

# HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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## **HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES 2004-2005 SEASON**

**35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season Includes Eleven New Works**

**Season Opens with Program Devoted to Female Choreographers**

**Cullen Series Returns with Three New Works**

**Company Premiere of Mark Morris' *Sandpaper Ballet*  
Highlights Spring Program**

**Houston, Texas** – Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch announced the company's 2004-2005 season today.

The 2004-2005 season marks Houston Ballet's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Mr. Welch has guaranteed that it will be an exceptional year that both looks to the company's future, with an unprecedented eleven new works, while honoring its past, represented by beloved classical ballets. The coming season is the first full season that Mr. Welch has programmed, and it bears his distinctive stamp. It offers a clear picture of where he intends to take the company in the future, and features an array of exciting initiatives.

A program of all female choreographers will launch the season in September, including world premieres from Julia Adam and Natalie Weir, and the company premiere of Lila York's spectacular **Celts**, making Houston Ballet one of the only American ballet companies to devote an entire program to the works of three living female dance makers. The Cullen Series returns in October with a new emphasis on experimentation and three commissioned pieces by Matjash Mrozewski, Adrian Burnett, and Mr. Welch. Mr. Welch is committed to new works, and chose these

choreographers for the series because they create pieces that are balanced on the edge of classical and contemporary dance. Another highlight, in May 2005, is the company premiere of Mark Morris's delightful **Sandpaper Ballet**, the first work by this modern dance master to enter Houston Ballet's repertory.

In the 2004-2005 season, Houston Ballet will also premiere an abstract, large-scale classical work by Mr. Welch, artistic associate Maina Gielgud's acclaimed production and staging of **Giselle**, Serge Lifar's full-company neo-classical showpiece **Suite en Blanc**, and Mr. Welch's sensual signature work, **Maninyas**. Ben Stevenson's beloved **Romeo and Juliet** returns in March 2005, and a newly polished production of James Kudelka's dazzling **The Firebird** opens in May 2005. Houston Ballet will celebrate its 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season in grand style on December 3, 2004 with a **Gala Performance**.

***WOMEN@ART***  
**FEATURING NEW WORKS BY JULIA ADAM, NATALIE WEIR AND LILA YORK**  
**LAUNCHES SEASON IN SEPTEMBER 2004**

From September 9 – 19, 2004, Houston Ballet opens its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary season with a flourish, by highlighting three of the world's most gifted female choreographers in a trio of new works that will show off the company to spectacular advantage. Australian Natalie Weir and Canadian Julia Adam will create commissions for the company, while American dance maker Lila York stages a company premiere of her rousing signature work **Celts**.

It's rare and exciting for a major ballet company to curate a program featuring the works of three women. "It's not the first all-female program. But it is the first time that a company our size is doing it. In many respects, ballet choreography is still a very male dominated field," commented Mr. Welch. Houston Ballet is proud to nurture and support the careers of female dance makers.

"Each of these choreographers creates in a very different way, and all three works will look distinctly different. Lila's choreography for **Celts** is complex and very mathematical. Much of her choreography involves preparatory work. Natalie Weir frequently works in collaboration with the dancers in the studio, and allows them to have input into the process and to shape the movement

that they will perform. Julia Adam is very witty and her ballets typically tell some type of story. I've never seen a ballet by Julia that doesn't have a narrative thread."

A former principal dancer with the San Francisco Ballet, Julia Adam began her choreographic career in 1993. She has created numerous pieces for San Francisco Ballet including: **The Medium is the Message** (1993), **Once is Enough** (1994), and **Night** (2000). **Night** has become a signature work for the San Francisco troupe, and the company has performed it at London's Royal Opera House, at the Opera Garnier in Paris and at New York's City Center. In February 2004, Houston Ballet will present the world premiere of Ms. Adam's **Ketubah**. A work inspired by the rituals of a traditional Jewish wedding, it follows one couple from first glance to wedding night. She has also created works for other ballet companies, including The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago, Cincinnati Ballet, Alberta Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre II.

