

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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**HOUSTON BALLET UNVEILS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF
MARIE,
CHOREOGRAPHED BY STANTON WELCH**

New Full-Length Ballet Inspired by the Life of Marie Antoinette

**Production Debuts in Houston in February 2009,
and then Travels to New Orleans in March 2009**

Houston, TX - From February 26 – March 8, 2009, Houston Ballet presents the highlight of the 2008-2009 season with the world premiere of **Marie** by Stanton Welch. Mr. Welch will create a new three-act narrative ballet inspired by the life of the legendary French queen, Marie Antoinette, who was born an Austrian arch duchess in 1755, married the future French King Louis XVI at the age of fifteen, and was executed by guillotine at the height of the French Revolution in 1793. London-based Canadian designer Kandis Cook will create the scenery and costumes for the production. Houston Ballet Music Director Ermanno Florio will arrange the score, featuring music by Dmitri Shostakovich. Houston Ballet will give six performances of **Marie** at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or by visiting www.houstonballet.org.

Famously known as the eighteenth-century French queen whose excesses have become legend, Marie Antoinette was blamed for instigating the French Revolution. Thomas Jefferson wrote in his autobiography on Marie Antoinette, “I have ever believed that had there been no queen there would have been no revolution.”

“I was intrigued to learn that Marie Antoinette wasn’t as superficial as she is often portrayed and found a true character arc in her transition from young princess to spoiled queen to mother to

Revolutionary victim,” said Mr. Welch. “That gives me a lot of material to work with. **Cinderella** was the last adventure I had in storytelling, and it was a romantic comedy. I wanted to do something a little darker. I also was intrigued by the way all the intense gossip and scrutiny of the queen’s life mirrors our society: how we become fixated on some pretty girl and how through gossip and tabloids, we create a distorted image of someone.”

Mr. Welch, one of the most sought after choreographers of his generation, has created ballets for such prestigious international companies as San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet in the United Kingdom, and Royal Danish Ballet. His new work for Houston Ballet will be his thirteenth ballet for the company. **Marie** is the second original evening-length work Mr. Welch has created for Houston Ballet, after **Tales of Texas** in March 2004. Mr. Welch has staged a number of full-length story ballets including **Swan Lake** (2006) for Houston Ballet; **The Sleeping Beauty** (2005), **Cinderella** (1997), and **Madame Butterfly** (1995) for The Australian Ballet.

After its premiere in Houston in February, **Marie** will travel to New Orleans March 27 – 28, 2009 as part of New Orleans Ballet Association’s season, with performances being accompanied by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra. **Marie** will be the first dance performance presented by the New Orleans Ballet Association to open the newly renovated Mahalia Jackson Theater of the Performing Arts, and it will mark Houston Ballet’s thirtieth anniversary of touring to New Orleans. To purchase tickets to Houston Ballet’s performances of **Marie** in New Orleans, call (504) 522-0996, Ext. 2, or visit New Orleans Ballet Association’s web site at <http://www.nobadance.com>.

Houston Ballet’s performances of **Marie** in Houston are generously underwritten by The Wortham Foundation, Inc., EDS, an HP company and Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P.

**Marie: A Child Bride
Sacrificed to 18th Century European Power Politics and Transformed by Suffering**

As a fourteen-year-old girl, she was sent from Vienna to marry the future King Louis XVI. The youngest daughter, fifteen out of sixteen children, of Austrian empress Maria Teresa and Francis

I, Marie Antoinette was sent on a journey by her mother from Vienna to Versailles with the expectation that she would further Austrian interests. Sacrificed to eighteenth century power politics, she arrived in France, a foreigner, hardly prepared for the court at Versailles and far from interested in state affairs. Marie Antoinette threw her energies into extravagant parties and patronizing the arts. The French accused her of political interference and wrote scandalous tracts against her, mocking her lack of sophistication. Longing for a family and a birth of an heir to secure the Franco-Austro alliance, Marie Antoinette's marriage remained unconsummated for seven years and she had to endure more than eight years of public humiliation for her barren marriage before the delivery of her first of four children.

The revolutionaries who stormed the Bastille found the queen a ready target for all that was wrong with France. Torn from her 100-room palace when a mob of some 7,000 women marched on Versailles, thrust into jail, she was plunged into despair, only to be transformed by her suffering. She defied her enemies at her trial with intelligence, arousing the admiration of even the most hostile revolutionaries. With new awareness and regal dignity, she mounted the steps of the scaffold to the guillotine, conscious of her failures, doomed by her own tragic flaws, a young woman trapped in a tumultuous moment of history.

Designer Cook: Inspired by a Visit to Versailles and Portraits of the Era

Kandis Cook began her research for designs for **Marie** by visiting Versailles, the world to which Marie Antoinette was taken as a 14-year-old girl to marry the future King of France, Louis XVI.

