

HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

FOR RELEASE ON
MARCH 7, 2004

CONTACT: JOHANNA TSCHEBULL
SUSAN INTILLE
713 535 3226

HOUSTON BALLET UNVEILS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF
TALES OF TEXAS
IN MARCH 2004

New Artistic Director Stanton Welch Creates
His First Evening-Length Work Specially for Houston Ballet

Production Features Music by Aaron Copland,
Patsy Cline and a Commissioned Score by Matthew Pierce

Houston, Texas – From March 11 through March 21, 2004, Houston Ballet unveils **Tales of Texas**, the first evening-length work by its new artistic director Stanton Welch created especially for Houston Ballet. The production takes an abstract panoramic view of Texas, its history, people and spirit; and tells the story of early Texas pioneers, brokenhearted women in a Texas honky-tonk, and a Texas folk legend. The ballet, which incorporates music by Aaron Copland, Patsy Cline, and the rising young composer Matthew Pierce, consists of three acts entitled “Big Sky,” “Cline Time,” and “Pecos.” The company will give six performances of **Tales of Texas** at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston.

Houston Ballet’s **Tales of Texas** is generously underwritten by Compass Bank Private Client Services, Fulbright & Jaworski LLP, Burlington Resources, and Cooper Industries. Additional support has been provided by The Brown Foundation, Inc., The Wortham Foundation, Inc., and Trammell Foundation

“BIG SKY:”
A PAEAN TO THE PIONEER SPIRIT
SET TO MUSIC OF AARON COPLAND

“Big Sky” begins with Copland’s “Open Prairie” from *Billy the Kid*, and tells the story of several couples working, living, and dying on the Texas frontier. The ballet depicts the settlers struggling to survive the harsh conditions, dealing with loss and death, and learning to cope with surroundings vastly different from the ones they left behind. “The arid landscape was a challenge for these early European pioneers,” commented Mr. Welch, “and the ones who succeeded had a special salt about their soul.”

Mr. Welch specifically chose music by Aaron Copland, explaining, “There are very few composers who sound so American, and whose music seems to belong to this country. He really captures the vast open spaces of the United States – and Texas. When I found out that I would be doing an American ballet, I knew that Copland would have to be a part of it.”

Houston Ballet wardrobe supervisor Pat Padilla worked with Mr. Welch to realize the earth-toned, period-inspired costumes for “Big Sky.” “After many conversations with Mr. Welch that helped me understand the ballet and what he is trying to convey in his choreography and costumes,” commented Ms. Padilla, “I began to look at fabrics and think about design.” Her inspiration for the colors came from discussions with Mr. Welch about the pioneers who “rose up out of the dirt.”

Thomas Boyd, Houston Ballet production director, and the Houston Ballet production team – which includes Christina Giannelli and Nicholas Phillips – realized “Big Sky’s” set. They created a sepia-toned collage of images that presents sweeping vistas of the Texas landscape, including architectural combinations of trees, cactuses, and mountains inspired by the arid “cityscapes” of West Texas.

**“CLINE TIME:”
TWO STEPPING TO THE SONGS
OF A COUNTRY MUSIC LEGEND**

“Cline Time” follows the romantic misadventures of a group of Texas women in a bar for the broken hearted. Set to the music of country legend Patsy Cline (whose name inspired the title of this act of the work), “Cline Time” gives Houston Ballet dancers the opportunity to demonstrate their skill at country and western dancing. Three-time country and western world champions Bob Wheatley and Shawna Dysart coached the company dancers in the character of country and western dance and specific two step patterns.

The dancers will bring Ms. Cline’s songs to life, embodying tragic love and broken relationships with humor and wit. “I started looking for the perfect country and western music for the ballet,” commented Mr. Welch, “and I kept coming back to Patsy Cline. Her songs have such a bittersweet quality that’s perfect for theatrical dance.” Some of the music selections include *Crazy*, *Walkin’ After Midnight* and *Sweet Dreams of You*.

