adam, and it originally premiered in Paris on June 28, 1841.

"I hope that the lyrical, delicate, and grave beauty of **Giselle** will stir the emotions of audiences of all ages," comments Ms. Gaisina on her staging. "If there is one story ballet that will be a benchmark for ballet lover's knowledge, it will always be **Giselle**. I hope my contribution to the important piece of art will be a meaningful one."

Born in Kazan in the USSR and educated in Leningrad at the famed Vaganova Choreographic Institute (Kirov Ballet School) Ai-Gul Gaisina graduated from the class of Naima Valieva Baltacheva. Travelling throughout South America, Cuba, Europe and Australasia, she partnered the legendary Alexander Godunov, before joining the Stanislavsky Ballet Theatre in Moscow. In 1973, Ms. Gaisina left Russia and joined The Australian Ballet. In 1983 Ms. Gaisina joined The Australian Ballet School where she taught for 10 years before joining The Australian Ballet once more as a guest teacher and coach. Ms. Gaisina has taught at The Royal Danish Ballet, Houston Ballet and Hong Kong Ballet. In 2009 Ms. Gaisina danced the role of "Clara - the elder" with The Australian Ballet in Graeme Murphy's highly acclaimed production of **Nutcracker - The Story of Clara**. In July 2010, Ms. Gaisina staged her own production of **Don Quixote** for The Australian Ballet's Dancers Company.

Giselle has played a seminal role in the history of Houston Ballet. **Giselle** was the first full-length classic that Houston Ballet Foundation staged in 1967, featuring superstar Carla Fracci, a legendary Giselle of the era, and Erik Bruhn, one of the world's most heroic *danseur nobles*, in a production supported by student dancers from Houston Ballet's Academy and from other area dance schools. The production was a success and inspired Houston balletomanes to launch a major fund drive. By 1968, the foundation gave the go-ahead for the creation of a professional company. In May 1969, the sixteen dancers of Houston Ballet's professional company gave their first Houston performance at Jones Hall for the Performing Arts.

Also on the program is the revival of Mr. Welch's critically acclaimed, athletic pure-dance piece, **Indigo** (1999), a signature work that Houston Ballet has performed extensively, including on the company's tour to the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in 2003. Set to music by Antonio Vivaldi, **Indigo** is a spectacular showcase for the strength, speed, and attack of Houston Ballet's dancers. The ballet examines the vagaries of romantic relationships as four couples come together, fall in love, fight, and exchange partners. Reviewing the work at its premiere, Molly Glentzer of the *Houston Chronicle* wrote, "In the sleek and stunning **Indigo**, Welch put eight dancers through a warp-speed deconstruction of classical ballet movements, matched to virtually every beat of two cello concertos by Antonio Vivaldi...**Indigo** fairly crackled with sensuous energy." (March 6, 1999)

The Holiday Season Begins with Houston Ballet's *The Nutcracker*

From November 25-December 27, 2011, Houston Ballet will bring Texas its most joyous holiday gift with its beloved production of Ben Stevenson's **The Nutcracker**, a Houston holiday tradition. A wonderful ballet for the entire family, **The Nutcracker** is the perfect way to introduce young children to the power and beauty of classical dance. Tchaikovsky's magical score, Desmond Heeley's fairytale scenery and Mr. Stevenson's vibrantly theatrical staging combine to create one of the most visually stunning productions of **The Nutcracker** in the world today.

The Nutcracker tells the story of a little girl named Clara who is given a magical nutcracker doll on Christmas Eve. She encounters the frightful rat king before embarking on a journey through the Land of Snow and the Kingdom of Sweets. Young and old alike will experience the production's many special effects, including the Christmas tree that "grows" to 40 feet, 200 pounds of "snow" falling during the snow scene and the firing of a canon on stage. Molly Glentzer, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle*, wrote, "You'd have to be a Scrooge not to surrender to the spirit."

