

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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**STANTON WELCH CREATES A NEW FULL-LENGTH
SWAN LAKE
FOR HOUSTON BALLET**

**New Zealand Designer Kristian Fredrikson's Spectacular
Scenery and Costumes Inspired by Pre-Raphaelite Paintings**

**Dame Merle Park, Georgina Parkinson, and Olga Evreinoff
Coach Ballerinas in Leading Roles**

Houston, TX – From February 23 – March 5, 2006, Houston Ballet presents the highlight of the company's 2005-2006 season: a lavish new production of **Swan Lake** by Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch. A milestone work for the company, this will be Houston Ballet's first new **Swan Lake** in 22 years. One of the greatest love stories of classical ballet, the work tells the story of Odette – a beautiful maiden transformed into a swan by an evil knight – and the prince who swears his eternal love for her. Houston Ballet will give eight performances of **Swan Lake** at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or by visiting the company's Web site at www.houstonballet.org.

Mr. Welch commented, "**Swan Lake** is the Everest of ballet, a career benchmark and a challenge for choreographers. It's important for my development as an artist to make this work my own, and to give this new generation of dancers at Houston Ballet ownership of the roles."

One of the most famous and frequently performed works in the international repertoire, **Swan Lake** was first performed at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in 1877, with a specially commissioned score by Tchaikovsky. The production was not an overwhelming success at its premiere. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, “neither the ballet nor its ballerina were well received.” On March 1, 1894, Act II of **Swan Lake**, featuring choreography by Lev Ivanov, was performed for a Tchaikovsky memorial. The Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov production, which became the definitive version, was performed at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg on January 27, 1895.

Since that time, countless choreographers have staged versions of this classic. George Balanchine once said, “**Swan Lake** is always changing. That is as it should be.” Each generation responds to classical ballet in a distinct way, and Mr. Welch will bring his own unique, twenty-first century aesthetic to a touchstone work.

Mr. Welch’s **Swan Lake** will feature lavish designs inspired by Pre-Raphaelite paintings by the celebrated New Zealand designer Kristian Fredrikson, who passed away in November 2005. This production, the last work that Fredrikson designed in an illustrious 40-year career spanning three continents, will be dedicated to his memory. Commented Mr. Welch, “In my whole life, from childhood to adulthood, my experience of ballet has been shaped by Kristian Fredrikson’s designs. Nearly every full-length work in The Australian Ballet’s repertoire is his design. He was truly a unique Australian voice and artist. There is no one else who can compare with his artistry and achievement.”

The role of Odette/Odile in Mr. Welch’s new **Swan Lake** will be performed by principal dancers Barbara Bears, Mireille Hassenboehler and Sara Webb; first soloist Amy Fote (giving her first performances of this role in Houston), and corps de ballet member Bridgett Zehr, who will make her role debut as Odette/Odile.

Appearing as Prince Siegfried are Houston Ballet Principals Simon Ball, who will partner Amy Fote; Zdenek Konvalina, who will dance with Ms. Zehr; and Andrew Murphy, who

will perform with Ms. Hassenboehler. Corps de ballet member Connor Walsh will debut as the prince with Ms. Bears and Ms. Zehr.

The charismatic Brazilian star Marcelo Gomes, a principal dancer with New York's American Ballet Theatre, returns to Houston to appear as Prince Siegfried in Mr. Welch's production. Mr. Gomes has a long history with Houston Ballet: he trained at Houston Ballet's Ben Stevenson Academy, and has known Mr. Welch since 2001, when he was cast in a leading role in his ballet, **Clear**, at American Ballet Theatre. He has also performed in Mr. Welch's **Within You Without You: A Tribute to George Harrison** (2002) and **HereAfter** (2003).

These performances of **Swan Lake** will be Mr. Gomes's third visit as a guest artist with the company. In 2004, he appeared as the Nutcracker Prince in **The Nutcracker**, and in 2005 he danced the role of Romeo in the company's production of **Romeo and Juliet**. Mr. Gomes will partner Ms. Webb in **Swan Lake**, resuming a friendship and partnership that began when both dancers trained at Harid Conservatory from 1993-1996 and spent a summer session together at Houston Ballet Academy.

The principals will benefit immeasurably from the expertise of three world renowned coaches who have traveled to Houston to work with the dancers during the rehearsal period: Dame Merle Park, the great Royal Ballet ballerina of the 1960s and 1970s who also served as director of the Royal Ballet School from 1983 – 1998; Georgina Parkinson, also a former Royal Ballet principal who has served as ballet mistress at American Ballet Theatre for over twenty-five years; and Olga Evreinoff, a product of St. Petersburg's famed Vaganova Ballet Academy who regularly coaches for many of the world's best companies, including The Royal Ballet, English National Ballet, the Royal Swedish, and Royal Danish Ballets.

