

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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CONTACT: MELISSA CARROLL
KIM ESPINOSA
713 535 3226

HOUSTON BALLET CAPS SEASON WITH STANTON WELCH'S STAGING OF *SWAN LAKE*

**New Zealand Designer Kristian Fredrikson's Spectacular
Scenery and Costumes Inspired by Pre-Raphaelite Paintings**

Melody Herrera Performs the Swan Queen for the First Time in Houston

Linnar Loooris Dances Prince Siegfried for the First Time in Houston

Houston, TX - From June 11 – June 21, 2009, Houston Ballet revives Stanton Welch's vibrantly theatrical staging of **Swan Lake**, which he created for Houston Ballet in 2006. Set to the hauntingly beautiful Tchaikovsky score, **Swan Lake** tells the classic tale of Odette – a beautiful maiden transformed into a swan by an evil knight – and the prince who swears his enduring love for her. It's good and evil in black and white, danced on rich and spectacular sets by the late, great New Zealand designer Kristian Fredrikson. Houston Ballet will give eight performances of **Swan Lake** 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

"**Swan Lake** is the Everest of ballet, a career benchmark and a challenge for choreographers. It's important for my development as an artist to make this work my own, and to give this new generation of dancers at Houston Ballet ownership of the roles," said Mr. Welch when he choreographed the work for Houston Ballet in 2006.

Dance Magazine Editor in Chief Wendy Perron in May 2006 observed of Mr. Welch's staging:

Artistic director Stanton Welch's **Swan Lake**, with spectacular costumes and sets by the late Kristian Fredrikson, is a fresh read on the classic story . . . this is an emotionally rich, visually stunning, uplifting production...In Act I, Welch added a rousing dance for the men on their way

to the hunt. Emerging singly from their social clusters, they danced with zest and virility, then slipped smoothly back into the groups. The dance not only showed off the company's strong male contingent, but also gave dazzle to the choreography and momentum to the narrative.

One of the most famous and frequently performed works in the international repertoire, **Swan Lake** was first performed at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in 1877, with a specially commissioned score by Tchaikovsky. The production was not an overwhelming success at its premiere. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, "neither the ballet nor its ballerina were well received." On March 1, 1894, Act II of **Swan Lake**, featuring choreography by Lev Ivanov, was performed for a Tchaikovsky memorial. The Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov production, which became the definitive version, was performed at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg on January 27, 1895.

Since that time, countless choreographers have staged versions of this classic. George Balanchine once said, "**Swan Lake** is always changing. That is as it should be." Each generation responds to classical ballet in a distinct way, and Mr. Welch brings his own unique, twenty-first century aesthetic to a touchstone work.

Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake** features lavish designs inspired by Pre-Raphaelite paintings by the celebrated New Zealand designer Kristian Fredrikson, who passed away in November 2005. This production, the last work that Fredrikson created in an illustrious 40-year career spanning three continents, was dedicated to his memory.

The role of Odette/Odile in Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake** will be performed by principal dancers Amy Fote, Mireille Hassenboehler, Sara Webb and Melody Herrera (giving her first performance of this role in Houston).

Appearing as Prince Siegfried are Houston Ballet Principals Simon Ball, who will partner Amy Fote; Ian Casady, who will dance with Melody Herrera; soloist Linnar Loores, will debut in this role in Houston with Mireille Hassenboehler; and Connor Walsh who will perform with Sara Webb.

A New *Swan Lake* for a New Century

Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake** is Houston Ballet's third production of this beloved classic. Houston Ballet Artistic Director Emeritus Ben Stevenson created the company's first version in 1977, a production that drew considerable national interest as it was the first American staging of the ballet in over a decade. Mr. Stevenson then created a new version of **Swan Lake** in 1984, with designs by David Walker, which the company toured throughout the United States and Great Britain.

"My **Swan Lake** is set in the classical idiom," explained Mr. Welch. His production includes many of the familiar elements of this beloved, classical work: the swans, Odette, Odile, and Prince Siegfried. "However," he continued, "I'm playing with the scenario. I give the ballet a contemporary slant, with complex dramas and a twenty-first century feel and pace." Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake** is an updated version of the folktale for a new generation, one that gives the main characters more developed, three-dimensional personalities. "It's apparent that Siegfried, Odette, Rothbart, and Odile, have light and dark sides to their characters," commented Mr. Welch. "It's important to see and understand the motivation and reason behind their actions."

In Mr. Welch's version, Prince Siegfried meets Odette as a maiden, not as a swan, which makes the relationship between the doomed lovers seem more credible. "In my story, Siegfried meets her at night while she is human, before she transforms into a swan in the daylight," said Mr. Welch. "I'd like to try and make their love story more appealing and tragic by having them meet when she is a real woman."

