

Desmond Kelly & Marion Tait

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by David Bain

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, 10 February 2007.

David Bain welcomed the Association's President and Assistant Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet, Desmond Kelly, and Ballet Mistress Marion Tait.

When this interview took place, Birmingham Royal Ballet had just been in America, doing three ("and a half") performances of *Sleeping Beauty* at the Virginia Arts Festival, the half being a matinée for 1,800 school children from age six who were bussed to the theatre from all round the area. Desmond had felt that the whole three and a half hours was too long for them, so they did Act I, the kiss scene from the end of Act II and the whole of Act III which lasted one and a half hours. Marion and Desmond had given a pre-performance talk in case the children didn't know the story. "He twisted my arm to do a preamble," Marion said. "Marion and I have become a double act, we do everything together!" Desmond responded. Apart from telling the story of the ballet, they showed them mime and Desmond "made the fatal mistake" of saying "Now, the dancers have been here since 7.30 this morning so if you see anything you really like, please clap." So the children clapped every tendue, every jetée, every lift! "It was most gratifying," Marion said. "The most magical moment was when Aurora bouréed on and the whole audience just gasped – they couldn't believe it, this fairy princess."

Desmond remarked that the experience made him wonder why we don't do this here, to encourage young audiences. "Even if five of those 1,800 kids started to go to ballet classes we would have achieved something." Marion remarked that often parents make the mistake of taking children to *Sleeping Beauty* yet it's one of the longest ballets so they fall asleep by the third act. "It's too long for me too," said Desmond. "Doris Humphries, a modern choreographer in America, once said that no ballet should be longer than 30 minutes – and I absolutely agree with her."

The tour was a terrific morale-booster for the Company as when the curtain rose on each act the audience applauded "in absolute wonderment" at the production. Marion commented "Our dancers so easily

forget what a wonderful production we have. All Des's hard work at rehearsing them, saying 'you have to make it special, be the people,' paid off. At the end of every performance, the whole audience rose to its feet, it was a most wonderful feeling." Desmond pointed out that the most extraordinary thing is that Norfolk, Virginia is a tiny, tiny little town and yet it paid for the Company to fly there with all the sets and costumes. It was absolutely amazing, incredible. We had a very good time, lovely, lovely people. We used their orchestra which was a nice combination."

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The BRB visit coincided with the Queen being there – "Our Patron – but she didn't come and see us," said Desmond. "She went to the Kentucky Derby!" said Marion. They took two dancers to dance for Prince Philip and were told emphatically it must last five minutes, no longer. "He walked in, stood five minutes, about his limit, while they did the *Sleeping Beauty* pdd and then went on his way to have his lunch."

Desmond and Marion were asked to talk about BalletHoo! Desmond hoped that there were some people in the audience who believed it was a terrible idea as he really wanted to argue about its benefits. They described how the idea for the programme had started more than two years ago. BRB was approached by Channel 4 and a charity, Youth at Risk, with an idea for a programme which was initially to find new talent associated with ballet. Desmond pointed out that unless you have a ballet background and have trained since 10 years old you can't just get up and learn how to dance in six

weeks. The idea evolved into using disadvantaged children from local councils, to expose them to ballet and see what the result was. Channel 4 was commissioned and put in a large amount of money supplemented by money from four local councils (Birmingham, Solihull, Wolverhampton and Dudley) who recruited 200 disadvantaged young people.

As a preliminary, Desmond took a group of dancers around the Birmingham area to get children interested. No tutus or pointe shoes, they did Twyla Tharp's Upper Room. The kids loved it, straightaway could identify with the loud music and couldn't wait to get up on stage and try for themselves. After starting the programme, the kids were gradually introduced to 'ballet.' "It's funny, they took to it, at the end saying it is not for poofs, it is for athletes, real, proper people – and they had such respect for our dancers." Marion remarked how at the very mention of the word 'ballet' their manner changed. She said it was obvious in the ballroom scene when basically all the men had to do was walk forward and look strong. "As soon as you mention the word ballet they couldn't walk. Desmond asked them how they would walk down the street? They said 'well you can't walk like that' because of a lot of them sway their hips, swagger; they could believe they were actually dancing."