Born in Australia, Natalie Weir has been choreographing professionally for 17 years. Ms. Weir has created two works for Houston Ballet: **Steppenwolf** (2002) and **In a Whisper** (2000), which toured to Sadler's Wells Theater in London. She has created pieces for several other major classical and contemporary dance companies, including American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, and Hong Kong Ballet. She also was choreographer in residence for the Queensland Ballet and most recently The Australian Ballet. Ms. Weir has created works for American Ballet Theatre Studio Company including **His Weeping** (1999) and **Bitter Moon** (2000). In June 2000, she created **Mirror Mirror**, her first full-length work for The Australian Ballet.

**Celts**, an abstract history of Ireland, with Irish music and folk dance, will have its Houston Ballet premiere on the same program. Mr. Welch, who first saw the piece in Boston, commented, "**Celts** is a crowd-pleasing ballet, Lila's most famous work. There's a lot of difficult material in the ballet, and the men are heavily featured."

Choreographed in 1995, the year before the Riverdance phenomenon hit the U.S., the ballet is a tribute to York's Irish roots. Set to a compilation of traditional and contemporary Celtic music, including the award-winning traditional Irish ensemble, The Chieftains, **Celts** is a celebration of all things Irish. A mixture of modern, classical, and Irish folk dance blended into one extraordinary

piece of choreography, this large ensemble piece showcases dancers doing an approximation of step dancing. Commissioned by Boston Ballet, it premiered there in 1996, and was well received by critics. Christine Temin, of the *Boston Globe*, called it “an astonishing array of dance images of Ireland, a piece that is both profound and thrilling.” (March 22, 1996)

Lila York danced with Paul Taylor Dance Company for twelve years, appearing in over sixty works. Since 1989, she has choreographed works for Boston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, The Birmingham Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, and American Repertory Ballet. She recently created two works for Houston Ballet: **Rules of the Game** (1999) and **All American** (2001). Ms. York’s work **Rapture** (1994), which she created for The Julliard Dance Ensemble, entered Houston Ballet’s repertory in 1998. It is also in the repertories of Pacific Northwest Ballet, Texas Ballet Theatre, and Cincinnati Ballet. In addition to her own choreography, Ms. York has staged Paul Taylor’s works for ballet and modern dance companies worldwide.

#### **TREY MCINTYRE STAGES *PETER PAN* IN SEPTEMBER 2004**

From September 23 – October 3, 2004, Houston Ballet Choreographic Associate Trey McIntyre will revisit **Peter Pan**, his first full-length work for the company, which was a smashing success with audiences and critics alike. Based upon the popular story by Sir James M. Barrie, the ballet is set to the music of Sir Edward Elgar in an arrangement by Niel DePonte. With elaborate, magical sets by scenic designer Thomas Boyd and imaginative costumes by Broadway designer Jeanne Button, the production reinterprets the classic story with verve and wit for the new millennium.

Mr. McIntyre has decided to revise certain elements of the production, explaining “**Peter Pan** was my first full-length ballet and for as much planning and preparation that was put into it, there are still some things you can only learn when you see it onstage. Plus, there are things I have learned in the time since the premiere; things that have given me perspective on the story that I think will enhance it without detracting from my original vision.”

Mr. Welch, who has choreographed two story ballets of his own, added, “Story ballets are like wine – they need to age. The first taste is not as strong as the last. As companies and choreographers

learn to adapt the work, it becomes better and tighter. You never re-do your ballet exactly the same. It's a living art form. It progresses."