Mr. Welch has created a number of evening-length story ballets including **Cinderella** (1997), **Madame Butterfly** (1995), **Don Quixote** (2003), **The Sleeping Beauty** (2005), and **Marie** (2009). Reviewing Mr. Welch's new staging of **The Sleeping Beauty** for the *Sunday Herald Sun*, Catherine Lambert wrote, "This is a stunning production....Welch and Fredrikson have put an inventive new stamp on this much-loved ballet, ensuring it continues to evolve and reach wider audiences." (September 18, 2005)

**Designer Kristian Fredrikson:
Inspired by John Williams Waterhouse's Painting, *The Lady of Shalott***

Mr. Welch, who collaborated with Mr. Fredrikson on **Swan Lake**, was inspired by John William Waterhouse's painting, *The Lady of Shalott* (1888). Waterhouse (1849-1917) was a British Neo-Classical and Pre-Raphaelite painter well-known for works featuring female characters from mythology and literature. The painting, which is based on Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem by the same title, depicts a tragic maiden afloat on a lake. Mr. Welch commented, "When I saw this painting I said, 'This is our Odette.' Here is a woman, a young heroine, lost in a forest by a lake, touched by tragedy."

Inspired by Pre-Raphaelite paintings, Mr. Fredrikson's designs feature maidens in long flowing gowns, dozens of white swans, Rothbart as a menacing dragon-like monster, four glamorous and steely black swans, sumptuously outfitted Hungarian, Neapolitan, Russian and Spanish princesses, and a royal court boasting costumes made of brocade, cut-velvet, and pearl-encrusted, sequined fabrics. There are more than 50 tutus, 45 costume designs, 31 characters, and 70 headpieces. The costume for Rothbart alone took Houston Ballet's costume shop more than 600 hours to produce.

An artist whose career spanned the worlds of dance, opera and theater over three decades, Mr. Fredrikson collaborated with Mr. Welch on five ballets: **Of Blessed Memory** (1991), **Cinderella** (1997) and **The Sleeping Beauty** (2005) for The Australian Ballet; the **Pecos Bill** section of **Tales of Texas** (2004) and **Swan Lake** (2006) for Houston Ballet.

Mr. Fredrikson designed five different productions of **Swan Lake** over the last four decades. His first experience with the ballet came from an unusual source: Imelda Marcos. In 1965 Ms. Marcos commissioned him to create the white act (the second act of the full-length work, set by the lakeside) for The Australian Ballet. She then flew in Dame Margot Fonteyn to dance the lead with the Australian company for a one-night performance.

Mr. Fredrikson created four other productions of **Swan Lake**, including one set in the Hapsburg Court for The Royal New Zealand Ballet in 1985, a Tudor version for the same company eleven

years later, an Art Noveau production for The Australian Ballet and a modern-dress one set in the Windsor Court for The Australian Ballet that premiered in 2002. He commented, “I could do **Swan Lakes** forever. The beauty of the ballet is the music; it’s so inspiring and wonderful. **Swan Lake** is the most emotional Tchaikovsky ballet score.”

Behind the Music: Houston Ballet’s *Swan Lake*

As the first composer who produced symphonic music for ballet, Tchaikovsky created in **Swan Lake** something that delighted dancers and music lovers. For many, the musical melodies from Tchaikovsky’s lush score are synonymous with ballet. Houston Ballet Music Director Ermanno Florio worked with Stanton Welch to organize Tchaikovsky’s original score in such a manner that it perfectly suits Mr. Welch’s vision for the work.

Commented Mr. Florio, “As we began discussing the arrangement for his **Swan Lake**, Stanton and I agreed that we would try to keep to the original Tchaikovsky score by using as much of the original music as possible in its original order, with few cuts within the individual musical numbers. For example, Stanton wanted the White Swan pas de deux and the Black Swan pas de deux music to be performed as is traditionally done, and we restored all of the music for the harp cadenza before the White Swan pas.

“Stanton organized the ballet into three acts with two intermissions. This would require combining the original Act I and Act II. As the musical numbers that end the original Act I and that start the original Act II are similar, Stanton decided to keep the Act 1 finale music (which is usually cut) and create a pas de deux on it. Also, in the ‘White Act’ (the second half of Stanton’s Act I), we decided to use the waltz three times, as in the original.

