

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON BALLET PREMIERE OF MARK MORRIS'S *SANDPAPER BALLET* HIGHLIGHTS SPRING REPERTORY PROGRAM

Fantastical Russian Fairytale *The Firebird*
Returns to Houston

Lauren Anderson, Sara Webb and Leticia Oliveira
to Dance Title Role in *The Firebird*

Houston, TX – From May 26 - June 5, 2005, Houston Ballet's spring repertory program features the company premiere of the deliciously witty **Sandpaper Ballet**, the first work by legendary choreographer Mark Morris to enter Houston Ballet's repertory. James Kudelka's dazzling staging of the ballet classic **The Firebird** rounds out the program. He offers a unique interpretation that sets the ballet's Russian fairytale story in a colorful Mayan jungle that won praise from *The New York Times* at its premiere in Toronto in 2000: "All that glitters looks like gold in the dazzling new version of **The Firebird**." (November 14, 2000) Houston Ballet will give seven performances of the spring repertory program at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston and tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or visiting the company's Web site at www.houstonballet.org

With this program, Houston Ballet is providing a showcase for two of the world's most celebrated contemporary dance makers, each working in a different genre. Commented Mr. Welch, "Both are directors of their own companies – to great acclaim – and have had a real impact on dance in North America. This program will be an interesting evening of contrasts: James's version of **The Firebird** is very opulent, which is the opposite of the minimalism of Mark's **Sandpaper Ballet**." Running the gamut from pure dance to

narrative storytelling, Houston Ballet's spring repertory program will have something for everybody.

Houston Ballet's performances of the spring repertory program are generously underwritten by Altria Group, Inc., Occidental Petroleum Corporation, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, Andrews Kurth LLP, The Brown Foundation, Inc., and The Wortham Foundation, Inc. Additional support comes in part from the City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County.

Sandpaper Ballet:
Mark Morris's Funny, Musical Ballet

Mr. Morris's **Sandpaper Ballet** is a lively ensemble piece for 25 dancers set to a suite of 1940s and 1950s all-American tunes by American composer Leroy Anderson, including "Sleigh Ride," "The Typewriter," and "Fiddle Faddle." Noted fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi created the vivid, colorful costumes in green, blue, and white, which add an inspired note of whimsy to the ballet.

Commented Mark Morris, "Anderson's novelty numbers are under known and underappreciated. They are wonderful small scale compositions that feature different sections of the orchestra. No one ever plays more than one of them on a program, as an encore. How about all encores? It is a fun gift for the orchestra and the public. What's better than 'Sleigh Ride'?"

"I saw it at its premiere and fell in love with it immediately," said Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch. "It's funny and incredibly musical – a real slice of Americana. There is no one like Mark Morris to work with. He's a profoundly musical choreographer, and it will be a treat for our dancers to work with him on and off stage."

Writing for the *San Francisco Examiner*, dance critic Allan Ulrich exclaimed, "**Sandpaper Ballet** lifts you out of your seat with its sheer, rib-tickling insouciance....If you hate ballet, you will love it. If you worship ballet, you will understand it. And if

you've never seen a ballet in your entire life, you will convert instantly." (April 28, 1999)
Originally created for San Francisco Ballet, the work premiered on April 19, 1999 in San Francisco.

An important fixture in American dance, artists and critics alike have praised Mark Morris. The legendary Mikhail Baryshnikov said, "Since meeting Mark in 1987, I have danced in ten of his premieres; I don't think anything else I can do or say would offer a more eloquent testimonial of how I feel about him and his work. He's one of the great choreographers of our time." Isaac Mizrahi noted, "Mark ruins me for everything else – he is so incredibly good. He is a natural-born theatrician, if there is such a word." Arlene Croce of *The New Yorker* pronounced him "the most exciting modern-dance choreographer in the country." (March 19, 2001)

Mark Morris often pushes the envelope in his choreography, and may be changing the world of dance. In comparing classical ballet and modern dance, Clive Barnes, dance critic for *Dance Magazine*, remarked:

There is an increasingly fine line nowadays between some modern dance and classical ballet. I don't think this is because modern dance has become like classical ballet, but because ballet has become like modern dance. And Mark Morris, trained as a classical dancer, seems to me to be the perfect bridge." (December, 2003)

Born in Seattle, Washington, Mark Morris studied as a young man with Verla Flowers and Perry Brunson. Early in his career, he danced with Lar Lubovitch, Hannah Kahn, Laura Dean, Eliot Feld, and the Koleda Balkan Dance Ensemble. He formed the Mark Morris Dance Group in 1980, and has created over 100 works for the company. From 1988-1991 he was the director of dance at the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, the national opera house of Belgium. Among the works created during his tenure were three evening-length ballets: **The Hard Nut** (1991); **L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato** (1988); and **Dido & Aeneas** (1989). In 1990, he founded the White Oak Dance Project with Mr. Baryshnikov. Mr. Morris is in great demand as a ballet choreographer and has created works for many companies, including San Francisco

Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, and the Paris Opera Ballet. His work is in the repertoires of the Geneva Ballet, New Zealand Ballet, English National Ballet, and The Royal Ballet. Mr. Morris was named a Fellow of the MacArthur Foundation in 1991, and he has received honorary doctorates from The Boston Conservatory of Music, The Juilliard School, Long Island University, Pratt Institute, and Bowdoin College.

The Firebird:
A Rare Bird Takes Flight in a Glittering Mayan Jungle

A revised, tightened production of James Kudelka's magical **The Firebird**, featuring exquisite designs by Tony Award-winner Santo Loquasto, rounds out the spring repertory program. Set in a lush Mayan jungle, the ballet is an unforgettable glittering showstopper. A big hit with audiences and critics, it is one of the most popular ballets of the twentieth century. Based on two Russian folk tales, the production tells the story of Prince Ivan and the Firebird, the magical creature who comes to his rescue in times of danger.

