

# HOUSTON BALLET

STANTON WELCH - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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## HOUSTON BALLET LAUNCHES 39<sup>TH</sup> SEASON WITH JOHN CRANKO'S TWENTIETH CENTURY MASTERPIECE *ONEGIN*

**Production Features Lavish Costumes and Scenery  
by English designer Elisabeth Dalton**

**Houston, Texas** – From September 4-14, 2008, Houston Ballet launches its thirty-ninth season in grand style with John Cranko's dramatic evening-length masterwork **Onegin**, the preeminent story ballet of the late twentieth century, with sumptuous costumes and scenery by English designer Elisabeth Dalton not seen before in Houston. Houston Ballet will give six performances of **Onegin** at Wortham Theater Center in downtown Houston. Tickets may be purchased by calling 713 227 2787 or by visiting [www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org).

"**Onegin** is so tremendously well-crafted, dramatic, accessible, and wonderful to dance that it has become the great classic of its time. Every element comes together so wonderfully in his work: the choreography, music, and scenic aspects," commented Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch.

Based on the great narrative poem *Eugene Onegin*, by the nineteenth century Russian writer Alexander Pushkin and Tchaikovsky's opera by the same name, the emotional ballet features an epic love story, deadly duels, and passionate revenge. The arrogant aristocrat Onegin rejects the love of the naïve young Tatiana only to realize later that he made a great mistake in throwing away his one chance at happiness.

Cranko's absolute mastery of the art of the pas de deux is highlighted to great effect in this large-scale emotional masterpiece, climaxing in a final, heart-wrenching pas de deux

between Tatiana and Onegin. Set to lush music by Tchaikovsky arranged by Kurt-Heinz Stolze with scenery and costumes evoking nineteenth century Russia, **Onegin** is an exquisite love story that will sweep audiences off their feet.

One of the most famous “new” classics, **Onegin** was originally created for Cranko’s own company, The Stuttgart Ballet. That company premiered it on April 13, 1965 in Stuttgart, Germany.

Since its premiere, the dazzling drama has been performed to great critical acclaim around the world and is in the repertoire of numerous companies including The Royal Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, The Australian Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, and Hamburg Ballet. Anna Kisselgoff, dance critic for *The New York Times*, said of the ballet’s appeal, “To a public yearning for full-evening dramatic ballets, **Onegin** was so seductive that company after company throughout the world snapped up the work for their own repertoire.” (July 10, 1998). She later added, “**Onegin** is the embodiment of ballet as a new form of opera-house spectacle, a mix of prettiness and passion clearly and boldly telegraphed.” (June 4, 2001)

**Onegin** is a personal favorite of Stanton Welch. Mr. Welch’s family has long been involved in various productions with The Australian Ballet: his mother danced the role of Tatiana, his brother Damien has performed Onegin, and he has appeared as Lensky.

British designer Elisabeth Dalton enjoyed an international reputation as a set and costume designer for opera houses and ballet companies. She studied at the Wimbledon School of Art, and then at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. It was in 1969 she designed her first major sets and costumes for dance, for John Cranko’s **The Taming of the Shrew**, mounted by The Stuttgart Ballet and one of the company’s longest-lasting successes.

Her association with The Stuttgart Ballet continued after Cranko’s sudden death in 1973. She designed many of Cranko’s earlier works, including **The Lady and the Fool** and **Pineapple Poll**. Most notable were her designs for his **Romeo and Juliet** in Frankfurt,

and (in 1991) for his **Onegin**, which is now in the repertory of companies across the world. When Ms. Dalton's **Onegin** was staged in Helsinki, a reviewer wrote that she had brought the very soul of Pushkin's Russia to the stage.

Her last work for The Stuttgart Ballet was for Rodgers and Hart's **On Your Toes** (1990). She also worked twice with Sir Kenneth Macmillan, on **The Sphinx** (Stuttgart, 1968) and **Checkpoint** (Royal Ballet, 1970). In addition to ballets, she designed sets and costumes for operas. Ms. Dalton died in 2004 at the age of 64.

Houston Ballet's performances of **Onegin** are generously underwritten by The Wortham Foundation, Inc.