There were two phases to the programme. The first was a small performance in a local theatre. They could do what they liked, sing or do a bit out of the fight scene from Romeo and Juliet. The boys adored doing the fight scenes. At first they were told that they couldn't use real swords – for health and safety reasons they would have to use wood not steel. So Desmond told them they could forget the whole thing at which point it was 'Oh. Alright, you can use steel!' The boys took to it like ducks to water. There was one whole day of fights and at one point there was a scream from one of the boys who fell to the floor with blood gushing out...it was a practical joke. Marion remarked that this showed the trustful relationship that was built up between the kids and themselves.

The 200 children were chosen by the councils because of their backgrounds. A few were associated with art or drama schools "but most came from the worst background you can think of, appalling backgrounds." Desmond said he didn't want to know what their individual backgrounds were as he wanted to treat them as professionals, exactly the same as dancers in BRB. They responded well to that.

The process took 18 months. The first part after recruiting the kids was to go through what Marion and Desmond described as "that awful bit" with Youth at Risk, talking about their backgrounds on camera, in front of their peers, knowing their stories would be broadcast. When Desmond saw that part of programme he had enormous misgivings and thought that it wouldn't work, it would be too hard. But gradually he saw it did work and thought it prepared the children

quite well. By the end he "kind of agreed" with Youth at Risk's way of dealing with them.

After the kids had been through phase one, they were asked if they wanted to go through to the actual performance. They were woken in the morning by mentors, taxied from home to theatre, fed at the theatre, taxied back – everything was laid on. Even so, at the beginning they had the most incredible difficulty getting the kids to rehearsal. Marion said "It was a real wake-up call. When we thought we due to start at 10, breakfast was from 10 a.m. onwards, they would arrive at midday if at all, by 1 in the afternoon we would have everyone there that was needed and then it was lunch time. So what was termed as 'intensive weeks of rehearsal' was actually once a month to start with, then once a fortnight, on a Sunday." It was incredibly frustrating, and Desmond walked out. Marion used this as bargaining tool to get the kids to pull their socks up, as they had terrific respect for Desmond.

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They were hugely helped and encouraged by Lady MacMillan who said that Kenneth would have absolutely loved what they were doing and so gave them carte blanche to change whatever they had to change. So Desmond was able to adapt scenes and fights, put street dancers into the Mandolin Dance – but they don't think the audience, even if they had see BRB's Romeo and Juliet before, realised it was different (apart from the break dancers) because the kids handled everything superbly.

It was difficult at the start. Desmond planned that the kids would just do corps – the crowd scenes. Then he thought "Why not try and find kids to do Nurse, Lady Capulet and even perhaps Tybalt?" He found it difficult in front of all those kids to find the one talent. They had an audition day and let them talk in snippets to see if they were able to act and time things to music as it is more difficult to time a mime, in an acting scene, than it is to dance, to make sure you get the story in the right amount of time. "It was incredible luck to find the kids we did. We had two casts for everything, apart from Nurse because the first cast dropped out when her family moved away." They were left with the second choice, Christine, who according to Marion, "was just amazing. People said they have never seen anyone do a nurse portrayal so professionally. She really came up trumps."

