

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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CONTACT: MELISSA CARROLL
CASSIE PATTERSON MCCLUNG
713 535 3226

**HOUSTON BALLET PRESENTS THREE COMPANY PREMIERES IN
ANIMAL MAGNETISM,
ITS SPRING REPERTORY PROGRAM**

Carnival of the Animals, First Work by Christopher Wheeldon to Enter Repertory

Tony Award-Winner John Lithgow Appears in Select Performances of
Carnival of the Animals

Houston Ballet honors 125TH Anniversary of Stravinsky's Birth
with Company Premiere of Jiří Kylián's *Svadebka*

Stanton Welch's *Clear* Makes First Appearance in Houston

Houston, TX - From May 24 – June 3, Houston Ballet presents **Animal Magnetism**, a powerhouse program featuring three company premieres by a trio of the world's most celebrated living choreographers. **Carnival of the Animals** is the first work by New York City Ballet Resident Choreographer Christopher Wheeldon to enter Houston Ballet's repertory. The wonderfully charming ballet follows the adventures of a young schoolboy who falls asleep in the American Museum of Natural History. Houston Ballet will also pay tribute to the great Russian composer Igor Stravinsky on the 125th anniversary of his birth with the company premiere of Jiří Kylián's **Svadebka**, a moving portrait of a Russian couple on their wedding day, set to Stravinsky's powerful 1923 cantata *Les Noces*. Rounding out the program is the Houston premiere of Mr. Welch's explosive and sensual work **Clear**, set to music by Bach. Houston Ballet will give seven performances of **Animal Magnetism** at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or by visiting www.houstonballet.org.

Carnival of the Animals:
Using Classical Ballet Technique to Bring to Life
a Colorful Menagerie of Characters

Christopher Wheeldon's ballet is set to French composer Camille Saint-Saëns's beloved orchestral work, *Carnival of the Animals*. Often used as an introduction to musical instruments, the famous score now sets a magical mood for a ballet that will charm audiences for years to come. The libretto for the ballet, which is based on an idea from Mr. Wheeldon and has been written by John Lithgow, tells the story of a young boy, Oliver Pendleton Percy III, who spends the night in the American Museum of Natural History one evening, and as he sleeps the animals invade his dreams, taking the form of animals from his life - his schoolmaster becomes a lion, his schoolmates grow rats' tails, their parents squawking chickens. A librarian reveals an inner fantasy when she transforms from a kangaroo into a glamorous mermaid, and Oliver's great aunt recalls her dancing days as a glamorous swan. With a familiar score, a deliciously funny and lighthearted mood, the ballet will serve as a perfect introduction for young people to the world of classical ballet.

John Lithgow and Alley Theatre Actors Paul Hope and Justin Doran
Share the Role of Mabel Buntz in *Carnival of the Animals*

Tony Award-winning actor John Lithgow is scheduled to perform in two of the seven performances of **Carnival of the Animals**: on opening night on Thursday, May 24, 2007 at 7:30 pm and on Saturday, May 26, 2007 at 7:30 pm. Paul Hope, a Houston native and one of the city's most beloved actors, is scheduled to perform in the four of the performances. Justin Doran, an actor frequently on the stage at the Alley Theatre with a history in theater, film, and television, will perform on Sunday, May 27 at 2:00 pm.

In 2003, the noted choreographer Christopher Wheeldon invited Mr. Lithgow to collaborate with him on a new piece for the New York City Ballet, for which Mr. Lithgow wrote verse narration. The project also spawned an award-winning children's book, *Carnival of the Animals*. In the two performances in which he appears, Mr.

Lithgow will narrate the ballet, as well as dance the roles of the night watchman and Mabel Buntz, the waltzing elephant school nurse.

Mr. Lithgow is an actor with a broad range of interests and talents in every area of the entertainment industry - stage, film, and radio. He has earned four Emmy Awards (in addition to being nominated ten times) and two Tony Awards (as well as three other Tony nominations), among many other honors. Mr. Lithgow is probably most widely known for his starring role as Dick Solomon in the 1996-2001 NBC sitcom *3rd Rock from the Sun*.

In 2002, Mr. Lithgow won a Tony Award for Best Leading Actor in a Musical for his portrayal of J.J. Hunsecker in the Broadway adaptation of the 1957 film **Sweet Smell of Success**. In 2005, he was elected into the American Theatre Hall of Fame for his work on Broadway, and was also nominated for a Tony Award as best leading actor in a musical for **Dirty Rotten Scoundrels**. Highlights of his film career include *Dreamgirls* in 2006, the voice as Lord Farquaad in the hit animated movie *Shrek* in 2001, and Academy Award nominations for best supporting actor for his performances as Roberta Muldoon in *The World According to Garp* and as Sam Burns in *Terms of Endearment*. Since 1998, he has written seven *New York Times* best-selling children's picture books, including *The Remarkable Farkle McBride*, *Marsupial Sue*, *Micawber*, and *I am Mantee*. Mr. Lithgow also performs concerts for children and has released three kids' albums, *Singin' in the Bathtub*, *Farkle & Friends*, and *The Sunny Side of the Street*.

