

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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**HOUSTON BALLET CAPS ITS 2004-2005 SEASON
WITH THE COMPANY PREMIERES OF STANTON WELCH'S *MANINYAS*
AND MAINA GIELGUD'S *GISELLE***

**At the End of Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Season,
Company Returns to Its Beginnings with a New Version of *Giselle***

**Sara Webb, Leticia Oliveira Debut as Giselle
Simon Ball, Zdenek Konvalina, Andrew Murphy to Give their
First Houston Performances as Albrecht**

Houston, TX – From June 9 - 19, 2005, Houston Ballet concludes its 35th anniversary season, showcasing the strength and depth of the company in a program that contrasts 21st century romance with a tale of love, betrayal, and redemption, set in the Romantic era. The performances feature two company premieres: artistic director Stanton Welch's **Maninyas**, a sensual, abstract work about relationships, and artistic associate Maina Gielgud's beautiful and moving production of **Giselle**. Set to a violin concerto by Australian composer Ross Edwards, **Maninyas** is a powerful work for ten dancers. In **Giselle**, the supreme example of 19th century balletic Romanticism, a beautiful peasant girl is deceived in love by an aristocrat disguised as a commoner. Houston Ballet will give seven performances of its season finale, featuring **Maninyas** and **Giselle**, at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or visiting the company's Web site at www.houstonballet.org

The program not only presents two different ways of looking at relationships, but two different styles of dance. Commented Mr. Welch, "This program showcases our dancers in two ballets at opposite ends of the spectrum. The works highlight the change in balletic technique and provide a good yardstick of the evolution of dance. **Giselle** is one

of the oldest ballets still performed, and it is nice to contrast an authentic Romantic ballet with a much more recent work. **Giselle** is about tranquility and slowness and **Maninyas** is all speed and physicality. It shows what you can ask of dancers today.”

Houston Ballet’s production of Maina Gielgud’s **Giselle** features several role debuts. Principal Sara Webb and first soloist Leticia Oliveira will perform the role of Giselle for the first time. Principal Mireille Hassenboehler will reprise the role she first performed memorably in June 2001. Principals Simon Ball, Zdenek Konvalina and Andrew Murphy will appear in Houston for the first time as Albrecht. This production of **Giselle** is an international affair. Ms. Gielgud, whose **Giselle** has won accolades in Australia, London, New York, and France, is from London. Ms. Oliveira is from Brazil, Mr. Konvalina is from the Czech Republic, and Mr. Murphy is from Australia. The opening night cast on Thursday, June 9th features Ms. Hassenboehler as Giselle and Mr. Murphy as Albrecht.

It is fitting that Houston Ballet should conclude its 35th Anniversary Season with a new staging of **Giselle** as this work has played a seminal role in the history of the company. **Giselle** was the first full-length classic that Houston Ballet Foundation staged in 1967, featuring superstar Carla Fracci, a legendary Giselle of the era, and Erik Bruhn, one of the world’s most heroic *danseur nobles*, in a production supported by student dancers from Houston Ballet’s Academy and from other area dance schools. The production was a success and inspired Houston balletomanes to launch a major fund drive. By 1968, the foundation gave the go-ahead for the creation of a professional company. In May 1969, the sixteen dancers of Houston Ballet’s professional company gave their first Houston performance at Jones Hall for the Performing Arts.

Houston Ballet’s performances of the season finale are generously underwritten by ConocoPhillips, Baker Botts L.L.P., AIM Investments, BHP Billiton, The Wortham Foundation, Inc., and The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts. Additional support comes in part from the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

Maninyas:
A Process of Unveiling

A mix of classical and contemporary ballet, **Maninyas** is a small abstract work, a series of pas de deux and pas de trois. Set to *Maninyas Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, a work by Australian composer Ross Edwards, the piece features five couples in delicate costumes designed by Mr. Welch, who move in and out of a series of shimmering curtains or veils.

“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. The dancers are undressing themselves spiritually as well as physically.”

Originally created for San Francisco Ballet in 1996, **Maninyas** was Mr. Welch’s first commission outside his home company, The Australian Ballet – his first American exposure, which led to commissions with other companies. In fact, seeing **Maninyas** led Ben Stevenson, Houston Ballet artistic director emeritus, to ask Mr. Welch to create a work for the company. At its premiere, *San Francisco Examiner* dance critic Allan Ulrich enthusiastically commented, “Although still in his early 20s, [Stanton Welch] is extraordinarily promising....**Maninyas** was spectacular.” (February 29, 1996)

Maina Gielgud Breathes New Life into *Giselle*,
One of the Most Beautiful Romantic Ballets

Maina Gielgud’s acclaimed production of **Giselle**, with designs by Peter Farmer, will have its Houston premiere on this program. One of the most famous and widely performed works of the Romantic era, it tells the story of a beautiful peasant girl deceived by Prince Albrecht, her transformation into a Wili (the ghosts of women betrayed on their wedding day) and her forgiveness of her errant lover which results in his salvation. 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 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 as 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-19th-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 1997-1999).

The Story of *Giselle*

In **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 goes to mourn 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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HOUSTON BALLET
SEASON FINALE
FACT SHEET

WHAT: SEASON FINALE PROGRAM, featuring:

MANINYAS (Houston Ballet Premiere)

Music by Ross Edwards

Maninyas Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

Choreography by Stanton Welch

Scenic and costume design by Stanton Welch

Lighting Design by Lisa J. Pinkham

GISELLE (Houston Ballet Premiere)

Music by Adolphe Adam

Choreography by Marius Petipa, after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot

Produced and Staged by Maina Gielgud

Designs by Peter Farmer

Lighting by Christina R. Giannelli

Generously underwritten by:

ConocoPhillips

Baker Botts L.L.P.

AIM Investments

BHP Billiton

The Wortham Foundation

The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts

Additional Support Provided by:

The City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council
of Houston/Harris County

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

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WHEN:

At 7:30 pm on June 9, 11, 17, 18, 2005

At 2:00 pm on June 12, 18, 19, 2005

WHERE: Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center
501 Texas Avenue in downtown Houston

TICKETS: Start at \$17. Call (713) 227 ARTS or 1 800 828 ARTS
Also available at Houston Ballet Box Office at Wortham Theater Center
downtown at Texas at Smith Street, or purchase tickets online at
www.houstonballet.org

**FOR MORE
INFORMATION:** Visit Houston Ballet on the Web at www.houstonballet.org