“**The Firebird** has a venerable history in twentieth century ballet,” commented Mr. Welch. “After its premiere in 2000, James significantly revised his staging. James’s company, The National Ballet of Canada, has revived it several times since then, and he has developed it over time. James is a wonderful, intellectual choreographer. **The Firebird** is a great traditional ballet, and every company needs a version of this classic.”

Performances Include Many Role Debuts

Houston Ballet’s production of **The Firebird** will feature numerous role debuts. Principal Sara Webb and first soloist Leticia Oliveira will debut in the title role. Principal Lauren Anderson will reprise the title role that she danced so memorably at the American Premiere of the work in February 2001. Soloist Randy Herrera will debut as Prince Ivan, and principals Simon Ball and Zdenek Konvalina will appear in Houston for the first time as the prince. Principal Andrew Murphy will appear in Houston for the first time as Kastchei the Deathless, and soloist Nicholas Leschke will reprise the role he danced at

the premiere. Ms. Oliveira and corps de ballet member Hiromi Ushino will debut as Princess Vasilisa.

On opening night, Lauren Anderson will dance as the Firebird opposite Mr. Ball as Prince Ivan, Mr. Leschke as Kastchei the Deathless, and Ms. Oliveira as Princess Vasilisa.

Houston Ballet gave the American premiere of Mr. Kudelka's production in February 2001, with dance critic Molly Glentzer of the *Houston Chronicle* writing, "It was the Godiva of eye candy, layer after phantasmagoric layer...a spectacle of gold, red, and green, it got wilder as it progressed." (February 24, 2001) Holly Williams, dance critic for the *Dallas Morning News*, also praised it, observing, "A new, exotic **Firebird** has perched in Houston." (February 27, 2001)

Mr. Kudelka is setting his **Firebird** on Houston Ballet in the midst of a very busy and exciting season for The National Ballet of Canada, the company he has directed since June 1996. The company revived Mr. Kudelka's production of **Cinderella** with Erte inspired sets and costumes to sold out houses in Ottawa this spring, followed by the world premiere of Mr. Kudelka's first full-length comic ballet, **An Italian Straw Hat** on May 1, 2005.

Mr. Kudelka, whom *The New York Times* has described as "the most imaginative voice to come out of ballet in the last decade," has created over 40 ballets for some of the world's best companies, including San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and the Birmingham Royal Ballet. Mr. Kudelka has created numerous pieces for The National Ballet of Canada, including his own versions of three classics: **The Nutcracker** (1995), a controversial production of **Swan Lake** (1999), and a staging of **Cinderella** (2004). In 2002, he created his first full-length original ballet **The Contract (The Pied Piper)**, a compelling work of insightful psychology, examining ambition, lust, faith, and greed. The National Ballet of Canada performed **The Contract (The Pied Piper)** at the Brooklyn Academy of Music April 5- 9, 2005. In addition to **The Firebird**, Houston

Ballet currently has two works by Mr. Kudelka in its repertoire: **There, below** (1989) and **Musings** (1991).

The Story of *The Firebird*

Drawing upon two Russian fairy tales, “The Tale of Ivan Tsarevich” and “The Bird of Light and the Grey Wolf,” **The Firebird** incorporates the legend of the evil demon Kastchei the Deathless, whose death was hidden inside an egg. The ballet opens in the Kingdom of Thrice Nine, an enchanted glade in the jungle. Prince Ivan captures the mysterious Firebird, who persuades him to release her by giving him one of her plumes, which he can use to call upon her should he find himself in peril. Ivan meets and falls in love with the beautiful Princess Vasilisa, and thereby falls under the spell of Kastchei. A battle ensues between Ivan and Kastchei, aided by his infernal followers. The Firebird appears when summoned, forces Kastchei and the monsters to dance to exhaustion, and leads Ivan to a large egg, which cracks open to reveal the death of Kastchei. With the death of the enchanter, Ivan and the Princess are free to marry, and the Firebird flies away.

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HOUSTON BALLET
SPRING REPERTORY PROGRAM
FACT SHEET

WHAT: **SPRING REPERTORY PROGRAM, featuring:**

SANDPAPER BALLET (Houston Ballet Premiere)

Music by Leroy Anderson
Choreography by Mark Morris
Costume design by Isaac Mizrahi
Lighting design by James F. Ingalls

THE FIREBIRD

Music by Igor Stravinsky
Choreography by James Kudelka
Designs by Santo Loquasto
Lighting by David Finn

Generously underwritten by:

Altria Group, Inc.
Occidental Petroleum Corporation
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Andrews Kurth LLP
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Additional Support Provided by:

The City of Houston through the Cultural Arts Council
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**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

Houston Ballet's spring repertory features the company premiere of the funny and incredibly musical **Sandpaper Ballet**, the first work by legendary choreographer Mark Morris to enter Houston Ballet's repertoire. Noted fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi's witty costumes add an inspired note of whimsy to the ballet. James Kudelka's dazzling staging of the ballet classic, **The Firebird**, featuring magnificent Aztec-inspired costumes by Tony Award-winner Santo Loquasto, rounds out the program. Based on a beloved Russian folk tale, the ballet tells the story of Prince Ivan and the firebird, the magical creature who comes to his rescue in times of danger.

WHEN:

At 7:30 pm on May 26, 28 and June 3, 4, 2005
At 2:00 pm on May 29 and June 4, 5, 2005

WHERE: Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center
Texas at Smith Streets 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