“This has been a wonderful experience for our dancers,” commented Mr. Welch. “They have benefited tremendously from the wisdom and expertise of these artists. It's important for dancers to be exposed to new ideas and coaching techniques – to be

challenged, pushed and inspired. It's an invaluable part of their training and development.

“Dame Merle danced **Swan Lake** so memorably with The Royal Ballet and has been coached by those closest to the original production. She brings a very clean and precise English ballet technique, as well as intensity, to each dancer's character interpretation. She also is a wonderful source of stories about the greats of the dance world.

“I first saw Georgina Parkinson coaching **Swan Lake's** white swan pas de deux. I was so impressed with her coaching – especially the use of the back. Georgina is a world renowned coach of the classics, specifically the acting and the theatrical aspect of an interpretation.

“Olga Evreinoff will coach our dancers in the traditional Russian ballet technique. The moves are more luscious and bendy when contrasted against American and English ballet techniques. Her port de bras is so expressive and broad, and especially good for our taller ladies.

“All three ladies will merge American, English, and Russian ballet techniques to form an original style for our new production of **Swan Lake**. Their coaching is essential to our dancers' interpretation.”

Dame Merle Park, who is currently in Houston working with the company on Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake**, commented, “It's fascinating and exciting to see the men dancing as much as the women if not even more. **Swan Lake** was always a ballet for the ladies, and the men went home early.

“I thoroughly enjoyed working with the company. The dancers are very strong and receptive. It's so great to see them learning all the roles. They don't only do the leads; they learn secondary roles as well. It's all part of building an artist.”

Houston Ballet's performances of **Swan Lake** are generously underwritten by the Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation, The Fondren Foundation, The Wortham Foundation,

Inc., Fulbright & Jaworski LLP, Burlington Resources, Humphreys Foundation, and Fluor Corporation.

A New *Swan Lake* for a New Century

Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake** will be Houston Ballet's third production of this beloved classic. Houston Ballet Artistic Director Emeritus Ben Stevenson created the company's first version in 1977, a production that drew considerable national interest as it was the first American staging of the ballet in over a decade. Mr. Stevenson then created a new version of **Swan Lake** in 1984, with designs by David Walker, which the company toured throughout the United States and Great Britain.

"My **Swan Lake** will be set in the classical idiom," explained Mr. Welch. His new production will include many of the familiar elements of this beloved, classical work: the swans, Odette, Odile, and Prince Siegfried. "However," he continued, "I'm playing with the scenario. I intend to give the ballet a contemporary slant, with complex dramas and a twenty-first century feel and pace." Mr. Welch's **Swan Lake** will be an updated version of the folktale for a new generation, one that gives the main characters more developed, three-dimensional personalities. "It will be apparent that Siegfried, Odette, Rothbart, and Odile, have light and dark sides to their characters," commented Mr. Welch. "It's important to see and understand the motivation and reason behind their actions."

In Mr. Welch's version, Prince Siegfried meets Odette as a maiden, not as a swan, which makes the relationship between the doomed lovers seem more credible. "In my story, Siegfried meets her at night while she is human, before she transforms into a swan in the daylight," said Mr. Welch. "I'd like to try and make their love story more appealing and tragic by having them meet when she is a real woman."

Swan Lake's story is timeless. Mr. Welch's new staging, award-winning designer Kristian Fredrikson's sets and costumes, Tchaikovsky's memorably lyrical score, and Houston Ballet will make it irresistibly new and compelling.

Mr. Welch has created a number of evening-length story ballets including **Cinderella** (1997), **Madame Butterfly** (1995), and **Don Quixote** (2003); and a new production of **The Sleeping Beauty** for The Australian Ballet which opened in September 2005 in Melbourne, Australia. Reviewing Mr. Welch's new staging of **The Sleeping Beauty** for the *Sunday Herald Sun*, Catherine Lambert wrote, "This is a stunning production....Welch and Fredrikson have put an inventive new stamp on this much-loved ballet, ensuring it continues to evolve and reach wider audiences." (September 18, 2005)

Commenting on the challenges of staging two large Tchaikovsky works so close together, Mr. Welch said, "**Swan Lake** and **The Sleeping Beauty** are iconic dance stories. As a classical choreographer it is my duty to keep these works alive, fresh and interesting. We must continue to make these ballets challenging for both the audience and the dancers. With two such large works, it is hard to pace yourself. However, the stories, music, style and use of classical technique are very different. Each work provides new opportunities."

