

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON BALLET'S BEN STEVENSON ACADEMY PRESENTS 2005 ACADEMY SPRING PERFORMANCE

**Stanton Welch Creates *Studies*,
A Full-Scale Classical Work to Showcase Students in All Levels of the Academy**

Houston Ballet II to Perform Stanton Welch's Fast and Furious *Bruiser*

Classical Showpieces *Raymonda* and *Le Corsaire* to be Featured

Houston, Texas – On Friday, April 22 at 7:00 pm and Saturday, April 23 at 2:30 pm Houston Ballet II, the professional training program of Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, will present its 2005 Academy Spring Performance in the Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Orchestra seating is \$20.00 and mezzanine seating is \$15.00. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 ARTS (713 227 2787) or online at www.houstonballet.org. This performance is generously sponsored by AIG American General/AIG VALIC. All proceeds raised at the performance will benefit Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy 2005 Spring Performance will include **Studies**, a world premiere by Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch. Also on the program are Mr. Welch's **Blue** and **Bruiser** as well as excerpts from the classics **Raymonda** and **Le Corsaire**.

Entire Academy Debuts in Stanton Welch's *Studies*

Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch created **Studies**, a new work set to Carl Czerny's *Etudes*, especially for Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy. The entire

academy will perform in **Studies**, a fabulous showcase displaying the artistry and talent of academy students from the introductory levels through the company's professional training wing, Houston Ballet II. The piece highlights the academy's ability to take students from introductory ballet and develop them into skilled professional dancers.

Mr. Welch's intricate piece will join together 124 academy students, ages eight to twenty. According to Mr. Welch, "The piece is designed to give the audience an idea about the different levels of technique acquired as each age group progresses through their training." Many of the younger students have performed as clowns or party children in **The Nutcracker**, but for several young artists this will be their first time on stage. "The short vignettes of Czerny's *Etudes* are wonderful for showcasing the entire academy at different levels of technique," comments Shelly Power, associate director of the academy. "The simple charismatic tunes are not overwhelming for an eight year old."

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy takes students from introduction to ballet through a full course of ballet study. The rigorous program offers classes in technique, pointe work, pas de deux, men's technique, character dance and music. Students as young as four take creative dance, and six year olds take pre-ballet, both of which lay the foundation for further study of classical ballet. Students follow a structured sequence of training stages designed to enhance their technical skills, stamina and discipline.

Stanton Welch's *Bruiser* Challenges Houston Ballet II Students

Houston Ballet II (HB II) students round out the spring performance with Mr. Welch's contemporary knock-out, **Bruiser**. Choreographed in 2000 for the professional company, **Bruiser** will push HB II students physically and technically. Mr. Welch explains, "**Bruiser** is not a classical ballet. It's rougher, more explosive, and into the ground, with lots of natural movement and styles. It's about the impetus for the movement, as opposed to the pretty pictures found in classical ballet. The women in **Bruiser** are on pointe, and the piece uses classical technique. But the dancers punch each other, kick each other, headlock each other, and then they do an arabesque. There's a parallel between boxing, wrestling, and other sports with relationships and life. People always parallel boxing with

dancing. In both arenas, you're meant to be light on your feet, on the balls of your feet, and ready to go in any direction."

Bruiser is a thirty minute ensemble piece featuring a cast of eighteen dancers, nine men and nine women. "There are three movements," comments Mr. Welch, "The first and last movements are two rounds in a battle, and the middle movement, a pas de deux, is the 'time out,' the rest period in between."

Bruiser is challenging because it mixes classical ballet technique, requiring light-on-your-foot pointe work, with a grounded contemporary style inspired by sports. It is important for HB II students to learn works like **Bruiser** since most companies today perform contemporary and classical works. Therefore, **Bruiser** provides HB II students a thrilling, well-rounded experience.

Stanton Welch's *Blue* Stirs Emotions

Stanton Welch's energetic early work **Blue** is an ode to the beauty of classical dance and the body set to music by Antonio Vivaldi. **Blue** explores different emotions through the colors of chakras, the seven energy centers of the body. Barbara Zuck of *The Columbus Dispatch* describes **Blue** as demonstrating "Mr. Welch's strong grounding in classical ballet and his ability to find new things to say in this established vocabulary. Dancers flash across the stage in perfectly timed leaping or running entrances and exits. Many bravura solos give the work a virtuosic edge." (*The Columbus Dispatch*, February 11, 2005)

Blue challenges academy students to combine contemporary choreography with classical technique. Students must learn to move freely with their upper body while maintaining strong core strength needed for classical ballet. Mr. Welch created **Blue** (originally titled **Many Colours Blue**) in 1995 for The Dancers Company, a touring ensemble of The Australian Ballet.

Performances include Excerpts from *Raymonda* and *Le Corsaire*

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy will perform the extravagant third act of the love story **Raymonda**. Set in the time of the Crusades, the ballet's heroine Raymonda has been saved by her fiancée Jean de Brienne, a Christian knight, from abduction by the Saracen knight Abderakhman. Act three is the marriage and celebration of noble Raymonda and de Brienne.