Houston Ballet premiered **Peter Pan** in 2002, with dance critic Robert Greskovic of *DanceView* writing, "To call Trey McIntyre's **Peter Pan** the most impressive, original, multi-act ballet created by an American choreographer in recent memory doesn't quite do the three-act production justice....**Peter Pan** is a story ballet that really flies." (Summer, 2002) Molly Glentzer, of the *Houston Chronicle*, called Mr. McIntyre "a superb storyteller with a kid's heart and an adult's appreciation of life's complexities," (March 16, 2002) and Clive Barnes, writing in *Dance Magazine*, described Mr. McIntyre as a "choreographer of considerable promise...who tackled it [**Peter Pan**] with invention, a sure dramatic instinct, and a very special sensibility." (July, 2002)

Mr. McIntyre has condensed Mr. Barrie's story about the boy from Neverland into a ballet in three acts. In the first act, Peter Pan meets Wendy, John, and Michael Darling in their nursery and teaches them to fly. The second act opens in Neverland where Peter introduces the Darlings to the Redskins and Lost Boys. The third act is set on Captain Hook's ship, where the climactic battle between Peter and Hook occurs.

Recently named one of the 25 most eligible bachelors in *People*, thirty-four year old Trey McIntyre is a native of Kansas who has been hailed by *The New York Times* as "obviously a new face to watch." He has created six works for Houston Ballet, including **Touched** (1994), **Second Before the Ground** (1996), **Bound** (2000), and **The Shadow** (2003).

### **THE CULLEN SERIES RETURNS AFTER A TWO-YEAR HIATUS**

From October 28 – 31, 2004, Houston Ballet's Cullen Series returns with a new focus: to present emerging international choreographers who are building names for themselves in the world of ballet. The program features three world premieres by Adrian Burnett, Matjash Mrozewski, and Mr. Welch. Also included on the program is a revival of Trey McIntyre's quirky **Touched**.

In discussing his idea for The Cullen Series, Mr. Welch said, “This series offers an opportunity for experimentation. If dance is a war, and the war is about pushing the envelope of art, then this is the front line. Art forms are never static.” With his piece, Mr. Welch said that he plans to “explore my own boundaries of where contemporary and classical ballet meet.”

Mr. Welch explained that all the pieces were chosen for another reason as well. “These ballets may look better in an intimate setting,” he commented. “It’s more like a play in a small house – you see more detail. **Touched** was designed specifically for a small venue.”

A former senior artist with The Australian Ballet, New Zealand-born Adrian Burnett was appointed resident choreographer with that company in September 2003. He graduated from The Australian Ballet School in 1987, joined the professional company in 1988, and rose to the rank of senior artist in 2002. Mr. Burnett created **Pitch ‘n’ Sway** (1995), his first choreographic piece, as part of the ‘New Moves’ Choreographic Workshop presented in Melbourne, Australia, and in 1999, he received the Lissa Black Memorial Scholarship and assistance from the Australia Council Emerging Artists Scheme, enabling him to study choreography in the U.S. and Europe. In 2001, he choreographed a new work for the opening ceremony of the Sixth International Conference on HIV/AIDS. This year, Mr. Burnett will create a new work, **Red, Hot and New**, for The Australian Ballet’s 2004 season.

Recently singled out as one of *Dance Magazine’s* “25 to Watch,” Matjash Mrozewski is a Toronto-based choreographer who graduated from Canada’s National Ballet School in 1993. He has danced with numerous ballet companies, including The National Ballet of Canada and Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, and has appeared in works by William Forsythe, Twyla Tharp, Lar Lubovitch, Frederick Ashton, and Paul Taylor. Since leaving the National Ballet in 2001, Mr. Mrozewski has taken part in the New York City Ballet Choreographic Institute and created works for numerous international ballet companies. His works include **Lost and Found** (2002) for Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, the prize-winning **Another Space** (2002) for Milwaukee Ballet, **Flames and Ashes** for the Copenhagen International Ballet (2002) and **Monument** (2003) for the National Ballet of Canada. In 2004, he will travel to London to set a new work on the Royal Ballet.

Mr. Mrozewski, who is looking forward to being part of The Cullen Series, commented, “As a young choreographer, working with a prestigious and talented company like Houston Ballet is a major stepping stone in my career. I'm so excited to work with Stanton and his amazing team of artists.”