Swan Lake will be Mr. Welch's second full-length work for Houston Ballet. His other works for the company include **Indigo** (1999), **Bruiser** (2000), the evening-length **Tales of Texas** (2004), **Blindness** (2004), **Bolero** (2004), and **Nosotros** (2005).

Designer Kristian Fredrikson:

Inspired by John William Waterhouse's Painting, *The Lady of Shalott*

Mr. Welch, who collaborated with Mr. Fredrikson on **Swan Lake**, was inspired by John William Waterhouse's painting, *The Lady of Shalott* (1888). Waterhouse (1849-1917) was a British Neo-Classical and Pre-Raphaelite painter well-known for works featuring female characters from mythology and literature. The painting, which is based on Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem by the same title, depicts a tragic maiden afloat on a lake. Mr. Welch commented, "When I saw this painting I said, 'This is our Odette.' Here is a woman, a young heroine, lost in a forest by a lake, touched by tragedy."

Mr. Fredrikson's designs feature maidens in long flowing gowns, dozens of white swans, Rothbart as a menacing dragon-like monster, four glamorous and steely black swans, sumptuously outfitted Hungarian, Neapolitan, Russian and Spanish princesses, and a royal court boasting costumes made of brocade, cut-velvet, and pearl-encrusted, sequined fabrics. There are more than 50 tutus, 45 costume designs, 31 characters, and 70 headpieces. The costume for Rothbart alone took Houston Ballet's costume shop more than 600 hours to produce.

An artist whose career spanned the worlds of dance, opera and theater, Mr. Fredrikson achieved a life long ambition in 2005: he designed the sets and costumes for the three major Tchaikovsky ballets, all of which premiered in the same season. Immediately after creating sets and costumes for Mr. Welch's **The Sleeping Beauty** in Australia in September 2005, Mr. Fredrikson finished Houston Ballet's new **Swan Lake** and a new production of **The Nutcracker** for The Royal New Zealand Ballet before he died in November 2005.

Mr. Fredrikson designed five different productions of **Swan Lake** over the last four decades. His first experience with the ballet came from an unusual source: Imelda Marcos. In 1965 Ms. Marcos commissioned him to create the white act (the second act of the full-length work, set by the lakeside) for The Australian Ballet. She then flew in Dame Margot Fonteyn to dance the lead with the Australian company for a one-night performance.

Mr. Fredrikson created four other productions of **Swan Lake**, including one set in the Hapsburg Court for The Royal New Zealand Ballet in 1985, a Tudor version for that same company eleven years later, an Art Nouveau production for The Australian Ballet and a modern-dress one set in the Windsor Court for The Australian Ballet that premiered in 2002. He commented, "I could do **Swan Lakes** forever. The beauty of the ballet is the music; it's so inspiring and wonderful. **Swan Lake** is the most emotional Tchaikovsky ballet score." Mr. Fredrikson enjoyed working on Mr. Welch's production,

one that he felt would bring the ballet close to the original folktale, introducing the swans in daylight and the maidens at night.

This was the fourth time that Mr. Welch worked with Mr. Fredrikson. Mr. Fredrikson created the sets and costumes for Mr. Welch's **Cinderella** and **The Sleeping Beauty** for The Australian Ballet. In 2004, Mr. Fredrikson traveled to Texas to create the costumes and sets for the **Pecos Bill** section of **Tales of Texas**. Of working with Mr. Welch, Fredrikson said, "I think he's a great storyteller. He puts great psychological insight into the story. There are very few story choreographers left in the world."

Behind the Music: Houston Ballet's Swan Lake

As the first composer who produced symphonic music for ballet, Tchaikovsky created in **Swan Lake** something that delighted dancers and music lovers. For many, the musical melodies from Tchaikovsky's lush score are synonymous with ballet. Houston Ballet Music Director Ermanno Florio worked with Stanton Welch to organize Tchaikovsky's original score in such a manner that it perfectly suits Mr. Welch's new vision for the work.

Commented Mr. Florio, "As we began discussing the arrangement for his **Swan Lake**, Stanton and I agreed that we would try to keep to the original Tchaikovsky score by using as much of the original music as possible in its original order, with few cuts within the individual musical numbers. For example, Stanton wanted the White Swan pas de deux and the Black Swan pas de deux music to be performed as is traditionally done, and we restored all of the music for the harp cadenza before the White Swan pas.

"Stanton organized the ballet into three acts with two intermissions. This would require combining the original Act I and Act II. As the musical numbers that end the original Act I and that start the original Act II are similar, Stanton decided to keep the Act 1 finale music (which is usually cut) and create a pas de deux on it. Also, in the 'White Act' (the second half of Stanton's Act I), we decided to use the waltz three times, as in the original.

