



newsletter

February 2010

WE STARTED 2010 with a very enjoyable meeting where our guest, First Soloist **Yohei Sasaki**, spoke of his training, his career with The Royal Ballet, his family and his plans for the future. From the young student at the Royal Ballet School going to the pub to the proud family man, Yohei gave a delightful account of his career, including the frustrations of recurrent injuries. He brought some photos of his wife, former dancer **Maria Pietra**, and their two sons. We wish him a successful future as he moves from dance to sound. As well as undertaking a training course, Yohei will be doing some work experience with the sound department at the Royal Opera House. To further his new direction, the Association gave him a gift towards purchasing a compact mixer. Contributions towards this gift can be given at meetings.

Our website now contains a gallery of beautiful photographs of Birmingham Royal Ballet's performances last season taken by distinguished dance and theatre photographer **Bill Cooper**. It is well worth viewing

Future meetings

We are delighted to announce that the guest at our meeting on Tuesday 23 February will be Royal Ballet Principal, **Rupert Pennefather**. Somewhat elusive, this will be the first time Rupert has spoken to the Association since he joined the Company in 1999. He had danced Albrecht in the second act of *Giselle* at the Royal Ballet School performance that summer as well as the *pas de trois* from *Theme and Variations*. He was promoted to First Soloist in 2006 and to Principal in 2008. This season he has been seen as Prince Rudolph in *Mayerling*, Oedipus in *Sphinx* and the Princes in both *Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty*. We can look forward to a very interesting evening.

One of the highlights of last season was the meeting when **Gailene Stock**, Director of The Royal Ballet School, brought graduate students **Tristan Dyer** and **Shiori Kase** to talk. We are very pleased to announce that at our first meeting in March, on Wednesday 3 March, **Jay Jolley**, Assistant Director of The Royal Ballet School will be our guest. It is some year's since Jay last spoke to us. He will talk both about his role in the school, this year's activities in the school and some

highlights from his own dancing career. He will be accompanied by the two recipients of the Annual Ballet Associations Awards, **Imogen Chapman** and **Angela Wood**, who will talk about their time in the School and their plans for the future. We are sure that many members will want to meet these two young dancers at the beginning of their careers. (N.B Please note that on Wednesday evenings there is a concert in the Church at 6.00pm. Members are welcome to attend this. Otherwise, please do not arrive before 6.50.)

At our next meeting on Wednesday 17 March our guest will be Royal Ballet Soloist **Laura McCulloch**. Born in Glasgow, Laura trained there before joining the Royal Ballet Upper School. She joined the Company during the 2000/2001 Season and was promoted to First Artist in 2005 and Soloist in 2008. Laura spoke to the Association as part of a trio of young dancers soon after she joined the Company. We can expect an entertaining evening catching up on the intervening years which have included dancing the solo principal girl in *Rubies* and the Lilac Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*. (N.B. As this is another Wednesday, please do not arrive before 6.50 unless you wish to attend the concert at 6.00)

Meetings, unless otherwise stated, begin at 7.30 p.m. and are at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church which 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, if you face East. (nearest tube Tottenham Court Road). Doors open at 6.30 p.m. except Wednesdays.

Provisional dates for the rest of the season are Wednesday 7 April, Friday 16 April, Thursday 27 May, Thursday 3 June, Thursday 24 June. Some dates may change depending on commitments of speakers. Please note 13 and 20 May are cancelled because of Annual Dinner.

Other Events

Oxfam Haiti Earthquake Appeal: An exclusive photo of **Marianela Nunez** and **Thiago Soares** is being auctioned on eBay in support of this appeal. The auction closes at midnight on 14 February. Details can be found on:

<http://www.theballetbag.com/2010/02/05/thiago-soares-and-marianela-nunez-exclusive-print-2/>

Direct to eBay auction:

http://cgi.ebay.co.uk/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=120526937371#ht_587wt_1083

Sunday 28 February: Gala for Africa at Sadler's Wells Theatre at 7pm. In aid of **Mara Galeazzi's** charity 'Dancing for the Children', a very special evening with guests from The Royal Ballet: **Gary Avis, Ricardo Cervera, Yuhui Choe, Sarah Lamb, Steven McRae, Laura Morera, Marianela Nunez, Sergei Polunin, Thiago Soares, Eric Underwood, Edward Watson;** and others, including **The Ballet Boyz**. Tickets £10-£50.