The full-length **Raymonda**, choreographed by Marius Petipa, was first performed at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1898. Houston Ballet II Ballet Master Claudio Muñoz will stage and coach **Raymonda** for the Academy Spring Performance. With over a hundred years of ballet history behind this traditional piece, the students will illustrate the breadth of classical training provided by the academy.

Houston Ballet Principal Teacher and Coach Lazaro Carreño will stage one of classical ballet's most famous grand pas de deux – the love duet from **Le Corsaire**. The full-length ballet was first performed by the Paris Opera Ballet in 1856. The pas de deux celebrates the pirate Conrad's brave rescue of the Greek slave girl Medora from being sold to the wealthy military official Pasha Seyd. Conrad takes Medora to his underground grotto where they show their love for one another in a beautifully choreographed dance. The world famous elegant **Le Corsaire** pas de deux is a challenging technical showpiece made famous by Rudolph Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn.

Ambitious Young Stars of the Academy Shine

For the past three decades, Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy has trained scores of gifted young dancers. Most recently, Houston Ballet Corps de Ballet members Bridgett Zehr and Connor Walsh traveled to the Third Shanghai International Ballet Competition, in July 2004. Mr. Walsh received the Award of Encouragement. Ms. Zehr and Mr. Walsh,

both graduates of the academy, were personally coached during their apprentice year with the company by world renowned Houston Ballet Artistic Associate Maina Gielgud, A.O. and Houston Ballet Principal Teacher and Coach Lazaro Carreño. During the intense one-week competition, Ms. Zehr and Mr. Walsh competed against 90 dancers from eighteen countries for twenty awards.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy is the official school of Houston Ballet, and over 40% of the professional company's dancers trained there. The academy has become one of the nation's premiere classical ballet training institutions, and has produced many professional ballet dancers. Stanton Welch assumed leadership of the company and the academy in July 2003. As artistic director, Mr. Welch is extremely involved in the academy and is committed to the development of its students. This season, academy students have had the opportunity to perform with the professional company in **Peter Pan**, **Romeo and Juliet**, **Jubilee of Dance: A 35th Anniversary Celebration**, and **The Nutcracker**. Students will also join Houston Ballet this season in the company premiere of Maina Gielgud's production and staging of **Giselle**.

The top level of the academy is Houston Ballet II. Students training at this level are preparing for careers as professional dancers, and work with academy coaches and trainers to audition for companies around the world. This year HB II students range in age from fifteen to twenty, and are an international and cosmopolitan group. They have come from cities throughout Texas, California, North Carolina, Virginia, Oregon, Massachusetts, as well as England, Chile, and the Netherlands. HB II students study for two years and either join Houston Ballet or other dance troupes nationally and internationally. In addition to Houston Ballet, past graduates of the program have secured jobs with companies such as American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, San Francisco Ballet, Texas Ballet Theater, and Pacific Northwest Ballet.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy Spring Performance gives students a chance to shine onstage in various roles that emphasize their tremendous talents. Many of these

artists have trained for over ten years, making great sacrifices to achieve their dreams. Performing on the Cullen Theater stage allows the students to demonstrate to their peers and the public how they have developed as artists during their training years at the academy.

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**HOUSTON BALLET'S BEN STEVENSON ACADEMY
2005 SPRING PERFORMANCE FACT SHEET**

PERFORMANCE: **Spring Graduation Performance**
Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center
April 22, 2005 at 7:00 PM
April 23, 2005 at 2:30 PM

**This Performance is generously sponsored by
AIG American General/AIG VALIC.**

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy is also supported by:

The Margaret Wiess Elkins Young Artist Fund and
The AIG American General/AIG VALIC Education
& Community Outreach Programs Fund.
Both are permanent funds of the Houston Ballet endowment.

TICKET COST: Orchestra - \$20.00, Mezzanine - \$15.00

**TO PURCHASE
TICKETS:**

Call 713 227 ARTS (2787)
Or purchase online at www.houstonballet.org

WORKS TO

BE PERFORMED: **RAYMONDA Act III**

Music by Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936)
Choreography after Marius Petipa
Staged and Coached by Claudio Muñoz

LE CORSAIRE Grand Pas De Deux

Music by Riccardo Drigo (1864-1930)
Staged and Coached by Lazaro Carreño

BLUE

Music by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)
Choreography by Stanton Welch

STUDIES

Music by Carl Czerny (1791-1857)
Choreography by Stanton Welch
Katherine Burkwall-Ciscon and Steven Tran, *Pianists*

BRUISER

Music by Graeme Koehne
Choreography by Stanton Welch

All lighting by Christina R. Giannelli

FOR MORE

INFORMATION: Visit Houston Ballet on the World Wide Web at
www.houstonballet.org for more information or to purchase tickets.