

THE STRETTON LEGACY

Michelle Potter

When Australian Ballet principal dancer Matthew Trent retired late in 2005 he was quoted in *The Age* as saying that, in the course of his career with the Australian Ballet, the period of Ross Stretton's directorship had been the one in which he grew most as an artist. He said:

*That's when I was being given my biggest opportunities. The period with Ross was the period I grew the most. I loved the repertoire.**

When Stretton, the Australian Ballet's sixth artistic director, died in June 2005, much attention was paid to analysing, belatedly perhaps, the nature of his contribution to ballet in Australia, and to the Australian Ballet in particular. Not every commentator or dancer felt that Stretton had been generous in giving opportunities, but there seemed to be widespread agreement that the expansion of the company's repertoire was one of Stretton's great contributions during the short period of his directorship from 1997 to mid-2001.

The works Stretton put on stage reflected, quite naturally a range of necessities as well as his particular vision. No artistic director or a repertory company such as the Australian Ballet could or would want to dispense entirely with heritage and tradition. The repertoire listed below, especially the list of works restaged from the company's existing repertoire, makes it quite clear that Stretton cared about the classical tradition. Nor can an artistic director ever divorce him or herself from the influences that have shaped his or her life. Stretton's repertoire reflects quite strongly the impact his time as a dancer and director in the United States had upon him, especially in the new acquisitions he made for the Australian Ballet. And no artistic director should ever want the art form to stagnate. Stretton's new commissions over the four and a half years of his directorship indicate that Stretton was determined to foster new and existing choreographic talent.

I hope this list of Stretton's repertoire, compiled from a range of sources including programs, clippings and media releases, will engender interest and perhaps a discussion of Stretton's legacy.

NEW COMMISSIONS

1914 (evening length work)

Choreography: Stephen Baynes

Music: Graeme Koehne (Commissioned score)

Costume design: Anna French

Set and lighting design: Andrew Carter

Premiere: 7 April 1998 in the Opera Theatre [now Joan Sutherland Theatre], Sydney Opera House

Cast: Lisa Bolte, Steven Heathcote, Adrian Burnett and Gary Norman with artists of the Australian Ballet

Dark Lullaby (one act work)

Choreography: Natalie Weir

Music: Gustav Mahler (*Symphony No. 1*, 3rd movement and *Symphony No. 5*, 4th movement)

Set and costume design: Hugh Colman

Lighting design: Rachel Burke

Premiere: 1 July 1998 in the Merlyn Theatre, CUB Malthouse, Melbourne as part of the *Collaborations* season.

(Stretton's *Collaborations* program, a short season of new choreographic initiatives, also included new works by Stephen Baynes, Adrian Burnett and Bernadette Walong. Unlike Natalie Weir's *Dark Lullaby*, however, none of these works subsequently entered the repertoire of the Australian Ballet in the form in which it was shown at *Collaborations*.)

At the Edge of Night (one act work)

Choreography: Stephen Baynes

Music: Sergei Rachmaninov (*Preludes* from Opus 23 and 32)

Pianist: Stuart Macklin

Set and costume design: Michael Pearce

Premiere: 29 October 1998 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, as part of the Melbourne Festival

Cast: Lisa Bolte and Robert Curran with artists of the Australian Ballet

Rites (one act work)

Choreography: Stephen Page

Music: Igor Stravinsky (*The Rite of Spring*)

Set Design: Peter England

Costume design: Jennifer Irwin

Lighting design: Mark Howett

Premiere: 29 October 1998 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, as part of the Melbourne Festival

Cast: Artists of the Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre

The Storyteller (one act work)

Choreography: Twyla Tharp

Music: Kiyoung Kim (*Round Dance*)

Set and costume design: Santo Loquasto

Lighting design: Jennifer Tipton

Premiere: 29 October 1998 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, as part of the Melbourne Festival

Cast: Nigel Burley with Justine Summers, Damien Welch, Nicole Rhodes, Kirsty Martin and Matthew Trent

The Book of Alleged Dances (one act work)

Choreography: James Kudelka

Music: John Adams (*John's Book of Alleged Dances*)

Set and costume design: Michael Pearce

Lighting design: David Murray

Premiere: 10 September 1999 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne

Cast: Artists of the Australian Ballet

X (one act work)

Choreography: Stanton Welch

Music: Brent Lewis (Selections from *Rhythm Hunter* and *Primitive Truth*)

Costume design: Jennifer Irwin

Set and lighting design: Andrew Carter

10 September 1999 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne

Cast: Artists of the Australian Ballet

Mirror, Mirror (evening length work)

Choreography: Natalie Weir

Music: Robert Griffin Morgan (commissioned score)

Set and costume design: Bill Haycock

Lighting design: David Walters

Premiere: 16 June 2000 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne

Cast: Sarah Peace, Nicole Rhodes, Steven Heathcote, Daryl Brandwood, Madeleine Eastoe and Adrian Burnett with artists of the Australian Ballet

Personal Best (one act work)

Choreography: Stephen Baynes

Music: Philip Glass (*Violin Concerto*)

Solo violinist: Dene Olding

Costume design: Christina Smith

Set design: Andrew Carter

Lighting design: Nigel Levings

Premiere: 8 September 2000 in the Capitol Theatre, Sydney, as part of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival

Cast: Nicole Rhodes, Felicia Palanca and Robert Curran with artists of the Australian Ballet

Tivoli (evening length work)

Choreography: Graeme Murphy

Music: Graeme Koehne

Costume design: Kristian Fredrikson

Set design: Brian Thomson

Lighting design: Damien Cooper

Premiere: 22 May 2001 in the State Theatre, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne

Cast: Carl Plaisted, Madeleine Eastoe, Linda Nagle, Michael McCormick, Harry Haythorne and Tim Tyler with artists of the Australian Ballet and Sydney Dance Company

Requiem (one act work)

Choreography: Stephen Baynes

Music: Gabriel Fauré (*Requiem* Opus 48)

Costume design: Anna French
Set design: Richard Roberts
Lighting design: Nigel Levings
Premiere: 23 May 2001 in the Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre
Cast: Artists of the Australian Ballet, members of the State Opera House Chorus (Adelaide) and the Adelaide Philharmonia Chorus

Carmina Burana (one act work)

Director: Lindy Hume
Choreography: Natalie Weir
Music: Carl Orff (*Carmina Burana*)
Set and costume design: Dan Potra
Lighting design: Nigel Levings
Premiere: 23 May 2001 in the Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre
Cast: Artists of the Australian Ballet, members of the State Opera House Chorus Adelaide) and the Adelaide Philharmonia Chorus

(Stanton Welch's full-length *Cinderella* premiered early in 1997, in the first few months of Stretton's directorship. It was, however, commissioned by Maina Gielgud prior to her departure from the Australian Ballet.)

NEW ACQUISITIONS

Bella Figura (Jiří Kylián)
Bolero (Maurice Béjart)
Fall River Legend (Agnes de Mille)
In the Upper Room (Twyla Tharp)
La Bayadère (Natalia Makarova after Marius Petipa)
Other Dances (Jerome Robbins)
Por Vos Muero (Nacho Duato)
Theme and Variations (George Balanchine)
Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude, The (William Forsythe)

RESTAGING OF WORKS FROM THE EXISTING REPERTOIRE

Apollo (George Balanchine)
Beyond Bach (Stephen Baynes)
Coppélia (Peggy van Praagh after Arthur Saint-Léon)
Divergence (Stanton Welch)
Don Quixote (Rudolf Nureyev after Marius Petipa)
Études (Harald Lander)
Gemini (Glen Tetley)
Giselle (Peggy van Praagh after Jules Perrot and Jean Coralli)
In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated (William Forsythe)
Jardi Tancat (Nacho Duato)
Madame Butterfly (Stanton Welch)

Manon (Kenneth MacMillan)
Merry Widow, The (Ronald Hynd)
Nutcracker. The Story of Clara (Graeme Murphy)
Romeo and Juliet (John Cranko)
Sinfonietta (Jiří Kylián)
Swan Lake (Anne Woolliams/Lev Ivanov)

*Jo Roberts, 'Now for and out-of-body-tights experience', *The Age* (Melbourne), 28 November 2005, p. 21