“Additionally, there are two wonderful pieces of music in the appendix to the musical score of **Swan Lake** that are rarely used in the full-length version of the ballet: the music used by Balanchine in his **Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux**, and a fabulous solo for violin called Danse Russe. Stanton is using the ‘female variation’ music from the **Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux** and all of the Danse Russe in this version of the ballet.”

Houston Ballet performed the world premiere of Stanton Welch's **Swan Lake** on February 23, 2006 in the Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center in Houston, Texas. In his staging of **Swan Lake**, Mr. Welch made slight changes to the story, "the most critical of them," as William Littler noted for the *Toronto Star*, "showing the Prince falling in love not, as fairytale tradition dictates, with the feathered Swan Queen Odette but with the human princess she originally was." (March 11, 2006).

Mr. Welch has choreographed fourteen ballets for Houston Ballet: **Indigo** (1999), **Bruiser** (2000), **Tales of Texas** (2004), **Blindness** (2004), **Bolero** (2004), **Nosotros** (2005), **Brigade** (2006), **Swan Lake** (2006), **The Four Seasons** (2007), **Punctilious** (2007), **The Core** (2008), **A Doll's House** (2008), **Mediæval Bæbes** (2008), and **Marie** (2009).

Houston Ballet's performances of **Swan Lake** in Houston are generously underwritten by The Wortham Foundation, Inc., ConocoPhillips, Cooper Industries, and The Methodist Hospital System.

The Story of Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*

Odette, a young maiden, is in the forest. The evil knight Rothbart appears and captures her, turning her into a white swan. She is cursed to remain a swan during the day, and a maiden at night.

Later, the young Prince Siegfried and his entourage arrive in the forest and set up camp, celebrating the day's hunt. The Queen calls her son aside and reminds him that tomorrow is an important day. She introduces him to four eligible young princesses, but he is distant and uninterested. The Queen sternly warns him that this is the last night of his youth and that he must soon take on the responsibility of adulthood. Upset, Siegfried decides to leave the camp and venture out into the woods alone.

Deep in the forest that evening along the edge of the lake, Siegfried sees a young maiden. She is beautiful, and he falls instantly in love. However, she is terrified, and begs him to leave, to no

avail. Charmed by his bravery, Odette finds herself falling in love with him. As the sun begins to rise, the evil knight Rothbart summons Odette. She goes to him and is transformed into a swan and flies away. Soon thereafter, a large flock of swans lands on the lake. Siegfried's friend and some hunters from the royal party see the flock and prepare to shoot, but the Prince intervenes and orders them to leave. Siegfried notices that one of the swans is Odette and he professes his love to her.

The next night, the Queen hosts a party and presents eligible princesses to her son, but the Prince pays little attention. Suddenly, Rothbart a maiden dressed in black arrive. It is Odile. She is the mirror image of Odette. The Prince is smitten with the mysterious woman in black and begs his mother to consider the new arrival. Siegfried and Odile dance and he proclaims his love for her. The Prince tells his mother that he wants to marry Odile. Just then, Siegfried sees Odette in the crowd. She is horrified by the betrayal and runs out. The Prince runs to Odile and realizes that she is one of Rothbart's swans and that he has been fooled. The devastated prince chases Rothbart as he flees the court.

The Prince arrives at the edge of the lake in the forest and begs the distraught Odette for forgiveness. The sun comes up and the maidens turn back into swans in the morning mist. Before long, Rothbart and his black swans appear and he summons all of the swans, including Odette. The Prince, desperate to be with his love, grabs his crossbow to kill Rothbart. The Prince shoots, but his arrow hits Odette instead. Rothbart holds Odette in his arms but when she falls, she is a maiden. The spell Rothbart cast on Odette is broken, and the Prince runs to her. Odette, as a woman, dies in the Prince's arms. He picks up her body and walks into the lake, drowning himself. Young maidens appear from the forest, forever changed.

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HOUSTON BALLET
SWAN LAKE
FACT SHEET

WHAT: SWAN LAKE (2006)

Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
Choreography by Stanton Welch, after Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov
Scenic and Costume Designs by Kristian Fredrikson
Lighting Design by Lisa Pinkham

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**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

Houston Ballet caps its 2008-2009 season with a revival of Stanton Welch's spectacular staging of the beloved classic, **Swan Lake**, created for the company in 2006 and featuring sumptuous scenery and costumes by Kristian Fredrikson. One of the great love stories of classical ballet, **Swan Lake** tells the story of Odette – a beautiful maiden transformed into a swan by an evil knight – and the Prince who swears his eternal love for her.

WHEN: At 7:30 pm on June 11, 13, 19, 20, 2009
At 1:30 pm on Saturday, June 13, 20, 2009
At 2:00 pm on June 14, 21, 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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