°Most amazing was the boy, Lyndon, who did Tybalt. "He was such a find." At the beginning, Desmond couldn't keep up with the fact that Lyndon was such a good learner because he knew he hadn't been exposed

to movement. In the fights, every single move has to be learned, so at first Desmond thought he would only use him in Act I when he would do the general fight in the beginning and the ballroom scene and use one of the BRB dancers for Act II. But Lyndon kept pleading to learn the full role. Desmond explained it was too fast, too complicated and no way could he simplify as he couldn't expect BRB dancers to learn two versions. So Lyndon asked if there was a video. He was lent it on a Friday and when he came back on the Monday Desmond asked how he had got on. "Oh I learned it." Desmond said it was impossible, he couldn't have. "Oh I did." Desmond said he still can't believe he did as well as he did. He also had stature and nobility. Lyndon was very keen on drama before BalletHoo! but he hadn't done any dance. Now he is going to drama school although his parents were very against it in the beginning. The programme showed how thrilled his father was with his son at the end. Desmond had spoken to him and said that he had to let him go. The father told Desmond he couldn't understand where his son's talent for sword fighting came from "but he does have a great-uncle who used to do sword-fighting, he must have inherited it!"

Marion and Desmond talked about some things that were not shown in the programme. There was Nick whom Channel 4 had cottoned on to as he came from a rather privileged background. But they didn't want to follow his progress unless he did something interesting like Paris. Desmond explained that Paris has two pdds with Juliet and there was no way they could be done by a non-dancer. Nick had done contemporary dance but no partnering and, like Lyndon, he pleaded to try. Desmond brought in Laura Perkiss from the company who is absolutely tiny and, of course, Nick nearly gave himself a hernia but couldn't lift her. Then he understood. Nick entered into the whole production, and they couldn't have managed without him. Marion explained how so many of the kids had risen to it, like Nick covering other parts, were accepting and did what was asked of them, as Nick did when he realised he couldn't be Paris.

Several of the boys had quite severe learning difficulties. One would get so angry with himself when they were learning to sword-fight he said he was seeing red, he would back away and said he would have to walk away until the red disappeared. Then he would come back in and learn. By the end, that boy was teaching the other boys to fight, a most remarkable transformation which happened to several of the kids. So many things like that had made Desmond and Marion realise how transforming the experience was for so many of them.

It wasn't until the last two or three weeks that Desmond saw the whole cast together, then suddenly, they all turned up. Marion thinks the costume fitting was something to do with it as they all liked dressing up. Tights were a problem – the boys said that if any of their

friends saw them on the screen in tights they would be beaten up, no doubt about it. Marion said they hadn't realised that it wasn't just a case of them not wanting to be sissy, it was the knock-on effect in their lives. It was Lyndon who stood up and said if he was going to wear tights you all can. Desmond remarked that it was the jock-straps that were a little more difficult.

They talked about some of the things that have happened to the kids since the programme. These were people who were kicked out or dropped out of college, roamed the streets at night looking for people to beat up, committed armed robbery. To date, of the kids that participated, 47 have taken BTEC exams, the first exams in their lives, 10 to diploma level; one girl or possibly two have been awarded scholarships to college and Andy (Friar Laurence) is training to be a youth worker as he wants to pass on what he learned. The day after his mother died, Alex phoned his mentor to say he wouldn't miss his BalletHoo! rehearsal. The other kids were so supportive of him. It was as if it brought them all together.

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Both Desmond and Marion get emotional about it all as they became so fond of the kids. Alex, one of the break dancers was a real problem. Asked during the programme how he felt about not getting the role of Tybalt, said he felt like killing someone, beating somebody up. This young man is training to be a PE teacher, a transformed life. Before being accepted for teacher training he got his first job. No-one on the interview panel had ever heard an interview done so well and asked where in his imagination did he get it all from? He said "I was a part of BalletHoo wantt I?" It gave him confidence and he had money in his pocket for the first time in his life. Since then, he has gone on to even better things. "If this process helps only one, and has given them a new horizon, to see they are actually worth something, it would be worth it," Desmond said.

The kids still come back and see BRB, come to performances. They fell in love with Chi Cao. Lyndon was crazy about him. As soon as Chi Cao came into studio he used to make loud whooping noises. A great crowd of them afterwards came to see to Nutcracker. "They were so disruptive, made so much noise, there were a lot of complaints." Marion pointed out that it was not during the action, they waited till the appropriate time. Desmond commented that he found himself thinking of the audience "Well, why don't you all make that kind

of noise.”