Mr. Lithgow was born in Rochester, New York on October 19, 1945, but grew up in Ohio, and graduated from high school in Princeton, New Jersey. He won a scholarship to attend Harvard University, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1967. Mr. Lithgow has three grown children and a granddaughter, and lives in Los Angeles with wife Mary, a professor of economic and business history at UCLA.

Having appeared with The Alley Theatre for thirteen seasons, Paul Hope is a favorite of Houston theater audiences, and has given memorable performances at The Alley as Gavin in **House and Garden**, Richard in **Hay Fever**, Arthur in **Love! Valour!**

Compassion!, Serge in **Art**, Miles Gloriosus in **A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum**, Malvolio in **Twelfth Night**, Barrymore in **I Hate Hamlet**, Frederick in **Noises Off** and Sgt. “Froggy” Le Seuer in **The Foreigner**, among many others. His musical theatre roles include Rohna in **Grand Hotel** (with Cyd Charisse and Liliane Montevecchi) and Col. Lockert in **Dodsworth** (with Hal Linden), both at Casa Mañana in Fort Worth; and Beauregard in **Mame** (with Juliet Prowse), Bienstock in **Sugar** (with Robert Morse), and M. Renaud in **La Cage** (with Lee Roy Reams) all at Theater Under the Stars. He has also performed as Steve Baker in **Showboat** (with Eddie Bracken) at Houston Grand Opera. He is the artistic director for Bayou City Concert Musicals, which has presented concert stagings of **Follies**, **Falsettos**, **A Little Night Music**, **She Loves Me**, **70 Girls 70**, **Assassins** and this year, **Fiorello**.

Justin Dorian recently appeared at The Alley Theatre as Mr. Gilmer in **To Kill A Mockingbird**, Mr. Marvel in **A Christmas Carol**, and Conrade in **Much Ado About Nothing**. He has appeared in **The Taming of the Shrew** (Petruccio) and **Macbeth** (MacDuff) with the Houston Shakespeare Festival and most recently in **The Tempest** (Ferdinand) and **Titus Andronicus** (Chiron). Before coming to Houston, Mr. Dorian was a company member at the Will Geer Theater in Los Angeles since 1998. Television credits include *E.R.*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Movie Stars*, *The In-Laws*, and *According to Jim*. He earned a B.F.A. in Acting from Southern Methodist University, and a M.F.A. in Theatre/Film/Television from the University of California-Los Angeles.

One of Ballet’s Brightest Choreographic Stars: Christopher Wheeldon

Christopher Wheeldon is among the most sought-after and critically acclaimed contemporary ballet choreographers. Born on March 22, 1972 in Somerset, England, Mr. Wheeldon began his ballet training when he was eight, 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. He has received the Mae L. Wien Award for choreography from the School of American Ballet, the Martin E. Segal Award from Lincoln Center, the London Critics' Circle Award, the American Choreography Award, and the Olivier Award.

In November 2006, Mr. Wheeldon announced he would leave his position as the resident choreographer of the New York City Ballet when his contract expires in 2008 in order to form his own dance company, Morphoses.

Mr. Wheeldon created **Carnival of the Animals** for New York City Ballet in 2003.

Carnival of the Animals is a co-production between Houston Ballet Foundation and Pennsylvania Ballet.

**Stanton Welch's *Clear*:
Created in the Aftermath of 9/11**

An abstract work for seven men and one woman, Mr. Welch's **Clear** is a showcase for male dancers. Set to music by Bach, the work is an artistic response to 9/11. Mr. Welch began choreographing **Clear** for New York City's American Ballet Theatre two weeks after terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan. The resulting critically acclaimed work explores his reaction to that time of crisis.

Commented Mr. Welch, "In a time of tragedy, what is the clearest thing that occurs to people? What is most important? What is the common thread? To me it's love and family. In **Clear**, the woman brings clarity to the seven men in the ballet. She represents the thing that leads you home and out of the mess you're in."

Noted fashion designer Michael Kors created the costumes for **Clear**. Sleek and sexy, Mr. Kors's flesh-toned designs focus the attention on the dancers, emphasizing the emotional impact of Mr. Welch's choreography. Mr. Kors, who lives near the Joffrey Ballet School in Chicago, was inspired by the students he sees every day in their layers, which influenced designs for some of his recent collections. In March 2007, he opened his own boutique in Houston's Galleria.

When American Ballet Theatre premiered **Clear** on October 25, 2001 in New York City, Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times* enthused,

Seven Men And One Woman Equals Explosion

Clear is already the major hit of American Ballet Theater's season. The choreography is explosive, fiercely danced by seven men with no show of diminished energy by the sole woman in the cast. Yet under the almost aggressive exuberance there is a hint of sadness, resolved finally in the comfort of a lover's embrace....

Above all **Clear** is a work that uses classical technique but not classical style. That is, it is not a classical ballet. (Think Balanchine or Petipa.) But it explores the academic dance idiom in depth. Mr. Welch knows how to play around with that idiom: **Clear** has a contemporary look but not the self-consciousness about the ballet vocabulary sometimes seen in Ballet Theater's works by modern-dance choreographers.