“Additionally, there are two wonderful pieces of music in the appendix to the musical score of **Swan Lake** that are rarely used in the full-length version of the ballet: the music used by Balanchine in his **Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux**, and a fabulous solo for violin called Danse Russe. Stanton is using the ‘female variation’ music from the **Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux** and all of the Danse Russe in this version of the ballet.”

Mr. Florio, who joined Houston Ballet in 1992, has conducted seven different productions of **Swan Lake**. Other versions he conducted were choreographed by: Erik Bruhn (for National Ballet of Canada), Peter Wright (for Royal Birmingham Ballet), Ben Stevenson (for Houston Ballet), Rudolph Nureyev (for Paris Opera Ballet), Anna Marie Holmes (for Norwegian National Ballet), Rudi van Danzig (for Dutch National Ballet), Kevin McKenzie (for American Ballet Theatre) and George Balanchine (for New York City Ballet).

The Story of Stanton Welch’s *Swan Lake*

Odette, a young maiden, is in the forest. The evil knight Rothbart appears and captures her, turning her into a white swan. She is cursed to remain a swan during the day, and a maiden at night.

Later, the young Prince Siegfried and his entourage arrive in the forest and set up camp, celebrating the day’s hunt. The Queen calls her son aside and reminds him that tomorrow is an important day. She introduces him to four eligible young princesses, but he is distant and uninterested. The Queen sternly warns him that this is the last night of his youth and that he must soon take on the responsibility of adulthood. Upset, Siegfried decides to leave the camp and venture out into the woods alone.

Deep in the forest that evening along the edge of the lake, Siegfried sees a young maiden. She is beautiful, and he falls instantly in love. However, she is terrified, and begs him to leave, to no avail. Charmed by his bravery, Odette finds herself falling in love with him. As the sun begins to rise, the evil knight Rothbart summons Odette. She goes to him and is transformed into a swan and flies away. Soon thereafter, a large flock of swans lands

on the lake. Siegfried's friend and some hunters from the royal party see the flock and prepare to shoot, but the Prince intervenes and orders them to leave. Siegfried notices that one of the swans is Odette and he professes his love to her.

The next night, the Queen hosts a party and presents eligible princesses to her son, but the Prince pays little attention. Suddenly, Rothbart and a maiden dressed in black arrive. It is Odile. She is the mirror image of Odette. The Prince is smitten with the mysterious woman in black and begs his mother to consider the new arrival. Siegfried and Odile dance and he proclaims his love for her. The Prince tells his mother that he wants to marry Odile. Just then, Siegfried sees Odette in the crowd. She is horrified by the betrayal and runs out. The prince runs to Odile and realizes that she is one of Rothbart's swans and that he has been fooled. The devastated prince chases Rothbart as he flees the court.

The Prince arrives at the edge of the lake in the forest and begs the distraught Odette for forgiveness. The sun comes up and the maidens turn back into swans in the morning mist. Before long, Rothbart and his black swans appear and he summons all of the swans, including Odette. The Prince, desperate to be with his love, grabs his crossbow to kill Rothbart. The Prince shoots, but his arrow hits Odette instead. Rothbart holds Odette in his arms but when she falls, she is a maiden. The spell Rothbart cast on Odette is broken, and the Prince runs to her. Odette, as a woman, dies in the Prince's arms. He picks up her body and walks into the lake, drowning himself. Young maidens appear from the forest, forever changed.

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HOUSTON BALLET
SWAN LAKE
FACT SHEET

WHAT: **SWAN LAKE (World Premiere)**
Music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
Choreography by Stanton Welch, after Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov
Scenic and Costume Designs by Kristian Fredrikson
Associate Designer: Fiona Reilly
Lighting by Lisa Pinkham

Production dedicated to the memory of Kristian Fredrikson

Generously underwritten by
The Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation
The Fondren Foundation
The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
Fulbright & Jaworski LLP
Burlington Resources
Humphreys Foundation
Fluor Corporation

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch will create a spectacular new version of **Swan Lake**, the company's first new production of this milestone work in 22 years, featuring scenery and costumes by the celebrated designer Kristian Fredrikson. One of the great love stories of classical ballet, **Swan Lake** tells the story of Odette – a beautiful maiden transformed into a swan by an evil knight – and the Prince who swears his eternal love for her.

WHEN:

At 7:30 pm on February 23, 25 & March 3, 4, 5, 2006
At 2:00 pm on February 26 & March 5, 2006
At 1:30 pm on March 4, 2006

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

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