Houston Ballet's *Jubilee of Dance*: A One-Night-Only Extravaganza

On Friday, December 2, 2011, Houston Ballet presents its seventh annual **Jubilee of Dance**, a special one-night-only performance showcasing the talent and artistry of the company dancers in a program of high-energy excerpts from signature works and beloved classics. *Houston Chronicle* dance critic Molly Glentzer called the 2006 **Jubilee of Dance** "the event of the season," noting, "The audience gave it a rousing standing ovation."

Stanton Welch's *Cinderella* Is A Modern Take On A Classic Fairy Tale

From February 23-March 4, 2012, Houston Ballet presents Stanton Welch's staging of **Cinderella**, which was originally created for The Australian Ballet in 1997. A fresh new take on the familiar tale, **Cinderella** features lavish scenery and spectacular costumes by the late New Zealand designer Kristian Fredrickson. In Mr. Welch's staging, Cinderella is no downtrodden waif, but a gutsy tomboy who stands up for herself to fight against her stepsisters, and in the end chooses love over money in a twist to suit the 21st century.

Houston Ballet presented the American premiere of Mr. Welch's production of **Cinderella** in February 2008. Writing in *Arts Houston Magazine* in April 2008, critic Nancy Wozny pronounced the work "one rousing and very relevant ballet," observing, "Welch combined pathos, following the dark tenor of Prokofiev's score, with sharp wit and full bodied characters....Kristian Fredrikson's glorious storybook setting and luscious parade of gold-trimmed black gowns kept the thread alive."

The music of Serge Prokofiev's famous score for **Cinderella** inspired Mr. Welch to choreograph the ballet. "I first fell in love with **Cinderella** through its music. I was able to find a story of my own through the Prokofiev score, without seeing a ballet version until much later," he observed. In fashioning his scenario for the ballet, Mr. Welch drew upon several interpretations of Cinderella: the Brothers Grimm's dark fairy tale version *Aschenputtel* ("ash girl"), Gioacchino Rossini's famous 1817 opera, and the traditional English pantomime version of Cinderella, with its lovable servant, Buttons.

It was his brother Damien who indirectly inspired Stanton Welch to re-conceive the traditional version of Cinderella. Damien was appearing in The Australian Ballet School as Dandini, the Prince's assistant. "I just didn't like the prince," Mr. Welch remembers, laughing. "I thought that she should marry his valet Dandini."

At the end of Mr. Welch's staging, Cinderella finds true love not with the handsome, narcissistic prince, but with his mild-mannered valet, Dandini. "I think that the subtle, implicit message of the traditional Cinderella story -- that someone will magically appear to rescue you from a bad situation -- is not a great message to send to a young child. It's about standing up for yourself, making your own decisions, choosing your own path, your own love," commented Mr. Welch.

In the spring of 1997, critic Patricia Laughlin from *Dance International*, observed, “The highlight of the year so far has been the world premiere of Stanton Welch's new version of **Cinderella** for The Australian Ballet. I find it by far the most interesting version of this work that I have seen. Although it has romance, beauty and humor, Welch has also drawn on the dark, almost sinister thread which runs through Prokofiev's musical score....Each time I saw this ballet, I enjoyed it more. People were leaving the theatre bubbling with enthusiasm, and many were heard to say, ‘I would love to see it again.’”

The production includes lavish wigs and 207 sumptuous costumes using materials ranging from silk, lace and laser fabrics to heavy tweed, stretch denim and lycra. Mr. Fredrickson also created a series of lavish and spectacular ball gowns for the stepmother and the stepsisters, who are portrayed by men who dance on pointe.

Mr. Fredrickson created the sets and costumes for many of Stanton Welch’s ballets including: **Of Blessed Memory** (1991) **Cinderella** (1997) and **The Sleeping Beauty** (2005) for The Australian Ballet; and for Houston Ballet, the **Pecos Bill** section of **Tales of Texas** (2004) and **Swan Lake** (2006), the final production of his long and distinguished career before his death in 2005. In addition to Mr. Welch’s staging, Mr. Fredrickson designed two other productions of the work: a staging of Sir Frederick Ashton’s version for The Australian Ballet in 1972 and a production by English choreographer Jack Carter for the Royal New Zealand Ballet in 1992.

