

Genesisia Rosato

PRINCIPAL CHARACTER ARTIST, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by Joan Seaman

Swedenborg Hall, London, 1 July 2004.

Genesisia had first gone to a dance school in Chessington, where at the age of fifteen she was doing so well that she was advised to audition for the Royal Ballet School. She was accepted spending the rest of her school years there.

When dancing in a school performance at Richmond Theatre in 1976, she was spotted by Kenneth MacMillan, then Director of the Royal Ballet. He asked her to join the company. He was only to be Director for one more year, after that staying at the Opera House as Resident Choreographer. In fact, Genesisia told us she had worked under five directors in total, Kenneth MacMillan, Norman Morrice, Anthony Dowell, Ross Stretton and now Monica Mason.

Glen Tetley's *Voluntaries*, which was his tribute to the late John Cranko created for the Stuttgart company, had just entered the Royal Ballet repertoire. Genesisia was picked to dance in this, then to create the role of Princess Louise in Kenneth MacMillan's *Mayerling*. This did not endear her to the rest of the company, where seniority when casting was still mainly the accepted rule.

The costumes for *Mayerling* were as authentic as possible, which meant lots of whalebone in the bodices making dancing uncomfortable.

Norman Morrice found himself short of senior ballerinas, sickness, injury, maternity leave taking their toll. Young dancers were being brought forward. Genesisia found herself cast mainly in 'bad girl' roles. She did get classical roles, such as the Lilac Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* and the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*, but roles such as Profane Love in *Illuminations*, Gipsy in *Two Pigeons*, Lykanion in *Daphnis and Chloe*, a Harlot in *Romeo and Juliet*, one of the sisters in *My brother, my sisters*, the last act of *Anastasia* where she had worked with Monica Parker, the wife in *The Invitation* and *Fin du jour* were also given to her.

She had not had a great desire to dance the major classical roles, enjoying being someone else in the character roles. Dame Ninette de Valois described her as being so like the Jefferies. Genesisia thinks it was a com-

pliment. She was never afraid of Madame although many were.

Genesisia danced one of the lovers in *The Dream* as well as other roles in Frederick Ashton ballets, working with him on *Rhapsody*. She said that he liked his ballerinas off stage to be well dressed in bright colours, no trousers. Although she had been considered for *Giselle* the roles she was considered more suited for in the ballet were Myrthe and the 'snotty-nosed' Bathilde.

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Genesisia enjoyed working with Anthony Dowell when he became the next Director of the Royal Ballet. He made changes in the way the company are listed with a category for Character Principals, to which she was promoted. Her repertoire of varied roles continued to grow, *Ondine* as Berta, *Les Biches* as the Hostess, *Firebird* as the Tsarevna.

When the Opera House was closed for two years for refurbishment it meant that the company had no home apart from Barons Court. Genesisia said she at least was happy with the Hammersmith venue, it was so close to where she lives.

Coming back to the Opera House for the reopening, the company found excellent facilities: showers, kitchens, beautiful studios and dressing rooms. The Soloists and Corps de Ballet still share large dressing rooms but the Principals have their own. These are on a different floor to the others, which is lonelier than it used to be. There is no one to check whether the dancers have arrived. Genesisia feels that they have lost some community spirit. The new stage although so much bigger does not feel that way because the wings are always full.

Genesisia felt that she would not be doing roles that require pointe work, such as Larisch, for much longer: it

now requires a great deal of effort. Starting to help with some rehearsals of *Cinderella* she became sick and had to drop out. It is very important to teach the new young dancers the Ashton style, which can be very different from other choreographers'.

Roles such as the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* have been enjoyable especially when there is a good rapport with the dancer performing Juliet, also Lady Capulet when there is good rapport with Tybalt.

Asked her most embarrassing moment, Genesia had everyone laughing with her description of not one but two. Once, on tour, when rising from her throne in *Swan Lake* to walk with the prince she found that the

throne and its two attendant local American girls were following along behind, like a carnival float – her gown had become tangled up in the throne. Irek Mukhamadov who was the Siegfried helped free the dress.

On another occasion at the end of *La Fille mal gardée*, after going up the stairs to fetch Lise and Colas for their final pas de deux she tumbled back down them. Genesia said that she had been told Kenneth MacMillan nearly fell off his chair laughing, one of the best performances of *Fille* for him.

Reported by Sylvia Tyler, corrected by Genesia Rosato
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