

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON BALLET'S
OF AN ERA
PRESENTS TWO COMPANY PREMIERES

Nacho Duato's Signature Work
Jardí Tancat, Set to Catalonian Folk Songs,
Enters Houston Ballet's Repertoire

Christopher Wheeldon's *Carousel (A Dance)*
Is Inspired by Rodgers and Hammerstein's Classic Musical

Program Showcases Three Younger Choreographers

Houston, TX - From May 28 – June 7, 2009, Houston Ballet will present its spring repertory program, **Of An Era**, featuring a trio of contemporary ballets by three living choreographers who have emerged to international prominence since 1980. The company premiere of Christopher Wheeldon's **Carousel (A Dance)**, inspired by the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, will be presented alongside a revival of Stanton Welch's popular **Nosotros**, and the Houston Ballet premiere of the poignant ballet **Jardí Tancat**, created by Spanish choreographer Nacho Duato. Houston Ballet will give six performances of **Of An Era** in Brown Theater at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or by visiting www.houstonballet.org

Jardí Tancat, which means "closed garden" in the Catalonian dialect, is set to Catalonian folk tales collected and passionately sung by Spanish singer Maria del Mar Bonet. With a sweet, yet passionate melancholy, these folksongs and their dance portrayal tell the story of the people who work the barren land, praying to God for the rain that does not come and enduring with great spirit in the face of hardship:

Water, we have asked for water
And You, Oh Lord, You gave us wind
And You turn Your back on us
As though You will not listen to us

Though **Jardí Tancat** was choreographed for classically trained dancers, its movement vocabulary is strikingly individual – and an exciting challenge for Houston Ballet artists charged with communicating the work’s powerful feeling.

Nacho Duato created **Jardí Tancat**, his first work, in 1983 while he was a member of the Netherlands Dance Theater, winning the first prize at the International Choreographic Workshop in Cologne. Born in Valencia, Spain in 1957, Mr. Duato started his professional ballet training with the Rambert School in London at the age of 18. To expand his studies he joined Maurice Bejart’s Mudra School in Brussels and completed his dance education at The Alvin Ailey American Dance Center in New York. In 1980, at the age of 23, Mr. Duato signed his first professional contract with Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm, and a year later Jiří Kylián brought him to the Netherlands Dance Theater in Holland, where he was quickly incorporated into the company and its repertoire. In 1987, he received the VSCD Gouden Dansprijs (Golden Dance Award) for his achievements as a dancer.

In 1988, he was appointed resident choreographer for Netherlands Dance Theater, along with Hans van Manen and Jiří Kylián. He has created works for many companies including: American Ballet Theatre, Berlin Opera Ballet, The Australian Ballet, and The Stuttgart Ballet. His versatile style fuses the physical lyricism of Jiří Kylián with his own distinctive theatrical imagination. In 1990, he was appointed artistic director of Compañia Nacional de Danza for which he has created many works including **Tabulae** (1994), **Por vos muero** (1996), **Romeo y Julieta** (1997) and **Multiplicity** (2000). Houston Ballet has one other work by Mr. Duato in its repertoire, **Without Words**, which the company first performed in 2000.

The company premiere of English wunderkind Christopher Wheeldon’s 10-minute romance, **Carousel (A Dance)**, will also be performed as part of the spring mixed repertory program.

Originally intended as a *piece d'occasion* for New York City Ballet's gala as a part of the Richard Rodgers Centennial, **Carousel (A Dance)** premiered on November 26, 2002. It is set to the melodic and evocative *Carousel Waltz* and *If I Loved You*. Dancing in front of the outline of a ferris wheel projected onto a neutral backdrop, the circular movement of carnival rides and their cheerful colors are echoed in the choreography and costumes for the corps. As the dancers round the stage, in pairs, in a stylized-carousel formation, they often separate the two central characters in the work, the rough and tumble carnival worker from the beautiful, shy young woman he loves. With a simple hint at the story of the original play, Mr. Wheeldon catches the sweep and emotion of the music and the poignant, doomed nature of the lead couple's relationship with a romantic tender central pas de deux.

Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times* enthused, "Mr. Wheeldon's ballet was too terrific not to be seen again As its title indicates, '**Carousel (A Dance)**' is primarily a dance, not a narrative ballet. Its whiff of a story is a subtext that breaks through formal metaphors, in floor patterns and the love duet, one of the finest in contemporary ballet. There are also the emotions associated with the musical score." (February 25, 2003).