### ***Onegin: A Journey from Novel to Opera to Ballet to Film***

The story of the Byronic world-weary Russian aristocrat Eugene Onegin has evolved from poetry to opera to ballet. Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin composed his masterpiece poetic novel in 1837; fifty-two years later Tchaikovsky composed *Eugene Onegin*, an opera based on Pushkin's poem. Cranko was first exposed to the story while choreographing three dances for George Devine's production of the opera that the Sadler's Wells company premiered in 1952. In the years that followed, repeated screenings of a Russian film of the opera inspired him to create a ballet.

"The opera struck me as being much more suitable for ballet," noted Cranko. "The plot of the Pushkin poem is balletic – explainable in three different dance styles. The first act is a youthful peasant dance, the second is a bourgeois party, and the third is an elegant St. Petersburg ball. And like a thread going through the labyrinth you have your soloists, with their problems, their stories."

Cranko brings the story to life with a series of magnificent duets, each providing rich, complex scenes for the four principal characters: Onegin, Tatiana, her sister Olga, and Olga's fiancée Lensky. However, the focus of **Onegin** is Tatiana, who experiences a full

character arc. She matures from an infatuated provincial schoolgirl to a glamorous woman with a secretly broken heart.

“Onegin is a tragic love story about a woman leaving her childish notions behind, and coming to terms with adult feelings of love,” commented Mr. Welch. In the first act, the bookish Tatiana Larina imagines that the jaded Onegin returns her teenage love. By the ballet’s end, the tables have been turned, and Onegin has persuaded himself that he is desperately in love with the adult, married Tatiana. “This ballet is about a strong woman,” continues Mr. Welch, “with a fully developed character, who ends the ballet in a position of strength.”

### **John Cranko: One of the World’s Great Choreographers of Narrative Ballets**

Born in South Africa in 1927, John Cranko was one of the most successful choreographers of full-length story ballets in the twentieth century. He studied dance mainly at the University of Cape Town and at the Sadler’s Wells School in London. He joined the Sadler’s Wells Ballet (later The Royal Ballet) in 1946 and in a few years began his choreographic career. In 1957, he created his first full-length ballet, **The Prince of the Pagodas**, for The Royal Ballet. He was appointed director of The Stuttgart Ballet in 1961, and in 1962, he premiered his breakthrough staging of **Romeo and Juliet** to great critical acclaim. His productions of **Onegin** (1965), **The Taming of the Shrew** (1969), and **Carmen** (1971) are now part of the international repertoire. Some other works he created in Stuttgart include **Swan Lake** (1963), **Opus I** (1965), and **Initials R.B.M.E.** (1972). In addition, he encouraged young dancers in his company - including Jiří Kylián and John Neumeier – to try their hand at choreography. The untimely death of John Cranko in 1973, at the age of 45, deprived the ballet world of one of its most talented choreographers of story ballets. Houston Ballet’s company premiere of **Onegin** was in 2005, and the company has one other work by Cranko in its repertoire: **Lady and the Fool** (1954), which the company first performed in 1978.

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**HOUSTON BALLET**  
***ONEGIN***  
**FACT SHEET**

**WHAT:       ONEGIN (1965)**  
A ballet in three acts based on the verse-novel by Alexander Pushkin  
Music by Peter I. Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)  
Arrangement by Kurt-Heinz Stolze  
Choreography by John Cranko  
Staged by Jane Bourne  
Scenery and Costume Design by Elisabeth Dalton  
Lighting Design by Steen Bjarke

**Generously sponsored by:**  
The Wortham Foundation, Inc.

**ABOUT THE  
PROGRAM:**

Houston Ballet launches its 2008-2009 season with a new production of John Cranko's twentieth century masterpiece, **Onegin**, featuring sumptuous scenery and costumes by the English designer Elisabeth Dalton. A fiery love triangle and a deadly duel inflame passion in this story of an innocent young woman and the brooding Russian nobleman who cruelly rejects her. **Onegin** delivers the fervor and intrigue of a Gothic romance, and provides four superb, richly textured leading roles to showcase the dramatic abilities of Houston Ballet's dancers.

**WHEN:**       At 7:30 pm on September 4, 6, 12, 13, 2008  
                  At 2:00 pm on September 7, 14, 2008

**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  
                  Tickets are also available at [www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org) and the Houston  
                  Ballet Box Office at Wortham Theater Center, 501 Texas Avenue  
                  (at Smith Street).

**FOR MORE  
INFORMATION:** Visit Houston Ballet on the Web at [www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org)

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