Rock, Roll & Tutus:

Christopher Bruce’s *Rooster*, Stanton Welch’s *Divergence* and World Premiere

From February 8-18, 2012, Houston Ballet’s exhilarating winter repertory program, **Rock, Roll & Tutus**, features a world premiere by Stanton Welch choreographed to highlight the strengths of Houston Ballet dancers, as well as revivals of Christopher Bruce’s **Rooster**, a fast-paced romp of machismo and nostalgia set to music by The Rolling Stones, and Mr. Welch’s sexy and explosive look at the mechanics of ballet in **Divergence**.

Rooster, the smash hit by Houston Ballet Associate Choreographer Christopher Bruce, received its American premiere by Houston Ballet in 1995. Set to eight classic tracks by The Rolling Stones, including “Sympathy for the Devil,” “Paint it Black,” and “Ruby Tuesday,” **Rooster** has become a signature piece for the company. Hailed by *The Dallas Morning News* as “fast, furious and wild,” Houston Ballet has electrified audiences from Shanghai to South Carolina with this work.

On its surface, **Rooster** is a riotous evocation of the mating rituals of hip young Londoners during the “Swinging Sixties.” But critics delving deeper into the work have found other layers of meaning. At its wildly successful American premiere, Margaret Putnam, dance critic for *The Dallas Morning News*, wrote, “On a superficial level, the subject [of **Rooster**] is machismo and vanity, about the strut and swagger of young, cocksure males. But behind the bravado is despair, the sense that these youths are staring straight into a future of picket lines and cramped lives. **Rooster** even manages to transcend the music, no small feat.” (May 28, 1995)

Originally premiered by the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève on October 10, 1991, **Rooster** has been performed to overwhelming popular and critical acclaim worldwide. The London opening of the ballet at Sadler’s Wells Theater in November 1992 was a glittering international event. Prince Andrew was in attendance, as was Rolling Stones front man Mick Jagger. When asked what he thought of **Rooster** after the performance, Mr. Jagger responded, “I love it! It was great. I was looking at them and thinking ‘that’s a good move, I must nick that.’” He brought his children back to see a matinee performance of **Rooster**, and hired three of the **Rooster** dancers to appear in his next video.

The response of the public and the press to **Rooster** was equally enthusiastic. At a performance in Liverpool, *The London Times* reported that a group of teenagers greeted the piece with deafening cheers. Judith MacKrell of London’s *The Independent* called **Rooster** “a sensation,” writing that “sex, machismo, parody, and deep, deep nostalgia hung in the air.” She also praised Mr. Bruce’s “effortless reams of driving, exhilarating dance.”

Mr. Welch will reprise his sexy, explosive **Divergence**. Set to Georges Bizet's *L' Arlésienne*, *Suites No. 1 & 2* and featuring Vanessa Leyonhjelm's provocative industrial strength costumes, Mr. Welch's **Divergence** is classical dance with a punch. It is an extraordinarily demanding bravura showpiece for the entire company.

The work, which was created for The Australian Ballet in 1994, had its Houston premiere in 2004, and has emerged as a signature work for the company in performances from Canada to Spain. Molly Glentzer, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle*, exclaimed, "Wow. Am I just giddy with love at first sight, or is **Divergence** the coolest thing Houston Ballet has ever done? If this is 21st century ballet, bring it on." (February 28, 2004)

Mr. Welch comments, "For years I had heard that classical ballet was dying; staggering along like some prehistoric creature, tiredly dragging its old and limited repertoire around. I have never believed this. I was raised on the beauty of classical ballet and have never seen its limitations.

