

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON BALLET PRESENTS ACCLAIMED CANADIAN TROUPE LES GRANDS BALLET CANADIENS DE MONTRÉAL IN CULLEN SERIES

**Performances Feature Two Signature Works
by Acclaimed Contemporary European Choreographers
Didy Veldman and Stijn Celis**

Houston, Texas – From November 7-8, 2008, Houston Ballet's Cullen Series, devoted to the performance of contemporary works, presents Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal with two Houston premieres of the most stunning pieces in its repertory by two dazzling contemporary choreographers, Didy Veldman and Stijn Celis. Ms. Veldman's **TooT** is a brilliantly theatrical circus, with dancers who fling themselves into falls and acrobatic phrases. Mr. Celis's **Noces** is a radical restaging of Nijinska's historic ballet dramatizing a Russian peasant wedding. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal will give two performances in the Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or by visiting www.houstonballet.org.

When Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal last visited Houston in 2005, audiences adored the vitality and theatricality of the dancers. By popular demand, this vibrant company is back for its third appearances in Houston. Both **TooT** and **Noces** were extravagantly lauded by American critics when Les Grand performed them at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival during the summer of 2005. "The new **TooT**, by Dutch dancer/choreographer Didy Veldman, is a revelation," reported Karen Campbell, a correspondent with *The Boston Globe*. "Entertaining and visually stunning, it is a powerful statement on the conflict between conformity and individualism." (August 20, 2005) Writing in *The New York Times*, dance critic John Rockwell observed,

“Gradimir Pankov's revolution at Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal continues, with breathtaking results.... But the dancers’ rangy bodies and vivid personalities suit to near perfection the two works on display this week at Jacob's Pillow.... If the other repertory Mr. Pankov has cultivated in Montreal is anywhere as good as this, we should see more of it - and these compelling dancers - as soon as possible.” (*New York Times*, August 19, 2005)

Founded in 1957, the 36-member Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal is dedicated to the development of ballet in all its forms. The company is known for its commitment to works by upcoming artists from both North America and abroad, such as Kim Brandstrup, Stijn Celis, Didy Veldman; and to the presentation of the greatest works by today’s leading choreographers, such as Jiří Kylián, Mats Ek, Nacho Duato, and Ohad Naharin. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal has toured throughout Canada, and to Mexico, Spain, Germany, and the United States to great critical acclaim. The company is under the leadership of Macedonian Gradimir Pankov.

Didy Veldman’s inspiration for **TooT** started with the *Jazz Suite No. 2* by Shostakovich. As a Russian composer under Stalin’s regime, she was forced for economical reasons to compose music for a huge variety of arts, film and entertainment but still managed within that spectrum to keep her own identity. Ms. Veldman said, “I started to question identity, individuality and the relationship of the individual to society. Surely society was created for the benefit of the individual or has it become the other way around? Do we have to let go of individuality to be a part of society?”

Didy Veldman danced with Scapino Ballet in the Netherlands, Ballet du Grand Theatre in Geneva and Rambert Dance Company. She created her first piece in 1987 for Scapino Ballet. Since then, she has been a much sought after choreographer and has worked for Ballet du Grand Théâtre in Geneva, Rambert Dance Company, Les Grand Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Ballet Gulbenkian, Northern Ballet Theatre, New Zealand Ballet, Komische Oper Berlin, Scottish Dance Theatre and more. She created **Til baka** for Iceland Dance Company’s February 2006 performance.

As for **Noces**, John Rockwell, former dance critic for *The New York Times*, called it “extraordinary.” Belgian choreographer and set designer Stijn Celis puts his contemporary twist

on the highly stylized Russian peasant wedding ritual presented by Bronislava Nijinska in the original **Les Noces** from 1923. Set to the Stravinsky score, this largely ensemble dance for 12 couples, comments on the institution of marriage and on the anxieties that both men and women face in relating to each other. His dancers are in whiteface – the 12 brides in tulle and white caps with cloth braids (a reference to the original) – and the 12 grooms in black suites. Mr. Celis created **Noces** for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, and it had its premiere in 2002.

“**Noces** was set to Stravinsky’s riveting, barbaric score, with a little a cappella vocalizing to set the mood at the outset . . . He (Celis) even designs a set (a slatted wood barn interior, albeit with two chandeliers) that evokes folkishness. But then he and his brilliant costume designer, Catherine Voeffray, and lighting designer, Marc Parent, take over. There are 24 dancers, divided into sharply opposing forces, male and female, challenging each other brutally,” writes Mr. Rockwell. (August 19, 2005)

These performances of **Noces** will give Houston audiences a unique opportunity to compare two different contemporary interpretations of **Les Noces**, Bronislava Nijinska’s seminal work in the history of ballet originally staged for the Ballets Russes in 1923: Jiří Kylián’s 1982 work **Svadebka**, which was performed by Houston Ballet in May 2007; and this performance of Mr. Celis’s 2002 staging, **Noces**, performed by Les Grands.

Stijn Celis, artistic director of Bern Ballet, danced with the Royal Ballet of Flanders, the Zürich Ballet, Le Ballet du Grand Théâtre in Geneva and the Cullberg Ballet, worked as a set-designer for Didy Veldman and has assisted Jan Verzweyveld in many opera and theater productions. He has created ballets for the Cullberg Ballet, Ballet Gulbenkian, Bern Ballet, Ballet Mainz, Ballet Wiesbaden, and Ballet Nürnberg. He created **Noces** and the full evening **The Lost Shoe (Cinderella)** for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal. He created **L’odeur de l’ombre** for L’Association de Danse Contemporaine in 1996 and **UBILOZ Vanilla** for the Cullberg Ballet in 1997. In a critics survey, *Ballet International* named him “most promising young choreographer for 2001.”

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**HOUSTON BALLET
LES GRANDS BALLETS CANADIENS DE MONTRÉAL
FACT SHEET**

WHAT: **THE CULLEN SERIES,**
 featuring Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

When the acclaimed Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal visited Houston in 2005, audiences adored the vitality and theatricality of the dancers. By popular demand, this vibrant company is back, showcasing acclaimed productions by two dazzling contemporary choreographers, Didy Veldman and Stijn Celis. Veldman's **Toot** is a brilliantly theatrical circus, with dancers who fling themselves into falls and acrobatic phrases. Celis's **Noces** is a radical restaging of Nijinska's historic ballet. Set to Stravinsky's riveting score, the ballet features 24 dancers who strut, pose, and brutally challenge each other at a Balkan peasant wedding.

WHEN: **At 8:00 pm on November 7 and 8, 2008**

WHERE: Cullen Theater, Wortham Theater Center
 501 Texas Avenue in downtown Houston

TICKETS: Start at \$17. Call (713) 227 ARTS or 1 800 828 ARTS
 Tickets are also available at www.houstonballet.org and the Houston
 Ballet Box Office at Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas Avenue
 (at Smith Street).

FOR MORE

INFORMATION: Visit Houston Ballet on the Web at www.houstonballet.org

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