A revival of Trey McIntyre's **Touched**, which premiered in the 1994 Cullen Series, rounds out the program. With its playful use of light and dark and its wildly eccentric, colorful costumes, the work reflects Mr. McIntyre's singular sensibility: exuberant, experimental, and suffused with an irrepressibly idiosyncratic sense of humor. At its premiere, Ann Holmes, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle* said, “It's a dance piece with originality, a welcome experiment in black and white, close and far, coupled with youthful energy...**Touched** comes across as a vital number that works well.” (April 4, 1994)

Set to the cool tunes of jazz great David Brubeck, **Touched** is performed in four parts. Two sections of the work are danced entirely in the dark, with the artists using flashlights to illuminate parts of their bodies. In the work, Mr. McIntyre leaves the world of tutus, toe shoes, and the classical idiom far behind, requiring the dancers to dig deep into his grounded, barefoot, intensely athletic dance vocabulary. Although the tone is whimsical, Mr. McIntyre examines several serious ideas in the piece: the struggle to be vulnerable, to reveal oneself completely in a romantic relationship, and the challenge of achieving a sense of connection and emotional intimacy with another person.

### **HOUSTON BALLETS RINGS IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON WITH *THE NUTCRACKER***

From November 26 – December 26, 2004 Houston Ballet will bring Texas its most joyous holiday gift, Ben Stevenson's breathtaking production of **The Nutcracker**. The beloved ballet 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 many special effects, including the Christmas tree, which “grows” to forty feet, 200 pounds of “snow” falling during the snow scene, and the firing of a cannon on stage.

*Houston Press* dance critic Christie Taylor wrote of the company's 2003 performances, "New blood infuses **The Nutcracker** with life....This year's show was as surprising as going to unwrap a sweater on Christmas morning and instead finding a box of diamond earrings. The ballet's vibrantly colored costumes were captivating, and its choreographic nuances were marvelous." (December 4, 2003)

### **COMPANY DANCERS TO BE SHOWCASED IN 35<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY GALA PERFORMANCE**

On Friday, December 3, 2004, Houston Ballet will celebrate its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an exciting special performance showcasing the artists of the company in a program of high-energy excerpts from beloved classics, previews of upcoming new works, and pieces created specially for the occasion.

Managing director Cecil C. Conner, Jr., commented, "When we ended our 2003 season with a gala performance, audience response was extremely enthusiastic. We like to give our subscribers what they want and celebrate our many talented performers. We intend for this to become a company tradition in the coming years."

### **WORLD PREMIERE BY STANTON WELCH HIGHLIGHTS *ROCK, ROLL, AND TUTUS* IN FEBRUARY 2005**

From February 24 – March 6, 2005, Houston Ballet's exhilarating winter repertory program will feature a neo-classical ballet, rock music, and tutus. A world premiere by Stanton Welch will be unveiled alongside the company premiere of the elegant neo-classical work **Suite en Blanc**. Christopher Bruce's hard-driving, sexy **Rooster** rounds out the program.

A new work by Mr. Welch opens the program in February 2005. Set to Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, it will be created to highlight the company. "It will be a large ensemble work showing off the present and future stars of Houston Ballet," commented Mr. Welch. "Each of

the leads comes forward for a solo.” He chose the Rachmaninoff score for its familiarity, explaining, “It’s a favorite; a lot of people dream of choreographing to it.”

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 the Royal Danish Ballet. Since taking the helm of Houston Ballet in July 2003, Mr. Welch has energized the company, leading critics such as Christie Taylor to note, “Welch leads Houston Ballet with unequaled perfection.” (*Dallas Morning News*, September 6, 2003) He has created several works for Houston Ballet, including **Indigo** (1999), **Bruiser** (2000), and **Tales of Texas** (2004).