Pat Padilla created bright, fun costumes inspired by country and western style, rodeo attire, and cowboy fashion. Mr. Welch gave Ms. Padilla direction regarding the feeling for each song, and using this as a starting point, she fashioned outfits that range from sweet cowgirls to over-the-top country and western entertainers. Many of the costumes reflect the stage fashions worn by Patsy Cline and other entertainers popular during the heyday of country and western music, brought to life with eye-catching sequins, stones, and fringe.

“Cline Time” features a startling juxtaposition of scenic elements. Thomas Boyd and the Houston Ballet production team have created a set that encloses the dancers on stage in a corral-like space defined by a split-rail fence and lighting. “There will be an interesting interplay between the colorful costumes and a stark set which is sharply defined by dramatic lighting, creating a chiaroscuro-like effect,” commented Mr. Boyd.

**“PECOS:”
THE LOVE STORY OF A
LEGENDARY TEXAS HERO**

A third piece of the ballet takes as its subject the mythical Texas cowboy Pecos Bill. One of the most colorful figures in Texas folklore, he was raised by a pack of wild coyotes after he fell from his mother’s covered wagon when they were crossing the Pecos River. The relationship Pecos establishes with these animals leads to many adventures throughout his life. His best-known exploits include lassoing a cyclone, riding a mountain lion, and using a rattlesnake as a whip. Legend also has it that he invented the branding iron to stop cattle rustling, drained the Rio Grande to water his ranch during an enduring drought, and taught gophers to dig postholes.

In **Tales of Texas**, Mr. Welch will focus on the poignant romance between Pecos Bill and his beloved, Slue-foot Sue. “I’m not really touching upon the more traditional aspects that many people are familiar with, ” he commented. "I’m developing the less familiar stories and the relationship with the women in his life. I think the end of Pecos’s relationship with Sue is something that everyone can relate to. It is similar to **Madame Butterfly** and **Cinderella**, two other full-length works that I've choreographed, in that the story is very universal.”

Mr. Welch has commissioned the rising composer Matthew Pierce to compose the music for the “Pecos” section of the ballet. Mr. Welch explains, “I wanted to have a commissioned score that was specific to the story of Pecos Bill. On several occasions I went to San Francisco to watch some ballets choreographed by Julia Adam. Each time I liked the music she used in her pieces. So I asked her who created them for her, and she responded that they were all by Matthew Pierce. I asked him to write several themes, and I found them all very successful.” Mr. Pierce has written ballet scores for numerous companies, including The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet and San Francisco Ballet.

In discussing themes for the piece with Mr. Pierce, Mr. Welch explained, “I would like to incorporate the sounds of old cowboy folk songs with the sounds of coyotes and horses, to try to create something that is authentically Texan.”

Acclaimed New Zealand designer Kristian Fredrikson has created the costumes and set for “Pecos.” Mr. Welch is excited about working with Mr. Fredrikson on this ballet, and looks forward to introducing his talents to Houston audiences. “Kristian Fredrikson is Australia’s number one designer,” Mr. Welch comments. “If you grew up watching Australian ballet, you would have seen at least one of his productions a year. My most memorable childhood experiences were of his designs. He is an icon.”

Mr. Fredrickson’s scenic design includes whimsical and colorful costumes that flesh out the ballet’s characters, and a dramatic horizon – a sky full of storm clouds and a rainbow – that dominates the set. The costumes are sure to be a delight. From Pecos Bill’s playful red, white, and blue chaps; to the coyote’s fur-trimmed headdress; the steer’s magnificent, Texas-sized horns; and the mountain man’s fringed jacket and pants; the ballet’s costumes will be a sight to see.

Commented Mr. Fredrikson, “The concept for Pecos Bill is to capture not only the comedic myth of Bill’s origin and his courtship of the enthusiastic Slue-foot Sue, but also the evergrowing size of Texas, which is in itself practically a myth throughout the world. The set represents this by a single image ever iris-ing into multiple sizes, and the costumes pay homage to the frontier folk who pioneered this often flat and golden land. My inspiration was the landscape of an American quilt – that colorful folk art which is so beloved and which, I feel, lies deep in the American soul. For me it is a patchwork of images that represent a state that took the star as its emblem and now seeks to move physically on into the reality of the constellations.”

