

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES ADDITIONS TO THE ARTISTIC STAFF AND PROMOTIONS

Steven Woodgate Joins Artistic Staff as Ballet Master

Lazaro Carreño Named Principal Teacher and Coach

Sara Webb Promoted to Principal Dancer

Houston, Texas – Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch announced today two additions to the artistic staff. Lazaro Carreño joins the company as principal teacher and coach, and Steven Woodgate is the company's new ballet master. In November 2003, Mr. Welch promoted soloist Sara Webb to the rank of principal.

Mr. Carreño and Mr. Woodgate join artistic associate Maina Gielgud, artistic coordinator Martine Harley, and principal dancer Phillip Broomhead, who coaches the company and runs rehearsals, in rounding out the company's artistic staff. "Houston Ballet is proud to announce these additions to our artistic staff. We are committed to bringing exciting and new dance talent to Houston. With the arrival of Steven and Lazaro, we are assembling a superb artistic team to take the company to the next level," commented Mr. Welch.

Acclaimed Men Join Artistic Staff

In January 2004, Australian Steven Woodgate became Houston Ballet's new ballet master. He will stage and set ballets on the company, and occasionally teach and coach company classes as well as classes at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy.

Formerly a senior artist with The Australian Ballet, Mr. Woodgate appeared with that company for eighteen years before joining Houston Ballet's artistic staff. He danced with artistic director Stanton Welch in Australia and is familiar with Mr. Welch's repertory. Mr. Woodgate created the role of Goro in Mr. Welch's **Madame Butterfly** and danced in the first cast of Mr. Welch's signature work **Divergence**. Additionally, he recently set **Madame Butterfly** on Singapore Dance Theatre, where Houston Ballet Soloist Nicholas Leschke danced the role of Pinkerton as a guest artist. Mr. Woodgate's expertise with Mr. Welch's repertory will be invaluable. "I know that he's a great artist and a role model for dancers, and we're looking forward to having him here," commented Mr. Welch.

Initially trained by the late Kathleen Gorham OBE, Gailene Stock and Gary Norman, Melbourne born Steven Woodgate graduated from The Australian Ballet School in 1985. He was then offered a contract with The Australian Ballet, progressed through the ranks and was promoted to senior artist in 1996. Mr. Woodgate has appeared with The Australian Ballet all over the world, dancing at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York and Covent Garden in London. Among his many roles, Mr. Woodgate has performed as Alain and Colas in **La Fille mal gardée**, Franz and Dr. Coppélius in **Coppélia**, Mercutio in **Romeo and Juliet**, lead roles in Balanchine's **Symphony in C** and **Night Shadow**, as well as a solo role in **Suite en Blanc**. He created the roles of Snugglepot in **Snugglepot and Cuddlepie**, Florinda in Mr. Welch's **Cinderella**, and danced in Stephen Baynes's **Beyond Bach** and Mr. Welch's **Red Earth** and **X**. Mr. Woodgate was awarded The Churchill Fellowship in 2000, which enabled him to observe many ballet masters from around the world and study their various teaching methods. As well as performing, Mr. Woodgate has taught both student and professional classes around Australia, in Seattle, Washington, and most recently at Basel Ballet in Switzerland.

Cuban born Lazaro Carreño joined Houston Ballet's artistic staff in November 2003 as principal teacher and coach. A well-renowned teacher specializing in male technique, Mr. Carreño primarily teaches men's company classes and upper level classes at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy. Of Mr. Carreño, Mr. Welch said, "Lazaro was one of the world's most exciting dancers, and his reputation as an internationally renowned teacher precedes him. After he worked for us this fall as a guest teacher, I realized that he would be an asset to Houston Ballet."

Mr. Carreño began his professional ballet career in 1969 when he joined Ballet de Camagüey, and he began dancing principal roles with the Ballet Nacional de Cuba the following year. He has been a guest artist with a variety of renowned companies, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ballet Nacional de Caracas. After winning numerous international awards in the 1970s and 1980s, Mr. Carreño was awarded the Cuban National Arts Medal, the highest artistic honor in Cuba. He began teaching at the Ballet Nacional de Cuba in 1972 and was granted the title of Maitre de Ballet in 1976. He is a respected guest teacher worldwide and has previously taught at Toronto's National Ballet School of Canada, Britain's Royal Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

Sara Webb's Surprise Promotion

Following the bows for Sara Webb's performance as the Sugar Plum Fairy on the opening night for Houston Ballet's **The Nutcracker** on November 28, 2003, Mr. Welch surprised Ms. Webb as well as the audience with a special announcement. "Tonight is the last time you'll see Sara Webb as a soloist," said Mr. Welch. He went on to promote her to principal dancer in front of the cheering, full house. The promotion was a complete surprise for Ms. Webb, who accepted the praise and applause with an emotional final bow. By chance, her parents happened to be in the audience that night – they flew in especially to see her. "I had never danced opening night Sugar Plum, so it was great to have them there," commented Ms. Webb. "My parents have been part of my career since it started. They picked me off the floor when I was frustrated and discouraged, and were there every step of the way. So it was really special to have them there for this important step."

In a review of Ms. Webb's opening night **Nutcracker** performance, Molly Glentzer, dance critic for the *Houston Chronicle*, said, "Webb...was the ballerina of the night. Her whisper-soft crystalline technique was so beguiling, it seemed like Tchaikovsky had incorporated the twinkly sounding celesta into the score expressly for her."

Sara Webb received her early training at the Academy of Nevada Dance Theatre and at the Harid Conservatory in Boca Raton, Florida, from which she graduated in 1996. Ms. Webb was invited to join Houston Ballet in 1997, and was promoted to soloist in 2001. She has performed leading roles in a number of Ben Stevenson's classical productions, including Swanilda (**Coppèlia**), Odette/Odile

(**Swan Lake**), and Cinderella (**Cinderella**). This past September, she debuted as Aurora in **The Sleeping Beauty**.

She has also been featured in the lead roles in Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch's **Madame Butterfly** and Sir Kenneth McMillan's **Manon**. She created the leading roles of Wendy in **Peter Pan** (2002) and Thumbelina in **The Shadow** (2003), both of which were choreographed by Houston Ballet Choreographic Associate Trey McIntyre. In addition to her classical work, Ms. Webb's repertoire includes works by such choreographers as George Balanchine, Sir Frederick Ashton, Christopher Bruce, Nacho Duato, William Forsythe, Lila York, Natalie Weir, and Harald Lander.

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