The neo-classical **Suite en Blanc** is one of the best-known works by Serge Lifar, the legendary Russian dancer, choreographer, and ballet director. Originally created for the Paris Opera Ballet, this “pure dance” piece is a technically demanding one-act ballet that was designed as a star vehicle for the Paris company. For the beautiful score, Lifar selected excerpts from Edouard Lalo’s *Namouna*, a two-act ballet choreographed by Lucien Petipa in 1882. **Suite en Blanc** premiered in Zurich on June 19, 1943, and has been revived several times at the Paris Opera and other major companies. Maina Gielgud, who danced virtually all the female roles in the ballet and was coached by Lifar himself on the famous “Cigarette” solo, will stage the work for Houston Ballet.

“**Suite en Blanc** is abstract pure dance, one of four or five works like it in the world,” commented Mr. Welch. “**Theme and Variations**, **Symphony in C**, and **Etudes** are in the same category. It is based on French technique, with typical Lifaresque off-balance virtuosity, all done with humor behind it. It’s an extremely difficult ballet that shows off the entire company; only the best companies attempt it. Dancers need to do this ballet to prove their worth as dancers.”

**Rooster**, the smash hit by Christopher Bruce, received its American premiere by Houston Ballet in 1995. Set to eight hits by the Rolling Stones, including “Sympathy for the Devil,” “Paint it Black,” and “Ruby Tuesday,” **Rooster** has become a signature piece for the company, and Houston Ballet has electrified audiences from Shanghai to South Carolina with this work.

On its surface, **Rooster** is a fast, furious, and wild 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 by Houston Ballet in 1995, 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)

Hailed by London’s *The Daily Telegraph* as “the Nureyev of contemporary ballet,” Christopher Bruce was appointed Houston Ballet Associate Choreographer in 1989. Mr. Bruce’s position as one of Britain’s leading choreographers was acknowledged in March 1993 when he received the International Theatre Institute Award for excellence in international dance. This followed a host of other awards, including the first Evening Standard Award for Dance in 1974 in recognition of his contribution to British dance, and the Evening Standard Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement in Ballet in 1996. In June 1998, he was named a Commander of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II as part of the Queen’s Birthday Honors. Mr. Bruce has developed special relationships with a number of ballet companies, including Houston Ballet, Netherlands Dance Theater, Royal Danish Ballet, and English National Ballet. Over the past decade, Houston Ballet has emerged as Mr. Bruce’s artistic home in America. The company has nine works by Mr. Bruce in its repertoire, including **Ghost Dances** (1981), **Land** (1985), **Swansong** (1987), and **Journey** (1990).

### **EPIC LOVE STORY *ROMEO AND JULIET* RETURNS IN MARCH 2005**

From March 10 – 20, 2005, Ben Stevenson will revive his staging of **Romeo and Juliet**, a Houston Ballet classic which inaugurated Wortham Theater Center and opened the company’s historic tour to China. 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.

“**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 are keeping up the tradition. Every ballerina and ballet dancer wants to perform the leading roles in this production because it’s an important part of a dancer’s growth. In fact, every dancer needs to do this ballet. We will have a lot of wonderful Romeos and Juliets.”

Houston Ballet most recently performed **Romeo and Juliet** in 2000, with Molly Glentzer, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle*, noting, “**Romeo and Juliet** soars with emotion, fine dancing. I found myself wishing for the impossible...I yearned for Juliet to wake up before Romeo downed his poison.” (June 10, 2000)

The story of **Romeo and Juliet** is exceedingly simple, yet stunning in its emotional force. Set in sixteenth century Verona, the ballet 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.

**Romeo and Juliet** has played a key role in the history of Houston Ballet. In September 1987, the world premiere of **Romeo and Juliet** inaugurated the opening of Houston Ballet’s opulent new home, 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.

### **HOUSTON BALLET PREMIERE OF MARK MORRIS' *SANDPAPER BALLET* HIGHLIGHTS SPRING REPERTORY PROGRAM IN JUNE 2005**

From May 26 – June 5, 2005, Houston Ballet's spring repertory program features the company premiere of the funny and incredibly musical **Sandpaper Ballet**, the first work by legendary modern dance choreographer Mark Morris to enter Houston Ballet's repertory. James Kudelka's dazzling staging of the ballet classic **The Firebird** rounds out the program.