What next? To begin with Channel 4 were very against making a follow-up as they said it would be impossible to follow these kids but now when they see what's happened since is really interesting, they are seriously contemplating making a follow-up in 12 months time. It won't unfortunately involve BRB. “If you think there should be a follow-up programme, write and say so!” Desmond said.

For the Company, are there ideas for further work? The programme has put the Education Department on the map. BRB has always had a very big education programme but low-key. This brought education right forward. There have been many knock-on effects and ripples. It has changed everyone who was involved. The dancers used as coaches now have an educational interest, so there are at least five extra education officers who can be called on at any time. They did some work in

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Norfolk, Virginia, the day before the company started working. Desmond said he thought it also had changed him slightly. “I used to be horrible, but I am less so now!” It changed everyone who was involved because “when working with these kids you think about their backgrounds, the difficulties they are faced with. Now I think about the dancers in the company too. They have difficulties too, they have hard backgrounds, go through emotional states, I think I am more understanding – just at the end of my career.”

Have the dancers involved changed? Many dancers who come from what can be termed a privileged background – not all, some come from a poor background like Desmond did – and for them it has been a struggle, but they saw how difficult life can be for these kids who then turned out to be rather fantastic and they were impressed by that.

During a discussion, Desmond said that he wondered whether, if Channel 4 had marketed the programme without using the word ballet and approached it using different language, there might have been even more viewers than the two million plus people who did watch. “Because, whatever you say about ballet, however much you love it, there are people out there who when you say the word ‘ballet’ completely turn off”

Desmond and Marion were asked if they volunteered or were chosen for the job. Desmond said he volunteered, but “I was volunteered by Desmond!” said

Marion. “He could tell I was keen.” Desmond said he knew it would work well as they have known each other an awful long time and they work really well together. Both were commended for the skills they showed which were amazing – youth workers, counsellors, educators – it was as though they were tailor-made for the job but, Marion said, “We were leaning as we went along and listening to Youth at Risk did a lot to help us.” Desmond chose the dancers as he knows them very well. He knew the people who would be right. Some of the dancers recognised the feelings of the kids and could identify with them.

The kids are still getting together occasionally, a bit like a family that has been broken up, it created such a bond between them. The dancers commented to Desmond that the kids seemed older than themselves as they have experienced so much more and have matured much quicker.

Desmond explained that it would be very difficult to repeat the initiative which involved so many different bodies. The attraction of being on television been an important incentive, not least for the kids. He said how very deeply he felt that if this one city in this country has accomplished this with these kids, how many other thousands of kids in other cities are there who need this? “We keep talking of getting kids off the streets, hoodies, jails full, drugs. I know in my soul that art in this form, presented in this way, gives them a platform, something to grab onto. Why not approach problems from that side?”

The tour that went on directly after the TV showings of BalletHoo were completely sold out.

Asked about the high spots of their careers, Desmond said he couldn't remember that far back. He asked to be forgiven if he had forgotten names, places, dates because when you move from dancing to teaching and coaching and Assistant Directorship “you kind of forget, although I know all of it was a preparation for what I have been doing for the past 20 years. The bit before is very grey, this bit now is very bright.” He added “Don't ask how old I am.” Desmond is not English, he was born in Africa, and came to England when he was 16. He joined what was then London Festival Ballet, now English National Ballet, at 17, married Denise when he was 21, left Festival Ballet and went to New Zealand, then to Switzerland, back to New Zealand, back to Switzerland, “to America to dance with Margot then I joined the Royal Ballet – and that's my career.”

