

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON BALLET'S BEN STEVENSON ACADEMY PRESENTS SPRING GRADUATION PERFORMANCE

Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch to Present His *A Time to Dance*

Academy Student Peter Zweifel to Premiere His *Inspirations of the Soul*

Excerpts from *Swan Lake* and *Don Quixote* To Be Performed

HOUSTON, TEXAS – On Friday, April 23, 2004 at 7:00 PM the professional training program of Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy will present its Spring Graduation Performance in the Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. This performance is generously sponsored by AIG American General/AIG VALIC and the Rudolf Nureyev Dance Foundation. 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. All proceeds raised at the performance will benefit Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy.

Premieres by Stanton Welch and Peter Zweifel Highlight Graduation Performance

Academy student Peter Zweifel will present his work **Inspirations of the Soul** in the graduation performance. Mr. Zweifel was inspired by the music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach while listening to some CDs at the library. He has created this three part contemporary work on seventeen of his academy student peers and expressed, "I feel very

lucky to work with such awesome dancers and artists.” Conner Walsh, an academy dancer in Mr. Zweifel’s ballet commented, “It has been fun to watch Peter, because he is just starting out as a choreographer—it has been a learning experience for us to watch him grow!” Mr. Zweifel feels both nervous and excited about his opportunity to present his ballet on the Cullen stage. When asked what he wanted the audience to gain from his work he replied, “I would like the audience to be touched emotionally.” In addition to creating this work, Mr. Zweifel will travel to Australia in the spring to study dance and choreography for several weeks through the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) exchange program. WAAPA, a school within Edith Cowan University, has programs in drama, arts management, broadcast journalism, music, design and dance. In February, Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy hosted WAAPA student Kasey Polkinghorn as part of the program. Stanton Welch is an avid supporter of the exchange program and feels both students and company members can thrive from this type of outside stimulation.

Excerpts from the second act of **Swan Lake**, one of the great set pieces of classical ballet, are also on the program. The ballet tells the story of Odette ~ a beautiful princess transformed into a swan by an evil sorcerer ~ and the Prince who swears his eternal love for her. Tchaikovsky's tremendous score and Ben Stevenson's beautiful choreography created after Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, combine to create the perfect introduction to classical dance. Academy associate director Shelly Power commented, “Learning excerpts from a traditional ballet such as **Swan Lake** is an integral part of the training and education of a dancer. Exposure to this ballet is a golden opportunity for our students to realize their potential, as they are not only challenged physically, but also musically and emotionally.”

Excerpts from another 19th century classic, **Don Quixote**, will also be featured on the program. Set to music by Alois Louis Minkus in an arrangement by John Lanchbery, and choreographed by Ben Stevenson, **Don Quixote** had its Houston Ballet premiere in 1995. In the ballet the irresistible love story of Kitri, the feisty village beauty, and Basilio, the dashing young barber, is played out against the subplot of Don Quixote, the eccentric, wandering knight who sets out on a quest to find his ideal woman, Dulcinea. The academy will perform excerpts from this full-length ballet including the bravura pas de deux danced by Kitri and Basilio in the third act, which requires stamina, energy and a Spanish flair.

A Time to Dance, set to the music of Antonin Dvorak, was Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch's first choreographic commission at the young age of twenty-one. The ballet was choreographed for The Dancer's Company of The Australian Ballet and had its premiere on September 5, 1990 at the Sir Robert Helpmann Theatre in Mount Gambier, South Australia. **A Time to Dance** has since been performed by professional companies and schools all over the world including The Royal Ballet School (London) and BalletMet (Columbus, Ohio). Mr. Welch created this ballet to challenge the dancers and yet allow them to have fun within the boundaries of classical ballet. It is a celebration of youth and exuberance. Mr. Welch commented, "Keeping in style with the music, I have choreographed the dancing in a character and classical style. I have tried to capture in the dancers the exhilaration of youth, the awkwardness of adolescence and the strength of maturity, and show the love of dance and the small spark in all of us that lets us know when it is time to dance."

Priscilla Nathan-Murphy, principal of the lower school at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, will restage her work, **Captive/Support** which premiered at the academy spring graduation performance on April 22, 2000. This contemporary work is set to the percussive sounds of the Kodo drummers. The piece focuses on the physicality and energy of movement. It highlights the dancers' strong technique and seeks to explore movement from a spatial point of view. Ms. Nathan-Murphy observed, "Energy is important to me. The power of movement can be very explosive or sensual. The piece also explores the use of a prop which extends upon the energy and further manipulates the movement into either supportive or captive levels."

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy

Ben Stevenson Academy is the official school of Houston Ballet, and over 40% of the professional company's dancers have trained there. The academy has become one of the nation's premiere classical ballet training institutions that has cultivated many professional ballet dancers throughout the world. Stanton Welch assumed leadership of the academy in July 2003. As artistic director, Mr. Welch is extremely involved in the academy and committed to the development of its students. This season academy students have had the opportunity to perform with the professional company in **The Sleeping Beauty**, **The Nutcracker**, and **Tales of Texas**. The academy consists of eight stages, with levels 7 and 8 comprising the professional training levels. The level 8 class is the program's most advanced course in which students are trained for careers as professional dancers. This year's level 8 students range in age from 16-20, and are a cosmopolitan group. They have come from California, North Carolina, Virginia, Oregon, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., England, and cities throughout Texas to study at the academy. Students study in the

level 8 program for two years and either join Houston Ballet's professional company 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, and Pacific Northwest Ballet.

Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy Graduation Performance gives the 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
FACT SHEET**

PERFORMANCE: Spring Graduation Performance

Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center
April 23, 2004 at 7:00 PM

This Performance is generously sponsored by AIG American General/AIG VALIC and the Rudolf Nureyev Dance Foundation. 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: *INSPIRATIONS OF THE SOUL*

Music by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788)
Choreography by Peter Zweifel

***SWAN LAKE* (Excerpts)**

Music by Peter Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
Choreography by Ben Stevenson after Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov

***DON QUIXOTE* (Excerpts)**

Music by Alois Louis Minkus (1826-1917)
arrangement by John Lanchbery
Choreography by Ben Stevenson

A TIME TO DANCE

Music by Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)
Choreography by Stanton Welch

CAPTIVE/SUPPORT

Music by Ibuki (Kodo drummers)
Choreography by Priscilla Nathan-Murphy

FOR MORE

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