"I wanted to take classical ballet, and diverge from it. The first image in the work is what one would consider very traditional classical ballet. From then on, I kept branching off into different paths. I wanted to show the women working as hard as the men. I wanted to show the inside of ballet, to make it look difficult and athletic. I wanted to show the pain and the strength and the difficulty behind what the dancers were doing, rather than hide it.

"**Divergence** reveals the mechanics of ballet. So much of classical ballet is about making hard things look easy, so I let the dancers make the hard things look hard – and then made them harder."

Nicolo Fonte Creates His First Work for Houston Ballet in

Made in America in May 2012

From May 24-June 3, 2012, Houston Ballet presents its spring mixed repertory program titled **Made in America** featuring a world premiere by Nicolo Fonte, a company premiere of Mark Morris's **Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes**, and a revival of George Balanchine's tribute to Imperial Russian Ballet, **Theme and Variations**.

“I am excited for **Made in America** because all three works will truly be made in America. We are looking forward to having Mark Morris in Houston and we have built up our Balanchine repertoire significantly over the years so it will be nice to return to **Theme and Variations**. The piece was one of the first Balanchine works we performed after I became artistic director, along with **Apollo** and **La Valse**. It will be nice to see how far we have come in understanding Balanchine’s work,” remarks Mr. Welch.

Nicolo Fonte will create his first piece for Houston Ballet. Mr. Fonte is known for his daring and original approach to dance, noted by critics for a unique movement language as well as a highly developed fusion of ideas, dance and design.

“Fonte is an exhilarating choreographer, and I have enjoyed the works I have seen by him. His works are typically very challenging for the male dancers and will be very stylistically challenging for all our artists,” states Mr. Welch.

Born in Brooklyn New York, Mr. Fonte started dancing at the age of 14. He studied at The Joffrey Ballet School in New York, San Francisco Ballet and New York City Ballet Schools while completing a Bachelor’s Degree of Fine Arts at SUNY Purchase. After graduation, Mr. Fonte danced with Peridance in New York City, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal and Nacho Duato's Compañia Nacional de Danza in Madrid. In 2000 Mr. Fonte retired from performing and has gone on to choreograph for numerous international companies including The Dutch National Ballet and The Australian Ballet. He received a Choo San Goh Award for his 2002 collaboration with Pacific Northwest Ballet, **Almost Tango**, of which R. M. Campbell of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote, “Fonte is a thinker, an architect who creates the new rather than reinvent the old. He is a master of manipulating space and creating relationships.”

Inspired by the poem *A Song to Celia*, by Ben Jonson, Mark Morris’s **Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes** is a work for 12 dancers set to 13 etudes for piano by Virgil Thomson. It was commissioned by Mikhail Baryshnikov as Mark Morris’s third work for the American Ballet Theatre in 1988.

The dancers are dressed in white and perform Mr. Morris's choreography in small groups, solos and pas de deux that form together an unpredictable, yet mesmerizing piece. Allan Ulrich, dance critic for *The San Francisco Examiner*, observed, "The freshness of the inspiration, the consistent upturning of artistic convention, the sheer bravado of it all, is unprecedented, joyful and so volatile you fear it will evaporate before your eyes."

Mr. Morris's creativity began flourishing when he formed the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980. From 1988-1991 he was the director of dance at La Monnaie, Brussels and in 1990 he founded the White Oak Dance Project with Mikhail Baryshnikov. He has choreographed works for San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre and Boston Ballet, among others. His work is currently in the repertory of Houston Ballet, Ballet West, Dutch National Ballet, New Zealand Ballet, English National Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet and The Washington Ballet. His opera credits include directing and choreographing productions for The Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, English National Opera, Gotham Chamber Opera and the Royal Opera, London. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, American Philosophical Society, and the subject of a biography by Joan Acocella (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). In 2001, he opened the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn, New York, his company's first permanent headquarters in the U.S.

Rounding out the program is George Balanchine's **Theme and Variations**, the grandest tribute to his alma mater, the Imperial Russian Ballet, which Houston Ballet last performed in 2004. Balanchine originally created the work for American Ballet Theatre Principal Dancers Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch, and it premiered on November 26, 1947 at the City Center in New York City.