This naturalness extends to the way Mr. Welch has matched the ferocity of his fast footwork with the delicate sound of the violin and oboe in Bach....

As a choreographer Mr. Welch, 32, is something of a chameleon. When The Australian Ballet introduced his work to Americans at the Kennedy Center in Washington in 1994, the roots of his British-derived classical training were obvious. But so was his rebellion against tradition. **Clear** is a variation on that theme; the early promise is being fulfilled." (October 30, 2001)

Houston Ballet Orchestra Concertmaster Denise Tarrant on violin and oboist Erik Behr will be featured as soloists performing Bach's music.

Les Noces:

"without doubt, one of the greatest works of the twentieth century."

Houston Ballet's spring repertory program also features the company premiere of Jiří Kylián's abstract ballet for eight couples, **Svadebka**. Russian for "wedding," **Svadebka** is Kylián's version of *Les Noces*, Igor Stravinsky's powerful cantata about a peasant wedding. The work's title has roots in the Russian peasant name for the wedding ceremony or wedding play, *svádebnaya igrá*. In the ballet, a young bride and groom become betrothed through the workings of matchmakers, bid farewell to their parents, and are married in an ecstatic wedding ceremony.

Commented Mr. Welch, "**Svadebka** is one of Kylián's masterpieces. I find it a work that I can watch multiple times and not grow tired of it. The role of the bride is one of the most coveted in the Kylián repertoire."

Svadebka is set to Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky's memorable *Les Noces*, considered to be one of the landmark works in dance history. One of the most influential artists of the 20th century, Stravinsky (1882-1971) composed daring and innovative pieces that changed the dance world. In 1913, the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev commissioned Stravinsky to create a new work for his influential company Ballets Russes. Ten years later, the Russian dancer and choreographer Bronislava Nijinska created a ballet for Diaghilev's company to Stravinsky's *Les Noces*. The resulting work, **Les Noces**, has been performed around the world ever since, and it has been hailed by The Oxford Dictionary of Dance as "without doubt one of the greatest works of the twentieth century." Jiří Kylián created his version of **Les Noces** for Netherlands Dance Theater in 1982, creating a powerful reinterpretation of the ballet.

To bring **Svadebka** to the stage will require an interesting complement of musicians: solo soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor and bass; a chorus of singers from St. Paul's Choir, five percussionists, four pianists and timpani. *Les Noces* will be sung in Russian.

One of the most influential choreographers of his generation, Jiří Kylián has had a profound impact on the world of dance. Jack Anderson, writing in *The New York Times* about Kylián, observed, "Ballets choreographed by Jiří Kylián are passionate, rhapsodic, even tempestuous. The Czech-born artistic director of Netherlands Dance Theater likes to

send dancers surging in great waves across the stage, and he is not afraid to make strong choreographic statements in the theater.” (June 21, 1987)

Svadebka is the second Kylián ballet that Mr. Welch has added to Houston Ballet’s repertory since taking helm of the company in 2003. Houston Ballet has three other works by Kylián in its repertory: **Forgotten Land** (1981), **Sinfonietta** (1978) and **Symphony in D** (1976).

Houston Ballet’s performances of **Animal Magnetism** have been generously underwritten by Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, The Humphreys Foundation, The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts, The Brown Foundation, Inc., and National Endowment for the Arts.

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HOUSTON BALLET
ANIMAL MAGNETISM
FACT SHEET

WHAT: **ANIMAL MAGNETISM**
(Spring Repertory Program)

CLEAR (2001)

Houston Ballet Premiere

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto for Violin and Oboe in C minor and the first and second movements from the *Violin Concerto in G minor*

Choreography by Stanton Welch

Costume Design by Michael Kors

Lighting by Lisa Pinkham

SVADEBKA (1982)

Houston Ballet Premiere

Music by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Les Noces

Choreography by Jiří Kylián

Scenic and Costume Designs by John F. Macfarlane

CARNIVAL OF THE ANIMALS (2003)

Houston Ballet Premiere

Music by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Choreography by Christopher Wheeldon

Scenic and Costume Designs by Jon Morrell

Written by John Lithgow

Carnival of the Animals is a co-production between Houston Ballet Foundation and Pennsylvania Ballet.

Generously Underwritten by:

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Anadarko Petroleum Corporation

The Humphreys Foundation

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National Endowment for the Arts

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

Houston Ballet's Spring Repertory Program features three stellar company premieres in a powerhouse evening of dance. **Carnival of the Animals** is the first work by Christopher Wheeldon, one of the world's hottest young

choreographers, to enter Houston Ballet's repertoire. The ballet follows the adventures of a young boy who falls asleep overnight in the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and features whimsical costumes that evoke the animals pictured in the museum. Set to Stravinsky's powerful score, Jiří Kylián's **Svadebka** dramatizes the events of a Russian peasant wedding unfolding in a barn. Stanton Welch's sensual, abstract **Clear** has become a signature work for him, and provides a spectacular platform for the strength of the men of Houston Ballet.

WHEN: At 7:30 pm on May 24, 26, and June 1, 2, 2007
At 2:00 pm on May 27 and June 2, 3, 2007

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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