Born in Somerset, England, Mr. Wheeldon began his ballet training when he was 8, and later trained at The Royal Ballet School. In 1991 he joined The Royal Ballet and also won the Gold Medal at the Prix de Lausanne competition. In 1993, Mr. Wheeldon was invited to become a member of New York City Ballet (NYCB), where he rose to the rank of soloist in 1998. He began choreographing for NYCB with **Slavonic Dances** for the 1997 Diamond Project. After creating **Mercurial Manoeuvres** (2000), he retired from dancing to concentrate on his choreographic work. During NYCB's 2000-2001 season, Mr. Wheeldon served as the company's first-ever artist in residence, creating two ballets: **Polyphonia** and **Variations Sérieuses**. In July 2001 he was named NYCB's first resident choreographer. Since that time, Mr. Wheeldon has choreographed several ballets for the company, including **Morphoses** (2002), **Liturgy** (2003), and **After the Rain** (2005). He has also created ballets for such companies as The Royal Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, and Boston Ballet. In November 2006, Mr. Wheeldon announced the formation of his own dance company, Morphoses. In its first season, the company performed in Vail, London and New York. Mr. Wheeldon completed his tenure as resident

choreographer of New York City Ballet in February 2008. Houston Ballet has one work by Christopher Wheeldon in its repertory, **Carnival of the Animals**, which entered the company's repertory in 2007.

Stanton Welch created **Nosotros** for Houston Ballet, and it premiered on February 24, 2005 at Wortham Theater Center in Houston, Texas. Set to Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, **Nosotros** (the Spanish word for "us") is an abstract work featuring 11 couples in a glittering celebration of classical technique. "It's a large ensemble piece showing off the present and future stars of Houston Ballet. Each of the leads comes forward for a pas de deux," said Mr. Welch. "In making the ballet, my goal was to create a work that is a signature piece for our current dancers. I know what scares them, what challenges them, and what looks good, so I've incorporated that into the choreography. I want to capture their essence in dance."

The scenic and costume designs for **Nosotros** emphasize a work that presents a galaxy of stars to the audience. The women wear glamorous gowns inspired by high fashion couture designers such as Dior, and their partners match their romantic mood with flesh-toned, flowing costumes. The set design surrounds the dancers with a magical, star-lit atmosphere.

A critical and audience favorite, **Nosotros** won acclaim at its premiere. *Houston Chronicle* dance critic Molly Glentzer enthused, "Houston Ballet rocks with Rachmaninoff. Welch exploits his leading dancers' best qualities in **Nosotros** . . . demanding extreme virtuosity and jaw-droppingly athletic partnering." (February 26, 2005).

Houston Ballet's performances of **Of An Era** in Houston are generously underwritten by National Endowment for the Arts and Anadarko Petroleum Corporation.

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HOUSTON BALLET
OF AN ERA
FACT SHEET

WHAT: OF AN ERA
(Spring Mixed Repertory Program)

CAROUSEL (A DANCE) (2002)

Houston Ballet Premiere

Music by Richard Rodgers (1902-1979) and Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960)

Choreography by Christopher Wheeldon

Costume Design by Holly Hynes

Lighting Design by Mark Stanley

JARDÍ TANCAT (1983)

Houston Ballet Premiere

Songs by Maria del Mar Bonet

Choreography, Scenic and Costume Design by Nacho Duato

Staged by Nathalie Buisson

Lighting Design by Nicolás Fischtel (A.A.I.) (according to the original design by Joop Caboort)

NOSOTROS (2005)

Music by Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 43

Choreography and Costume Design by Stanton Welch

Lighting Design by Christina R. Giannelli

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**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

Houston Ballet's spring repertory program pairs works by three of the world's most celebrated choreographers who have risen to prominence over the last three decades. The English choreographer Christopher Wheeldon's **Carousel: A Dance** was created for New York City Ballet in 2002 as a tribute to the famous composer Richard Rodgers, and is set to melodic and evocative "Carousel Waltz" and "If I Loved You" from the iconic 1945 musical **Carousel**. **Jardí Tancat** was the first work choreographed by the acclaimed Spanish choreographer Nacho Duato, and portrays in song and dance the poignant story of a people who work the barren land, praying to God for rain and enduring with great spirit in the face of hardship. Set against a starlit sky, Stanton Welch's lushly romantic **Nosotros**

provides a wonderful showcase for the neoclassical technique of Houston Ballet's dancers.

WHEN: At 7:30 pm on May 28, 30, and June 5, 6, 2009
At 2:00 pm on May 31 and June 7, 2009

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

TICKETS: Start at \$17 - \$125. For tickets call (713) 227 2787 or 1 800 828 ARTS.
Tickets are also available at www.houstonballet.org and the Houston Ballet Box Office at Wortham Theater Center.

FOR MORE

INFORMATION: Visit Houston Ballet at www.houstonballet.org

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