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, George Balanchine (1904-1983) is regarded as the foremost contemporary choreographer in the world of ballet. Balanchine served as its ballet master and principal choreographer for New York City Ballet from 1948 until his death in 1983. Balanchine's more than 400 dance works include **Serenade** (1934), **Concerto Barocco** (1941),

The Nutcracker (1954), **Symphony in Three Movements** (1972), **Stravinsky Violin Concerto** (1972), **Vienna Waltzes** (1977), and **Mozartiana** (1981).

Although Balanchine once said, “I am more American than Russian,” he still turned to the music of the great Russian composers, notably Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, for his ballets. My teachers were people who knew Tchaikovsky, who talked with him....My first time on stage was in a Tchaikovsky ballet....Thanks to **The Sleeping Beauty**, I fell in love with ballet. [Tchaikovsky] is like a father to me. In everything that I did to Tchaikovsky’s music, I sensed his help.”

Set to the music of Tchaikovsky’s *Suite No. 3, in G*, **Theme and Variations** explores classic ballet training, focusing on preparatory movements that were developed to train and warm-up the dancer's body. Taking these steps further, Balanchine produced some very challenging choreography.

Themes and Variations was intended, as Balanchine wrote, “to evoke that great period in classical dancing when Russian ballet flourished with the aid of Tchaikovsky’s music.” The final movement of the composer's third orchestral suite consists of 12 variations. The ballet opens to reveal a corps of 12 women and a principal couple. As the ballet moves from variation to variation, the solo performances of the ballerina and her cavalier are interspersed among the corps performances.

Star-Crossed Teenage Lovers:

Houston Ballet Presents Shakespeare’s Epic *Romeo and Juliet*

From June 7-17, 2012, Houston Ballet will revive its lavish production of **Romeo and Juliet**, choreographed by Ben Stevenson. In the ballet, two teenagers from warring families meet, fall in love and rush headlong towards their romantic destiny. With its magnificent evocation of Renaissance Italy by David Walker and Prokofiev’s gorgeous score, the flagship production brings this classic love story thrillingly to life.

Houston Ballet's production of **Romeo and Juliet** has played a key role in the history of the company. In September 1987, the ballet's world premiere inaugurated the opening of Houston Ballet's opulent new home theater, the \$72 million Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston – a milestone in the company's development. In July 1995, Houston Ballet was the first full American company to be invited by the Chinese government to tour the People's Republic of China. A performance of **Romeo and Juliet** at Beijing's Exhibition Theater launched the two-and-half-week tour to Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. The opening night performance of **Romeo and Juliet** was broadcast live on Chinese television, with officials estimating that an audience of 500 million viewed the telecast.

“**Romeo and Juliet** is part of Houston Ballet's history,” commented Mr. Welch. “Many of Houston Ballet's dancers have passed through this ballet and we are keeping up the tradition. Every dancer wants to perform the leading roles in this production because it's an important part of an artist's growth. In fact, every dancer needs to do this ballet. We will have a lot of wonderful new Romeo's and Juliet's in these performances.”

Houston Ballet most recently performed **Romeo and Juliet** in March 2005, with Molly Glentzer, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle*, noting that, “the pas de deux are meltingly good, soaking up the Prokofiev score's emotional sweep. And the grand ball scene perfectly and simply evokes the deep-throated grandeur of the score's most thrilling section.”

Writing in the January 1988 edition of *Dance Magazine*, critic Josie Neal observed at **Romeo and Juliet's** premiere, “Stevenson has an eye for grand drama, and it serves him well here, with sweepingly regal dances in the ballroom scene, robust dances and swashbuckling swordplay in the marketplace scenes, and poignant pas de deux, all of them an apt expression of the ravishing Prokofiev score.”