Mr. Fredrikson has designed a large number of productions for The Australian Ballet and The Australian Opera, including **Swan Lake**, **The Nutcracker**, **Turandot**, and **The Merry Widow**. He has worked with Stanton Welch on several pieces, including Mr. Welch’s first professional ballet, **Of Blessed Memory**, and Mr. Welch’s version of **Cinderella**.

Mr. Welch has dedicated **Tales of Texas** to Houston Ballet Artistic Director Emeritus Ben Stevenson. In September 2000, Mr. Stevenson, who was then the artistic director of Houston Ballet, commissioned Mr. Welch to create an evening length work for the company. Mr. Welch

came up with several proposed ideas, but Mr. Stevenson was most intrigued with the concept for **Tales of Texas**. “I think that Ben’s attraction (and my own) to this idea was that no other company could present this work in the way that Houston Ballet could,” commented Mr. Welch. “It is truly a unique flower for Houston Ballet – not only for the company’s dancers, but for the city Houston and Texas.”

In conjunction with **Tales of Texas**, Houston Ballet presents four pre-curtain musical performances by Texas-based groups, starting at 6:30pm in the Grand Foyer at Wortham Theater Center. These performances are free to all ticketholders. On opening night, Thursday, March 11, The Gillette Brothers will entertain the audience with traditional cowboy music. Guy and Pip Gillette have combined their life-long interest in the history of the west and its music with their musical experience to great acclaim. In 2003 they received the Will Rogers Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Advancement of Contemporary Cowboy Music-Best Duo/Group by The Academy of Western Artists. They have also received the National Cowboy Symposium's American Cowboy Culture Chuck Wagon Award. On Saturday, March 13, Gina Lee and The Brisket Boys will perform rocking hillbilly, swing, and honky-tonk music, with sweet singing from the songbooks of Patsy Cline and Bob Wills. The Ridgetop Syncopators, an all acoustic, hot fiddle swing band true to the original roots of what is today called “Western Swing,” will entertain the pre-performance crowd on Friday, March 19 with old-time fiddle breakdowns, tin pan alley ballads, hot jazz foxtrots, and gut bucket blues. On Saturday, March 20, Texavia, a Houston-based Czech polka band, led by accordion player Mark Halata, will perform country music with a flair.

Texas Traditions, the musical performances and an accompanying photo display exhibit, is funded by the Texas Commission on the Arts and curated by Texas Folklife Resources. *Texas Traditions* highlights the music traditions and the distinctive character of life in Texas.

TALES OF TEXAS
FACT SHEET

WHAT: TALES OF TEXAS
(World Premiere)
In alphabetical order:

Big Sky

Music by Aaron Copland
Choreography and concept by Stanton Welch
Costumes realized by Pat Padilla
Set realized by Tomas Boyd
Lighting by Christina Giannelli

Cline Time

Music by Patsy Cline
Choreography and concept by Stanton Welch
Costumes realized by Pat Padilla
Set realized by Tomas Boyd
Lighting by Lisa Pinkham

Pecos

Music by Matthew Pierce
Choreography by Stanton Welch
Costumes and scenic design by Kristian Fredrikson
Lighting by Lisa Pinkham

Generously underwritten by:

Compass Bank Private Client Services
Fulbright & Jaworski LLP
Burlington Resources
Cooper Industries

Additional support provided by:

The Brown Foundation, Inc.
The Wortham Foundation, Inc.
Trammell Foundation

**ABOUT THE
PROGRAM:**

From March 11-21, 2004, Houston Ballet will unveil the world premiere of **Tales of Texas**, an evening-length work taking a panoramic view of Texas, its history, and its people. Set to the music of Aaron Copland, Patsy Cline, and a commissioned score by Matthew Pierce, the production will give Houston Ballet dancers an opportunity to display their skill at line

dancing and two stepping. One act of the ballet will focus on the poignant romance between the legendary folk hero Pecos Bill and his beloved, Slue-foot Sue.

WHEN: At 7:30 pm on March 11, 13, 19, 20, 2004
At 2:00 pm on March 14, 21, 2004

WHERE: Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center
Texas at Smith Streets in downtown Houston

TICKETS: \$11.50 -- \$115.50, 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 World Wide Web at <http://www.houstonballet.org>