Mr. Morris's **Sandpaper Ballet** is a lively ensemble piece for 25 dancers set to a medley of 1940s and 1950s all-American tunes by American composer Leroy Anderson, including "Sleigh Ride," "The Typewriter," and "Fiddle Faddle." Noted fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi created the vivid color-block costumes in green and white, which add an inspired note of whimsy to the ballet. Writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, dance critic Allan Ulrich exclaimed, "**Sandpaper Ballet** lifts you out of your seat with its sheer, rib-tickling insouciance....If you hate ballet, you will love it. If you worship ballet, you will understand it. And if you've never seen a ballet in your entire life, you will convert instantly." (April 28, 1999) Originally created for San Francisco Ballet, the work premiered on April 19, 1999 in San Francisco.

"I saw it at its premiere and fell in love with it immediately," commented Mr. Welch. "It's funny and incredibly musical – a real slice of Americana. There is no one like Mark Morris to work with. He's a profoundly musical choreographer, and it will be a treat for our dancers to work with him on and off stage."

An important fixture in American dance, artists and critics alike have praised him. The legendary Mikhail Baryshnikov said, "Since meeting Mark in 1987, I have danced in ten of his premieres; I don't think anything else I can do or say would offer a more eloquent testimonial of how I feel about him and his work. He's one of the great choreographers of our time." Isaac Mizrahi noted, "Mark ruins me for everything else – he is so incredibly good. He is a natural-born theatrician, if

there is such as word.” Arlene Croce of *The New Yorker* pronounced him “the most exciting modern-dance choreographer in the country.” (March 19, 2001)

Mark Morris often pushes the envelope in his choreography, and may be changing the world of dance. In comparing classical ballet and modern dance, Clive Barnes, dance critic for *Dance Magazine*, recently said:

There is an increasingly fine line nowadays between some modern dance and classical ballet. I don't think this is because modern dance has become like classical ballet, but because ballet has become like modern dance. And Mark Morris, trained as a classical dancer, seems to me to be the perfect bridge.” (December, 2003)

Born in Seattle, Washington, Mark Morris studied as a young man with Verla Flowers and Perry Brunson. Early in his career, he danced with Lar Lubovitch, Hannah Kahn, Laura Dean, Eliot Feld, and the Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble. He formed the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980, and has created over 100 works for the company. From 1988-1991 he was the director of dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, the national opera house of Belgium. Among the works created during his tenure were three evening-length ballets: *The Hard Nut* (1991); *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1988); and *Dido & Aeneas* (1989). In 1990, he founded the White Oak Dance Project with Mr. Baryshnikov. Mr. Morris is in great demand as a ballet choreographer and has created works for many companies, including San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, and the Paris Opera Ballet. His work is in the repertoires of the Geneva Ballet, New Zealand Ballet, English National Ballet, and The Royal Ballet. Mr. Morris was named a Fellow of the MacArthur Foundation in 1991, and he has received honorary doctorates from The Boston Conservatory of Music, The Juilliard School, Long Island University, Pratt Institute, and Bowdoin College.

A revised, tightened production of James Kudelka's magical **The Firebird**, featuring exquisite designs by Tony Award-winner Santo Loquasto, rounds out the spring repertory program. A big hit with audiences and critics, it is one of the most popular ballets of the twentieth century. Based on two Russian folk tales, the production tells the story of Prince Ivan and the firebird, the magical creature who comes to his rescue in times of danger.

“**The Firebird** has a venerable history in twentieth century ballet,” commented Mr. Welch. “James has reworked his staging. It was revived in Canada, and he has developed it over time. James is a wonderful, intellectual choreographer. **The Firebird** is a great traditional ballet, and every company needs a version.”