Prokofiev's 1935 score and Shakespeare's dramatic play have inspired many notable choreographers. In 1940, Leonid Lavrovsky created the first Soviet production for Kirov Ballet. Among other treatments of the work are Sir Frederick Ashton (for Royal Danish Ballet in 1955), John Cranko (for La Scala Ballet, Milan in 1958, revised for Stuttgart Ballet in 1962), Sir

Kenneth MacMillan (for The Royal Ballet in 1965), John Neumeier (for Royal Danish Ballet in 1974), and Rudolf Nureyev (for London Festival Ballet in 1977; also staged for La Scala in 1980 and Paris Opera Ballet in 1984).

The ballet's story is exceedingly simple, yet stunning in its emotional force. Set in 16th century Verona, **Romeo and Juliet** chronicles the romance of two beautiful Italian teenagers from families on opposing sides of a bitter feud. Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet first meet at a masked ball, fall headlong in love during a romantic encounter on the girl's balcony, and are secretly wed with the aid of Friar Laurence and Juliet's nurse.

The central love story is played out against a backdrop of violence, enmity, and conflict. The two lovers find themselves trapped in a vicious web of circumstance. After a bloody confrontation in the marketplace with Tybalt, a relative of Juliet's, Romeo is banished from Verona. When Juliet's parents insist that she marry the nobleman Paris, Juliet takes a potion that will give her the appearance of death, but allow her to escape and be reunited with Romeo. The two young lovers are indeed reunited in the devastating climax of the ballet in the Capulet family crypt.

About Houston Ballet

On February 17, 1969 a troupe of 15 young dancers made its stage debut at Sam Houston State Teacher's College in Huntsville, Texas. Since that time, Houston Ballet has evolved into a company of 53 dancers with a budget of \$18.4 million, a state-of-the-art performance space built especially for the company, Wortham Theater Center, and an endowment of just over \$47 million (as of June 2010), making it the United States' fourth largest ballet company by number of dancers. Under the administrative leadership of managing director C.C. Conner since 1995, the company has maintained a strong financial position.

Houston Ballet has toured extensively both nationally and internationally. Over the last decade, the company has appeared in London at Sadler's Wells, at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, in six cities in Spain, in Montréal, at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in New York at City Center, and in cities large and small across the United States.

Houston Ballet has emerged as a leader in the expensive, labor-intensive task of nurturing the creation and development of new full-length narrative ballets. The company has also commissioned new one-act ballets from some of the world's most respected choreographers, including Julia Adam, Christopher Bruce, James Kudelka, Trey McIntyre, Paul Taylor, Glen Tetley, Natalie Weir and Lila York.

Writing in *The Financial Times* on March 6, 2006, dance critic Hilary Ostlere praised Houston Ballet as "a strong, reinvigorated company whose male contingent is particularly impressive, a well-drilled corps and an enviable selection of soloists and principals." *Dance Europe* editor Emma Manning observed of the company in November 2004, "One of the first things that hits you about this company is the technical strengths not just of the principals, but throughout the ranks. Watching artistic director Stanton Welch take class on a Sunday morning before a matinee, one could not help but marvel at the multiple turns tossed off by the young women in the corps....The three new works shown in this program will be followed by no fewer than four more Houston premieres. Can any other major ballet company in the world match that?"

Houston Ballet Academy has reached over 19,000 Houston area students (as of the 2009-2010 season) and has had four academy students win prizes at the prestigious international ballet competition the Prix de Lausanne, with one student winning the overall competition in 2010.

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HOUSTON BALLET
2011-2012 SEASON OVERVIEW

All performances listed here are in Wortham Theater Center.