Marion started ballet classes when she was three, like other little girls because her mother thought it would be good for her deportment and she enjoyed it. She did all sort of dance, jazz, tap and modern. Her teacher said “You don't want to do ballet, go into music hall.” Her teacher was 80 when she first saw Marion dance professionally, in *Swan Lake* at Covent Garden, and her comment after the show was “Are you sure you don't want

do music hall?" She did love it, but later when she saw Marion in Hobson's Choice she said it was more her cup of tea and really liked it. Marion chose ballet as a career because she loved it. She said she always tells people only to do it if you love it as it is such a hard life. Every goal she achieved was just a bonus and Marion didn't expect to get into the Company. John Field saw her doing a pas de deux class and asked for her to come for an audition. Even Ursula Moreton who was Principal at the time said "Well congratulations, Marion. You of all people!"

“ People used to ask her why she didn't take the easy way and do the things that came naturally – ‘but that is why we do it, just because it is a challenge.’

She had to work hard at classical technique as she was not a natural. She enjoyed the challenge perhaps just because it was hard. People used to ask her why she didn't take the easy way and do the things that came naturally – “but that is why we do it, just because it is a challenge.” Desmond remarked that given her talent she could have done anything “She has a marvellous singing voice, dramatic as well as technical ability – and bunions!” Marion said that the years had flown by, a good sign. She reminded Desmond that the tour they went on together to Australia was in 1979. “Was it that many years ago, don't say that, it makes me depressed to think it was so many years ago.” Marion said she had had wonderful times and wonderful partners. “She used to call me Kelly the Tank.” “Or Kelly the Hulk,” said Marion.

When she was dancing and Desmond was Ballet Mastering and Assistant Directing it was always his opinion Marion wanted on her performances. She was always devastated if the slightest thing went wrong. She wouldn't speak to anyone, all she wanted was for Desmond to knock on her door and say “You know what didn't work, it won't happen again because you know why it didn't work. He always came up with something constructive, not just ‘oh darling you were lovely.’” Being a Ballet Master or Mistress means being a psychologist “80 percent of it is about confidence, getting the best out of people, reassuring them.”

Marion talked about Juliet which she first danced towards the end of her dancing career, when she was 42. Kenneth MacMillan had gone up to her after *The Burrow* when they knew that *Romeo and Juliet* was coming into the repertoire. He asked her if she wanted the good or the bad news. Marion asked for the bad, which was that *Solitaire* was coming back but that he didn't want her to dance it any more. Marion said that was fine, she completely understood, it was such a lovely role for a young dancer, just becoming a principal, ideal for someone young to start out on their career. And then Kenneth said he wanted her to do Juliet! Marion couldn't believe

it, Kenneth having told her she was too old for *Solitaire* that he wanted her to do Juliet. She was completely astounded. “And you were wonderful,” said Desmond. Until then when people asked if she had a favourite role she always said she hadn't, she just liked everything, as long there was a variety including dramatic, meaty roles. She hadn't had a particular craving to do Juliet “but once you have done it, it is a fantastic role.” She loved it, although it is not technically that demanding. “Part of the joy is just being able to let go, give it all the emotion.” Peter Wright had brought in guests as the young men in the company were too young to dance with her. She had also had Jonny Cope who had just returned to dancing after his year's break. He had danced with the company on tour and “He was divine.” The role Marion would have loved to have danced is *Manon*. Kenneth had said he wanted her to do it and he would put it in place but it never happened and she was very upset.

Desmond was asked if he had any favourite role. Just as Marion had danced Juliet then Nurse, he had danced Romeo, Tybalt and Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*. “As you get older you go gradually towards the character parts.” Like Marion, Desmond always tended to enjoy whatever role he was doing at that particular time, “Although I look back and think maybe Albrecht was my very favourite. I liked the fact that he was a rather horrible gentleman. I know some people play him as if he is very nice, that he made a slight error but in my view he contemplated and planned what he did to Giselle.” Marion said that it is obvious that Desmond loves and relishes the role when he coaches it. Desmond has mainly coached it at BRB. “I have done a lot of coaching and I look and see people like Kevin O'Hare who is now manager of The Royal Ballet – he was young, what's happened? Suddenly it's years and years later.”