Houston Ballet gave the American premiere of Mr. Kudelka’s production in February 2001, with dance critic Molly Glentzer of the *Houston Chronicle* writing, “It was the Godiva of eye candy, layer after phantasmagoric layer...a spectacle of gold, red, and green, it got wilder as it progressed.” (February 24, 2001) Holly Williams, dance critic for the *Dallas Morning News*, also praised it, observing, “A new, exotic **Firebird** has perched in Houston.” (February 27, 2001)

Mr. Kudelka, whom *The New York Times* has described as “the most imaginative voice to come out of ballet in the last decade,” has created over 40 ballets for some of the world's best companies, including San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Mr. Kudelka was named artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada in June 1996, and has created numerous pieces for that company, including his own versions of two classics: **The Nutcracker** (1995) and a controversial production of **Swan Lake** (1999). In addition to **The Firebird**, Houston Ballet currently has two works by Mr. Kudelka in its repertoire: **There, below** (1989) and **Musings** (1991).

The story of **The Firebird** draws upon two Russian fairy tales: "The Tale of Ivan Tsarevich" and "The Bird of Light and the Grey Wolf," incorporating the legend of the evil demon Kastchei the Deathless, whose death was hidden inside an egg. The ballet opens in the Kingdom of Thrice Nine, an enchanted glade in the jungle. Prince Ivan captures the mysterious firebird, who persuades him to release her by giving him one of her plumes, which he can use to call upon her should he find himself in peril. Ivan meets and falls in love with the beautiful Princess Vasilisa, and thereby falls under the spell of Kastchei. A battle ensues between Ivan and Kastchei, aided by his infernal followers. The Firebird appears when summoned, forces Kastchei and the monsters to dance to exhaustion, and leads Ivan to a large egg, which cracks open to reveal the death of Kastchei. With the death of the enchanter, Ivan and the Princess are free to marry, and the Firebird flies away.

**COMPANY PREMIERES OF STANTON WELCH'S *MANINYAS* AND  
MAINA GIELGUD'S *GISELLE* CAP SEASON IN JUNE 2005**

From June 9 – 19, 2005, Houston Ballet concludes its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary season with two company premieres: Stanton Welch's sensual **Maninyas**, an intimate abstract work featuring five couples, and artistic associate Maina Gielgud's vibrant production and staging of **Giselle**.

A mix of classic and contemporary ballet, **Maninyas** is a small abstract work for ten dancers, a series of pas de deux and pas de trois. "The piece is a process of unveiling," explained Mr. Welch. "It examines how in relationships, you gradually unlayer yourself, and how scary, dark, and open it is to reveal yourself to another, without protection."

Set to *Maninyas Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, a work by Australian composer Ross Edwards, the production is all Australian. Originally created for San Francisco Ballet in 1996, it was Mr. Welch's first commission outside The Australian Ballet – his first American exposure, which led to commissions with other companies. In fact, seeing the premiere of **Maninyas** led Ben Stevenson, Houston Ballet artistic director emeritus, to ask Mr. Welch to create a work for the company.

Maina Gielgud's acclaimed production of **Giselle**, with designs by Peter Farmer, will have its Houston premiere in June 2005. One of the most famous and widely performed works of the Romantic era, 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.

Ms. Gielgud is intimately familiar with this timeless work – she has had a long association and fascination with the ballet, performing the roles of Myrtha and Bathilde at an early age. She danced the role of Giselle in London with London Festival Ballet in 1974, as well as with several other companies around the world as a guest artist. Additionally, Ms. Gielgud first staged **Giselle** for The Australian Ballet in 1986 with original designs by Peter Farmer.

Ms. Gielgud commented, "**Giselle** is one of the most beautiful classical romantic ballets. Houston Ballet, with its wonderful dancers who are equally gifted actors, will perform it beautifully. I am so

much looking forward to working with them on it. One of the exciting things about the work is that it lends itself to many different interpretations of the key roles as well the corps of peasants, girlfriends and Wilis. It is endlessly fascinating for me to explore these characters with different casts of dancers, and together, to find their individual way of telling this perennial story.