**I RETURN OF THE MASTERS featuring:
FALL MIXED REPERTORY PROGRAM**

LES PATINEURS (1937)

Music by Giacomo Meyerbeer, selections from the opera *Le Prophete* and *L'Etoile du nord*
Arranged and orchestrated by Constant Lambert
Choreography by Sir Frederick Ashton (1904-1988)
Scenic and Costume Designs by William Chappell
Lighting Design by Christina R. Giannelli

IN THE NIGHT (1970)

Music by Frederic Chopin (1810-1849), *Piano Nocturnes, Opus 27, No. 1; Opus 55, Nos. 1 and 2; and Opus 9, No. 2*
Choreography by Jerome Robbins
Costume Designs by Anthony Dowell

SONG OF THE EARTH (1965)

Music by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)
Choreography by Sir Kenneth MacMillan (1929-1992)
Scenic and Costume Designs by Nicholas Georgiadis
Lighting Design by Tony Tucci

From three of the world's most esteemed choreographers come three lyrically stunning ballets long absent from Houston Ballet's repertoire. Sir Frederick Ashton's **Les Patineurs**, with its ice-skating couples, showcases the wit and warmth for which Ashton is known. Set against a starry sky, Jerome Robbins's **In the Night** is a beautiful and poignant ballet featuring three pairs of dancing lovers. Rarely performed in America, Sir Kenneth MacMillan's **Song of the Earth** is a symphonic masterpiece of music and dance, inspired by an ancient Chinese poem.

At 7:30 p.m. on September 8, 10, 16, 17, 2011

At 2 p.m. on September 11, 18, 2011

II GISELLE

Music by Adolphe Adam (1803-1856)
Choreography by Marius Petipa (1818-1910), after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot
Produced and Staged by Ai-Gul Gaisina
Scenic and Costume Designs by Peter Farmer
Lighting Design by Christina R. Giannelli

INDIGO (1999)

Music by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Choreography and Costume Designs by Stanton Welch

Lighting Design by Christina R. Giannelli

A striking pairing of contemporary and classical, speed and stillness, this two-part program is a spectacular showcase for the dancers of Houston Ballet. Stanton Welch's **Indigo** abounds with sensual energy. **Giselle** is a journey into a beautiful world of love, ghosts and mystery. The story of a peasant girl and the man who deceives her, **Giselle** is one of the most widely performed works of the Romantic era. Newly staged for Houston Ballet, this **Giselle** harkens back to early Russian productions.

At 7:30 p.m. on September 22, 24, 30 and October 1, 2011

At 2 p.m. on September 25 and October 1, 2, 2011

THE NUTCRACKER (1987)

Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Choreography by Ben Stevenson, O.B.E.

Scenic and Costume Designs by Desmond Heeley

Original Lighting Design by Duane Schuler

Recreated Lighting Design by Christina R. Giannelli

Oh, the wonder of it all. Living dolls. Dancing snowflakes. A Christmas tree that grows to spectacular heights. It's **The Nutcracker**, in all its magical, colorful, holiday charm. With music by Tchaikovsky and stunning sets by Desmond Heeley, Ben Stevenson's production has something to delight every member of the family. It just wouldn't be the holidays without **The Nutcracker**.

November 25 – December 27, 2011

At 7:30 p.m. on November 25, 26, 27 and December 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27

At 2 p.m. on November 26, 27 and December 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27

JUBILEE OF DANCE

Looking back and looking forward, the seventh annual **Jubilee of Dance** celebrates the best of Houston Ballet. Featuring highlights of company and audience favorites, previews of upcoming productions, and works created especially for the Jubilee, this is a one-night-only event. Order your tickets early. The **Jubilee of Dance** is a dance lover's dream.

At 7:30 p.m. on Friday, December 2, 2011

III CINDERELLA (1997)

Music by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Choreography by Stanton Welch

Scenic and Costume Designs by Kristian Fredrikson (1940-2005)

Lighting Design by Lisa J. Pinkham

The story has been a favorite for generations, but make no mistake, this is not your childhood **Cinderella**. More tomboy than princess, Stanton Welch's title character is a striking woman of substance, determination and spunk. She's in control, fighting the oppression and will of her evil stepmother with wit and vigor. And when she finds true love she grabs it – and wisely holds on with both hands.