Sunday 28 March: British Friends of Ballet Nacional de Cuba. We invited the British Friends of BNC to our meeting with Guest Teacher **Loipa Araujo**. The British Friends have now reciprocated by inviting Association members to an interview of Premier Dancer **Viengsay Valdés**, who is partnering **Carlos Acosta** in BNC's performances at the Coliseum and in Manchester, Birmingham and Cardiff. She partnered **Thiago Soares** in a gala on the Royal tour last summer. If you are interested in attending, please contact David Bain. Time, which will be around 2.30 or 3.00pm, and venue have yet to be confirmed.

Friday 9 April: Connecting Conversations with **Alicia Alonso**. The Director of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, talks to psychoanalyst **Luis Rodríguez de la Sierra** about her extraordinary career. 7-8.30pm at Henry Thomas Room, Tower Building, London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB. Nearest tube Holloway Road. Tickets: £12/£8 concessions. Includes a glass of wine. There is free online booking at <http://www.connectingconversations.org>, or by phone 07787 814 316 (£2.50 fee).

Members may also be interested in listening to Connecting Conversations: **Tamara Rojo** in conversation with **Luis Rodríguez de la Sierra** (held in March 2009):

http://www.connectingconversations.org/?location_id=2&item=202

Exits, Awards, etc.

At the first meeting since the AGM, David Bain and Sylvia Tyler were re-elected respectively as the Association's Chairman and Deputy Chairman.

As announced in the last newsletter **Cindy Jourdain** and **Xander Parish** left The Royal Ballet in

January. We presented them with flowers and wine respectively. Members will be pleased to hear that **Xander** is dancing the principal role in *Chopiniana (Les Sylphides)* with the **Maryinsky** on February 11 and that **Cindy** is dancing with **Christopher Wheeldon's** Company *Morphoses* later in the year.

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of former Royal Ballet Principal **Georgina Parkinson** on 18 December following complications from cancer. **Georgina** was a member of the artistic staff of **ABT** for more than thirty years, where she continued her dancing career as well as being ballet mistress. Members will fondly remember a masterclass a few years ago where she coached her daughter-in-law, **Leanne Benjamin**. Last October she was back at the Opera House coaching the **Empress** in *Mayerling*. The Royal Ballet has also announced the death of former soloist and ballet mistress **Jill Gregory**.

On a happier note, at the performance of *Nutcracker* on 12 December, the 'prop' invitation that **Hans Peter** showed **Clara** in the third scene of Act 2 read 'Will you marry me?' After the curtain calls, **Paul Kay** placed an engagement ring on **Leanne Cope's** finger, as she had said 'Yes'.

Congratulations to all those who have recently won awards. These include **David Bintley** who won the last South Bank Show Award for Dance for his new work *E=mc²*. At the National Dance Awards given by the Critics' Circle, **Alexander Grant** received the De Valois Award for Outstanding Achievement, **Leanne Benjamin** the Richard Sherrington Award for Best Female Dancer, **Wayne McGregor** the Award for Best Classical Choreography for *Infra* and **Melissa Hamilton** and **Sergei Polunin** the Awards for Outstanding Female and Male Performances. Congratulations also to **Tony Hall**, Chief Executive of the Royal Opera House, who has been appointed as a non-party-political peer in the House of Lords.

Annual Dinner 2010

There are some places left for our Annual Dinner on Monday 17th May at the Rubens Hotel in Buckingham Palace Road. Dinner is at 8.00pm. A private bar is available from 7.00pm. Price £35. An application form was attached to the last newsletter. If you are unlucky, don't despair, your name will be placed on a waiting list. Last year most on the waiting list were successful in getting into the dinner.

David Bain (Chairman)