



WE HAD TWO fascinating meetings in January. At the first, we welcomed two of the most refreshing young talents of the Company, **Melissa Hamilton** and Sergei Polunin. Members were greatly impressed by the attitudes of both. At different stages of their training they had to move away from their home country to develop as dancers, Sergei at The Royal Ballet School and Melissa with the Mukhamedovs in Greece. Both displayed a good sense of humour and kept members amused throughout the evening. The determination displayed by Melissa was refreshing in a young dancer from Britain, whilst Sergei was extremely modest about his achievements, which most recently have included Solor in *La Bayadère*, and both have danced principal roles in DGV.

At our next meeting we met two young dancers from The Royal Ballet School, **Shiori Kase** and **Tristan Dyer**, who accompanied the Director, **Gailene Stock**. It was 2001, when Gailene last spoke to us. So there was much to talk about, including changes in the curriculum, the new buildings, competitions, touring and programming the School performances. Shiori and Tristan, who are in their graduate year, were the first recipients of the Annual Ballet Association Awards. They gave examples, from their experience, of the different topics that Gailene discussed. It was a hugely entertaining evening. Some members watched Shiori dance the *Corsaire* pas de deux at the National Dance Awards a few days later. From her assured performance, it was difficult to imagine that this was the shy girl who had spoken to us. As this newsletter is being written, both are performing with the graduate year in Salt Lake City. Friends of the School were able to watch a performance of the programme prior to their leaving England and were impressed by both of them. We are very grateful to Gailene for giving up an evening to talk to us, at what is a very busy time for her. She had just returned from auditions around the country.

We have recently posted a large number of reports of meetings from the last few seasons, including the interview of **Alastair Marriott** and **Jonathan Howells** from last November.

Our website now contains a section where we hope to include various galleries of photographs. The

first gallery is of rehearsal photos taken by **Jennie Walton** over the last few years. There are some wonderful photographs, so it is well worth visiting the website just to see them. The site also contains reports of most of our meetings in recent years.

Future meetings

At our meeting in February, on Wednesday 18, we are very pleased to welcome **Barry Wordsworth**, Music Director of the Royal Ballet, as our guest. Barry needs little introduction. He has an extensive symphonic career. He was appointed Conductor Laureate of the BBC Concert Orchestra in 2006, having been Principal Conductor with them since 1989. He is also Principal Conductor of the Brighton PO and frequent guest conductor with many other orchestras. He was Music Director of BRB from 1990 to 2008 and of The Royal Ballet from 1990 to 1995 and was re-appointed to this role in 2006. He has recently conducted performances with Tokyo Ballet, Leipzig Ballet and Paris Opera Ballet. We can expect a fascinating evening learning about the conducting of ballet. (Please note that this meeting will start at 7.45 not 7.30. There is a concert in the church from 6pm, so please do not arrive before 7pm. If you wish to attend the concert first, you will be very welcome. Please ask at the Church for details.)

The following meeting will be on Friday 6 March at 7.30, when we welcome **Loipa Araujo**, Guest Teacher with The Royal Ballet. One of the 'Jewels of Cuban Ballet' described by critic Arnold Haskell in *Balletomania*, Loipa has followed an illustrious career as a dancer with another as one of the most sought after teachers of ballet. She joined the Ballet Nacional de Cuba in 1959 and was promoted to Prima Ballerina in 1967. In 1973 she joined the Ballet de Marseille and the following year she created the ballerina role in Roland Petit's *Les Intermittences du coeur*. As well as teaching in Madrid and Havana, Loipa teaches at companies around the world including London, Paris and Moscow. She coaches many famous dancers including Tamara Rojo. She will be bringing with her, Royal Ballet dancer Fernando Montano. Born in Colombia, Fernando was trained in Cuba. We can expect a fascinating evening with two delightful personalities.

Meetings, unless otherwise stated, begin at 7.30pm. Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church is at the eastern end of Shaftesbury Avenue, opposite the Shaftesbury Theatre. From Covent Garden you walk up Endell Street and cross over Shaftesbury Avenue. The church is then on your left (nearest tube Tottenham Court Road). Doors open at 6.30.

Dates for next season

These will probably include Friday 17 April, Friday 8 May, Wednesday 17 June, Wednesday 15 July. Please check meeting dates carefully as they sometimes change to avoid clashes with other events. Please note the meetings on 25 February, 10 March and 20 May have been cancelled.

Congratulations

Congratulations to **Edward Watson** who won the Dancing Times Award for Best Male Dancer at the UK Critics' Circle National Dance Awards. Congratulations also to **Yuhui Choe** and **Martin Harvey** who won the Spotlight Awards and **Christopher Wheeldon** who won the Best Classical Choreography Award for his ballet Electric Counterpoint.

Over the festive season, **Laura Morera** married her long-time boyfriend, ex-Royal Ballet dancer **Justin Meissner**. We wish both of them much happiness in their future together.

Annual Dinner 2009

In our last newsletter we announced that our Annual Dinner, celebrating the 35th Anniversary of the Association, will be on Tuesday 5th May. Once again, it will take place at the Rubens Hotel in Buckingham Palace Road. Dinner is at 8pm. A private bar is available from 7pm. The cost this year is £35. There has already been a very heavy demand for tickets, with only a few places left. If you haven't yet applied and wish to do so, please print out and complete the form and return it as soon as possible. Please send the completed form with your cheque and a stamped addressed envelope to Melanie Shipton, The Ballet Association, 7 Dutch Gardens, Kingston, Surrey, KT2 7TT. Please note, if you fail to send a stamped addressed envelope you may lose your place if we are over-subscribed.

Once all tickets have been allocated, and sent out, names will be placed on a waiting list. There are always some people who drop out because of illness and work commitments, so it is still worth applying. Last year around 20 on the waiting list eventually got places. We will not be announcing the guest list until the April newsletter. You will then have an opportunity to let us know which dancers you would like to sit near.

David Bain (Chairman)