As an aside Desmond mentioned that the BRB version of *The Nutcracker*, including sets and costumes, is going to Australia. Peter Wright is going out for a few days and Desmond will be there “for weeks and weeks.”

Desmond and Marion were asked about the transformation to Ballet Master/Mistress and Assistant Director and the coaching side. “I blame Desmond for my change in life,” said Marion. “He came up to me some years ago when we were at Sadler's Wells and said ‘Isn't it about time you started giving class?’ I was amazed as I couldn't even remember in which order the steps go!” “She's a complete natural,” said Desmond.

When Desmond was a very young dancer, aged 19 or 20, if ever he had found a class inspiring or a step or combination special, he wrote it down. He still has the book. “I must have known deep down then what I wanted to do in the end, so I made the transition easily.” Desmond said he had danced everything that he wanted to dance – although when later he was asked it he would have like to do *Mayerling* he answered vigorously “I would have given my eye teeth to do that role!”

He had had a wonderful mentor in Peter Wright. “He taught me a lot about coaching and teaching and also he had belief in me and that helps enormously. I love and enjoy it and have adored every moment from the day I stopped dancing until now.”

Marion said that Peter Wright had made an enormous difference to her too. Thanks to him, the last five to 10 years of her career were her best. He brought an amazing repertoire into the company for her to dance like *Pillar of Fire*, *Fall River Legend* – ballets that Marion would never have seen, let alone danced, if it hadn’t been for Peter as he had such a total, worldwide knowledge of the art form and always knew which pieces would suit his dancers. So when Marion decided to stop as “I didn’t want to carry on till people said ‘She ought to stop’” she was ready to go into the new phase. She has thoroughly enjoyed it, having thought that ballet staff just sat there relaxed and watched rehearsal and it was an easy life, she has subsequently discovered it is the most stressful thing you can do. “Very enjoyable,” said Desmond. “Mostly,” said Marion.

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The next generation of teachers is coming on through the Company. There are two or three who have started to teach. Hopefully there will be lots of them because it is a passing on from one generation to another which makes a ballet school.

Marion explained that you can tell as you look around class of dancers which ones are thinking about how their bodies are working and what’s good for their bodies where others for whom it all comes so easily they wouldn’t know if they were being given a superb class or a mediocre class. That is not a put-down, it is just that their bodies are so easy that they can do whatever is set for them. There are others who need the care and attention and know how to look after their own bodies and make sure they function properly.

The Company has changed enormously but it is not something that Desmond notices as it is like growing up with your children, it happens gradually. He knows the dancers are very young now as they have lost the more mature dancers. The other main change is the improvement in technique; it is incredible what some of the boys in the Company now can do. Sometimes Desmond worries that there has been such an emphasis on technique for many years now possibly to the detriment of the dramatic stage artist but on the plus side he does see the dramatic side coming back as well.

When David Bintley took over as Director of the Company, he brought in maturer dancers from other

companies. Now most dancers are getting roles who have grown up in the Company. It was pointed out that David had to do that at the time, like Kenneth used dancers he felt safe with. David needed to know that he had a group of dancers he knew he could work with like Wolfgang Stollwitzer and Sabrina Lenzi from Stuttgart. He is now discovering young dancers in the Company whom he can use and it is much better.

With regard to new choreography, the Company is doing a choreographic evening of three public performances on the big stage of the Hippodrome. Six or seven dancers are each doing a piece and collaborating on *Danses Concertantes*. One is doing a pdd, one doing something for the girls. David is encouraging this as we need new choreography as well as the classics. Compared to some companies they have done fair amount of new work, as much as they can afford to do. It is exciting that Kit Holder, who is doing a piece for the choreographic evening, is also doing a bit for the mid-scale tour the Company is doing. In the next two weeks the Company is doing *Coppélia*, *Pineapple Poll*, Kit’s ballet, David’s new ballet, *Four Seasons* – six or seven ballets in two weeks, for a company that is jet lagged!

