



PHOTO: GRANT HANCOCK

Vale Jonathan Taylor

2/5/1941 – 27/3/2019

I'VE never done anything else but dance ..."^{*} Jonathan Taylor, dancer, choreographer and director, has died in Melbourne, on March 27, 2019, at the age of 77.

Taylor was born in Manchester, England, where he began tap and ballet lessons as a very young boy. As a teenager he was taught in London by Andrew Hardie at the International School of Dancing. His professional career began when he danced in musicals and pantomime shows in London.

In 1959 Taylor joined a company started by Leonide Massine with which Harry Haythorne was also involved, the Nervi International Ballet, before joining Amsterdam Ballet (later Dutch National Ballet), again with the involvement of Haythorne. In Amsterdam, Taylor met his wife-to-be, Ariette van Rossen, also a dancer with Amsterdam Ballet, and shortly afterwards they moved to England. In England they joined Ballet Rambert, where Marie Rambert was fond of referring to Jonathan as "Jack". Taylor toured extensively with the Rambert company, and also began his choreographic career with *Diversities*, made for Ballet Rambert in 1966, *'Tis Goodly Sport* in 1970, and *Listen to the Music* in 1972. He left Rambert in 1972 and took up a freelance career in 1973.

Taylor first came to Australia in 1975 to work with Ballet Victoria. He was to stage his *Listen to the Music*, much admired by Peggy van Praagh, and create a new work. The new work turned out to be *Star's End* and it was a huge hit in Melbourne. As a result, Taylor was offered the position of artistic director of ADT. He arrived in Australia in 1976 with his wife and three children. He also brought with him Joe Scoglio and Julia Blaikie, close friends from his Rambert days. Together with Ariette they made up a foursome which would make ADT one of the most remarkable companies in Australian contemporary dance.

Under Taylor the repertoire of ADT included works from UK choreographers, in particular Christopher Bruce and Norman Morrice, as well as new works of his own. Some of his own works had Australian themes that drew on an English approach to Australian manners and attitudes—*Incident a Bull Creek* for example. Others, such

as *Wildstars*, reflected his background in London with popular entertainment—many thought I'd sold my soul to the devil, he has remarked.^{**} The company also had a strong emphasis on workshops and works for children, the latter led by Ariette. ADT was initially jointly funded by the South Australian and Victorian governments. It toured widely in Australia and internationally.

Taylor left ADT, unhappily, at the end of 1985. He and his family moved to Melbourne shortly afterwards. There he worked freelance, which included (at the invitation of Anne Woolliams) a brief period as choreographer in residence at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). He also worked in Holland with Netherlands Dance Theatre, as well as in a variety of other countries, and with several Australian companies including Kai Tai Chan's One Extra Company and Maggie Sietsma's Expressions Dance Company. In 1988 he was appointed Dean of the VCA and in this capacity led both the tertiary and secondary schools until 1997. He continued to choreograph, including in New Zealand where, in 1992, he created *Hamlet* for Harry Haythorne, then directing the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Following his time at the VCA, Taylor again worked freelance, often in collaboration with Ariette Taylor with Handspan Theatre, where he was a board member from 1993 to 1998, and the Keene-Taylor Theatre Project.

In his recent oral history interview for the National Library of Australia, Taylor spoke of his one regret being that he had never been asked to choreograph for The Australian Ballet. But he also spoke emotionally of what he had especially enjoyed.

"I enjoyed coming to Australia and having the ability to be in charge of my own company. It also allowed me to choreograph and be a creative person, and when I left the company in 1985 I don't think they realised they were cutting off creativity as well as a job. I'm sure they didn't, and that was a great blow. But it was wonderful to not set a standard, but set my standard—the standard of the dancing, the standard of the choreography, and the presentation of the performance."^{***}

Jonathan Taylor is survived by Ariette and their children, Ingmar, Juliet and Rebe.

— MICHELLE POTTER

This obituary was first published on MICHELLE POTTER ... on dancing: <https://michellepotter.org/>

^{*} Jonathan Taylor, Oral history interview recorded by Michelle Potter, September 2018, Oral History and Folklore Collection, National Library of Australia, TRC 6977

^{**} Ibid.

^{***} Ibid



Julia Blaikie in 'Flibbertigibbet', Australian Dance Theatre, 1978.

PHOTO: JEFF BUSBY