“The purpose of the arranged marriage orchestrated by Marie’s mother, Maria Theresa of Austria and Louis’s grandfather King Louis XV, was to create a political alliance between the two countries of France and Austria,” said Ms. Cook. “It was also important to research eighteenth century Austria, eventually exploring the features of the Hofburg Imperial Palace where Marie and her family frequently lived, but one of many palaces in the city. Its Baroque weight contrasted that of the Rococo lavishness (with no expense spared) of Versailles, and very quickly clarified the difference in temperament between the two people. Marie was raised in a relaxed and loving family environment and found the court life of France strict in comparison. Control

enforced by the 'Old Regime' in maintaining what was singularly French was expressed narrowly in its rules of etiquette, formal dress code, food, speech, and therefore the identity of being French under the reign of absolute rule."

Ms. Cook will create at least 150 costumes for the ballet based on the style and designs from 1770-1795 Austria and France with powdered wigs and perukes, corsets, panniers, silks, lace, jewels, braided waistcoats and jackets, jabeuxs, the strict formal dress of the ancient regime of France, and the rags of the public.

"Research for the costumes was taken from paintings of the time," said Ms. Cook. "Painted portraits of the period by Jean-Baptiste Charpentier, especially 'The Cup of Chocolate', 1768, and portraits by Jean-Marc Nattier, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Temperagemalde von Heinrich Fuger, Adelaide Labille-Guiard, Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun, Joseph Ducreux, Jean-Baptiste Gautier-Dagoty and Antoine-Francois Callet."

Ms. Cook has designed narrative ballets for London's Royal Ballet (**Turn of the Screw**) and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal (**Queen of Spades**) as well as works for the Royal Danish Ballet and San Francisco Ballet. She has designed the costumes for five of Mr. Welch's works: **The Four Seasons** (2007) for Houston Ballet; **Velocity** (2003) for The Australian Ballet, **Taiko** (1999) for San Francisco Ballet, **Powder** (1998) for Birmingham Royal Ballet, and **Fingerprints** (2000) for Cincinnati Ballet. She has also designed scenery and costumes for prestigious theaters, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Abbey Theatre in Dublin, The Royal Court, and The Donmar Warehouse.

Shostakovich: Defining the Musical Identity of the Soviet Union

Marie will be set to Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich's solo piano and chamber music. Other works by Shostakovich include music from his film scores, portion of the ballet suites, and part of his Symphony No. 10. Shostakovich was born on September 25, 1906 in St. Petersburg, Russia and died in Moscow on August 9, 1975. He is one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century and lived a large portion of his life under circumstances of political unrest and

hardship, including two official denunciations of his music in 1936 and 1948 and the periodic banning of his work by the Soviet regime. Shostakovich helped to define the musical identity of the Soviet Union internationally. Through his dark, brooding music, Shostakovich told the story of a nation embroiled in change and conflict.

Shostakovich had relatively little involvement with ballet and was limited to working on three scores, **The Golden Age**, **Bolt**, and **The Bright Stream**. "None the less all three scores are important in the development of Soviet ballet in the 1930s, not only in revealing the significant early move towards contemporary subject-matter to reflect the realities of everyday life after the Revolution, but also in pointing out the beginning of change from an exuberant period of relative freedom and open expression in the 1920s to the barbaric restrictions of the Stalin era, which were to suppress so much artistic innovation in the Soviet Union for the next 40 years," writes Geoffrey Baskerville in the International Dictionary of Ballet.

"After meeting with Stanton, both of us felt Shostakovich would be a wonderful composer for this ballet. He was one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century for both the stage and concert hall. Stanton made the selection of the music and explained the synopsis of the ballet. I felt the music he had chosen worked extremely well in telling the dramatic and tragic story he has in mind," commented Mr. Florio.

Mr. Florio's recent projects include arranging the scores for ballet versions of **La Dame aux Camelias** for the Tokyo National Ballet in November 2007 using music by Hector Berlioz; and **Gustav III** for the Swedish National Ballet in April 2008 with music by Carl Maria von Weber. He will be conducting performances of a new ballet he has arranged on the life of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley at the Staatsoper Berlin in June 2009.

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HOUSTON BALLET
MARIE
FACT SHEET

WHAT: MARIE
A World Premiere by Stanton Welch Inspired by the Life of
Marie Antoinette
Music by Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), arranged by Ermanno Florio
Choreography by Stanton Welch
Scenic and Costume Design by Kandis Cook
Lighting Design by Lisa J. Pinkham

Generously sponsored by:
The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
EDS, an HP company
Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P.

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

Stanton Welch creates a new full-length narrative ballet **Marie**, inspired by the life of the legendary French Queen Marie Antoinette, who was born an Austrian arch duchess in 1755, married the French king Louis XVI at the age of fifteen and was executed by guillotine at the height of the French Revolution in 1793. The London-based Canadian designer Kandis Cook creates the scenery and costumes for the production. Houston Ballet Music Director Ermanno Florio arranges a score, featuring music by Dmitri Shostakovich.

WHEN: At 7:30 pm on February 26, 28, and March 6, 7, 2009
At 2:00 pm on March 1, 8, 2009

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

TICKETS: \$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 on the World Wide Web at
www.houstonballet.org

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