“In addition, the more I work on this ballet, the more I realize that the romantic style in which this ballet was created is such a wonderful device with which to create the illusion of the otherworldliness of the Wilis, the souls of young girls who die before their wedding day. For the audience, it is a heartbreaking story with which many identify to this day: being betrayed by the person you love, which leaves you heartbroken. Giselle, from beyond the grave, forgives Albrecht, now in turn heartbroken and remorseful, and saves him from the Wilis.”

Stanton Welch commented, “**Giselle** is my favorite of all the classics because the story is most complete – the resolution is believable. The story is easy to relate to, and it has a wonderful moral. It’s more realistic and contemporary than some of the other stories of the great classical ballets, and the characters are more like real people. Maina’s production, especially the second act, is the best I’ve seen. She is really a traditionalist. There will be an authenticity to this production that is unique – as if you’ve been transported back 100 years to see it.”

Ms. Gielgud staged her production of **Giselle** for Boston Ballet in 2002 and for the Ballet du Rhin, France in 2003 to great critical acclaim. Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times* enthused, “Miss Gielgud’s **Giselle** is one of the best New York has seen.” (July 25, 1990) Writing in *The Independent* (London, England), Judith Mackrell noted, “In its purity and its clarity this production is one of the most satisfying of **Giselles**.” (July 13, 1992) Christine Temin, of *The Boston Globe* said, “Gielgud’s staging of the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century classic is both traditional and profound.” (February 15, 2002)

Bringing thirty years of experience as an international ballerina, company director and coach to her work, Maina Gielgud became Houston Ballet’s artistic associate in July 2003. Born in London, Ms. Gielgud has performed with numerous international companies, including the Grand Ballet Classique de France, Maurice Béjart’s Ballet of the Twentieth Century, London Festival Ballet, and

the Royal Ballet's touring company, performing all the great classical roles. In 1981, she retired from dancing in order to focus on teaching, choreographing, and coaching. In 1992, at Government House, Melbourne, she was appointed an Honorary Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia in recognition of her contribution to the performing arts, and particularly ballet. Ms. Gielgud has directed two of the world's most celebrated companies, The Australian Ballet (from 1983 - 1996) and the Royal Danish Ballet (from 1997-99).

In the story of **Giselle**, Prince Albrecht disguises himself as a peasant in order to court Giselle, a beautiful young village girl. Unaware of Albrecht's noble birth, Giselle falls in love with him. A hunting party stops for refreshments at the house where Giselle and her mother Berthe live. The party includes the Duke of Courland and his beautiful daughter Bathilde, to whom Albrecht is already engaged. Upon meeting Giselle, Bathilde, unaware that they are in love with the same man, is enchanted by her youthful innocence. They fall into conversation and Giselle tells the Princess that she is engaged to marry. Bathilde gives her a beautiful gold necklace. Hilarion, the village gamekeeper who is deeply in love with Giselle and is very jealous of Albrecht, discovers Albrecht's disguise and true identity. When Hilarion reveals this, Giselle becomes so distraught that she loses her reason. Uncontrollable and inconsolable, Giselle attempts to kill herself with Albrecht's sword, hears the Wilis summoning her, and dies in her mother's arms.

At the beginning of the second act, Hilarion is discovered mourning at Giselle's grave. She has been buried deep in the forest and has become one of the Wilis, the ghostly apparitions of girls who were betrayed by their lovers and died on the eve of their weddings. They avenge themselves by dancing to his death any man passing by during the night. Myrtha, Queen of the Wilis, summons the maidens and they force Hilarion to dance until he dies. When Albrecht, now full of remorse, comes to mourn at Giselle's grave, the Queen commands Giselle to rise from her grave and entice him to dance. Giselle is obliged to obey the Queen and dances with Albrecht through the night. She still loves him despite his betrayal, and manages to keep him alive until daybreak. With the arrival of dawn, Giselle and the other Wilis lose their power and vanish. From beyond the grave, the power of Giselle's selfless love has saved Albrecht's life.

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