At 7:30 p.m. on February 23, 25 and March 2, 3, 2012

At 2 p.m. on February 25, 26 and March 3, 4, 2012

IV ROCK, ROLL & TUTUS featuring:

WORLD PREMIERE BY STANTON WELCH

ROOSTER (1991)

Music by The Rolling Stones

Choreography by Christopher Bruce

Costume Designs by Marian Bruce

Lighting Design by Tina MacHugh

DIVERGENCE (1994)

Music by Georges Bizet (1838-1875), *L'Arlésienne Suites No. 1 & 2*

Choreography by Stanton Welch

Costume Designs by Vanessa Leyonhjelm

Lighting Design by Francis Croese

Contemporary ballet has come of age, and it's looking better than ever. At 20 years old, Christopher Bruce's **Rooster** is still rocking audiences around the world. It's a fast-paced romp of machismo and nostalgia set to eight classic tracks by The Rolling Stones. Also on the program are two ballets by artistic director Stanton Welch: a world premiere choreographed to highlight the talents of Houston Ballet dancers, and **Divergence**, the explosive ballet that put him on the international map.

At 7:30 p.m. on March 8, 10, 16, 17, 2012

At 2 p.m. on March 11, 18, 2012

ACADEMY SPRING SHOWCASE

The students of today are the stars of tomorrow. Sneak a peek at the future of the company as the gifted young artists of Houston Ballet's professional training school dance pieces created especially for them.

At 7 p.m. on Friday, April 20, 2012

At 1:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 21, 2012

V MADE IN AMERICA featuring: SPRING MIXED REPERTORY PROGRAM

WORLD PREMIERE BY NICOLO FONTE

Music Composed by Anna Clyne

DRINK TO ME ONLY WITH THINE EYES (1988)

Houston Ballet Premiere

Music by Virgil Thompson

Choreography by Mark Morris

Costume Design by Santo Loquasto

THEME AND VARIATIONS (1947)

Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), *Suite No. 3 for Orchestra in G major, Op. 55*

Choreography by George Balanchine (1904-1983)

Costume Designs after Karinska

Lighting Design by Tony Tucci

Balanchine. Morris. Fonte. All three have created ballets for companies around the world. This program, however, was made entirely in America. Mark Morris's breezy **Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes** was commissioned by Mikhail Baryshnikov for American Ballet Theatre. George Balanchine created **Theme and Variations**, his grand tribute to the Imperial Russian Ballet, for the same company. Nicolo Fonte, a Brooklyn native who danced with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal and the Compañía Nacional de Danza in Madrid, will premiere a new work, choreographed specifically for Houston Ballet.

At 7:30 p.m. on May 24, 26 and June 1, 2, 2012

At 2 p.m. on May 27 and June 3, 2012

VI ROMEO AND JULIET (1987)

Music by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)
Choreography by Ben Stevenson, O.B.E.
Scenic and Costume Designs by David Walker
Lighting Design by Tony Tucci
Lighting Design Recreated by Christina R. Giannelli

Set in 16th century Verona, **Romeo and Juliet** chronicles Shakespeare's tale of two beautiful teenagers from families on opposing sides of a bitter feud. With its sweepingly regal ballroom scenes, vivacious swordplay and poignant pas de deux, Ben Stevenson's production is a feast for the eyes. With impassioned dance and bold theatrics, it's an ideal showcase for the company's newest stars. The ballet that inaugurated Wortham Theater Center in 1987 is back in this, our inaugural season rehearsing in the new Center for Dance.

At 7:30 p.m. on June 7, 9, 15, 16, 2012

At 2 p.m. on June 10, 16, 17, 2012

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Full season subscriptions, with tickets to six productions, range in price from \$84 to \$1050, depending on seat location and date of performances. To subscribe, call (713) 5-BALLET (713-522-5538) or purchase online at www.houstonballet.org.

SINGLE TICKETS

Single tickets go on sale Monday, August 1, 2011 and may be purchased by calling 713-227-ARTS (713-227-2787) or purchased online at www.houstonballet.org.

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