The Company will definitely continue to come to London at least once a year. David and the new Chief Executive are determined they will try to come to London more but Desmond pointed out that the Company is not funded from London “We are that bit up North” and are funded by West Midlands. They will be in London as much as they can.

Having the relationship with a school (Elmhurst) has made an enormous difference to BRB although Elmhurst is going through a difficult time finding teachers at the moment. In the past they had to get dancers from the Royal Ballet School which was difficult but now they are able to use their own students, “not as many as we’d like but there are three or four girls and a couple of boys”. Marion teaches there and the school comes to BRB to do class and there is also a separate class on Saturdays. The association is strong but it will take time to settle and for a proper relationship to grow. Five of the students went with the Company to the US. Desmond commented that there is room for more schools than the Royal Ballet School, as each school offers something different and if you live in the North you may not want to send your children all the way to London. Give it a few more years.

Desmond and Marion were asked about *Choreartium* which the Company had been offered the opportunity to do. It had been reconstructed and done in Holland. This led to a discussion about the difficulty of reviving old ballets for young dancers who didn’t think much of the old fashioned choreography, giggled all the way through it most of the time “and got told off terribly” by Desmond. A similar problem had arisen when BRB put on *Pineapple Poll* recently after years and

years. Marion said “Having told the dancers that they would love it and that it was such fun, they looked at us as if we were mad. They couldn’t believe what we were asking them to do but as soon as they saw the audience reaction they really enjoyed it. They hadn’t realised the comic potential.” Desmond asked if people knew that Bob Parker, who is doing it, was leaving? “He is absolutely determined. He is a great loss to the Company and I shall miss him terribly.”

Asked about embarrassing or funny moments Desmond retold the story which he had shared with The Ballet Association many years ago about him partnering Margot Fonteyn. They had been rehearsing the

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Tchaikovsky *Romeo and Juliet* pas de deux on tour in America and doing the pre-performance run through. There was a lift where he held her under her armpits and then lowered her gently to the floor. Only he slipped and dropped her onto her knee. Margot inhaled her breath... and gasped.... and Desmond thought “This is the end of my career.” “Oh” she said, “My knee hasn’t felt that good for years.”

Marion said only the other night she fell out of the Carabosse carriage when one of the extras tripped, which could have been very funny if it hadn’t been so scary. It was embarrassing. The moment which made her laugh most on stage was when Stephen Jefferies fell into the pit in Eastbourne and the cast was hysterical. The other was in the ballet which Joe Leyton did, *The Grand Tour*, when Michael Corder as Noel Coward had to sing to a recording which slowed down... and he had to mime as it did so. She as Mary Pickford was laughing so much she had to bury her face in Douglas Fairbanks’ jumper. “As a Ballet Mistress the only time I get really angry is when people corpse on stage, because it is just not done, but we just couldn’t help it.”

Desmond described how when both he and Marion were dancing together, they had to run round in a circle, girl, boy, girl, boy, and flip the girl over and back onto her feet as they ran round. One girl got completely stuck upside down with her feet over her head and that started Desmond off, he just couldn’t stop laughing. Then he heard this absolutely furious voice from behind shouting “Will you stop it.” In this ballet, the first number is repeated at the end, choreography and music, to solo piano. In this same performance, the pianist played the second last number, closed the lid and was walking off. The dancers ran on and were running round in a circle flipping the girls – to no music. And suddenly they heard “Oh shit,” as the pianist realised what he’d done

and ran back and picked up.

Marion graphically demonstrated why Desmond’s nick name for her is ‘Bugsy’. It stems from the time when they did *The Invitation* together. Being nervous and having slightly protruding teeth, her top lip quite often would get stuck. In the very romantic moment when they gaze into each other’s eyes at the beginning of the pdd, being very lecherous “I turned round to him” (Marion demonstrated, to the mirth of the audience) – “Poor Desmond!”

Reported by Belinda Taylor, corrected by Marion Tait, Desmond Kelly, David Bain ©The Ballet Association.