

Marianela Nuñez

PRINCIPAL DANCER, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by David Bain

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, 28 November 2008.

David Bain welcomed Marianela who had come from a busy day, rehearsing in the morning, flat hunting and at an Evening Standard photo shoot of all the season's Sugar Plum Fairies.

Marianela last spoke at The Ballet Association four years ago, when she was recovering from injury, had just done *Sylvia* and was rehearsing *Fille*.

What are Marianela's memories of Sylvia which had just come back and which Marianela had also danced on the recent tour?

Looking back, it had been a good season to discover herself in Ashton's work. Marianela had thought that they usually chose small girls to do Ashton choreography so was very happy when, as a tallish dancer, she started to rehearse *Sylvia* and found that it was a role that would suit taller girls and in which she was quite at home. It was the season after doing *Fille* and *La Valse* and more of Ashton's work had come back; she found she had a greater understanding of the role and its depth.

Why does she think she suits Ashton?

It is hard for she herself to say, but most people refer to musicality. She has benefited from wonderful tuition from Lesley Collier who was so great in Ashton herself. She has worked with Marianela for a long time and given her the right approach. Also, it is the upper body. To achieve the freedom that Ashton requires has helped not just for Ashton but others. In every role, it gives the impression that you are in total control of your technique and everything else. If you let the upper body go as Ashton wanted, it makes dancing completely different, you can actually show how much you are enjoying it, how free dance can be. 'It gave me a whole different insight into ballet technique in general.' Ashton and MacMillan both were very good at using the body. Dancing Juliet for example, MacMillan's choreography is so intelligent that you don't need to overact, the movement already expresses exactly what you are doing. You can use that thought or feeling in other roles, like in *Swan Lake* or *Sleeping Beauty*.

In the summer before the 2004 season when *Sylvia* was revived, Marianela and Slava Samodurov had worked with Christopher Newton on Act II which was harder to reconstruct as there was so little documentation of it. Then, on return from the holiday, they all worked together, including Darcey who was first cast. First time round Donald MacLeary coached and second time Lesley Collier. Marianela did two seasons with Slava and the last one with Thiago (Soares), when they

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had a really good time. Marianela felt by then that Act II really held together, it was the first time that everything had really made sense and she had found it easier to get into it.

Marianela danced *Sylvia* in Japan on tour in 2008 and said she was lucky to do a lot of shows, three *Sylvias* in three days. Although she had thought she wasn't going to make it as it is one of the hardest things for girls to do, 'you finish and there is nothing left in the body. But it was brilliant, by the last show I was so relaxed it makes the whole thing so much easier.' The Japanese loved *Sylvia* because it was new ballet for them although they may have seen the wonderful video of Darcey with Thiago and Roberto Bolle. Everyone was wondering how the Japanese would react but they had enjoyed it – with *Sylvia* the music is well known, especially the pizzicato solo.

Japanese audiences really appreciate their ballet and they particularly like The Royal Ballet and look forward to their tours. Marianela was very happy that she had the chance this time to do main roles as last time they took a rep in which she wasn't doing much so she didn't get the chance to dance a lot.

She and Thiago had been out in advance to promote the tour and were received 'like pop stars.' It was

the first time Marianela had done something like that and they'd loved it, although it involved 17 to 20 interviews in two days, one after the other. It was tiring – they had arrived back on the Sunday evening and had a *Sleeping Beauty* performance on the Monday.

What is it like coming out of the theatre in Japan?

'It is like being a pop star!' Marianela had seen it before, last time they were in Japan. They were doing *Manon*. Marianela was doing Mistress in the Sylvie (Guillem) cast 'and the Japanese go crazy for Sylvie. I will never forget it, all these people, hundreds of them, screaming her name, wanting to take her picture, the flashes... incredible. I've never seen anything like it.' They wait for the dancers to go into class in the morning and give them copies of the pictures they have taken the night before.

Turning the clock back four years, Marianela was asked about *Fille* which she was rehearsing with Carlos (Acosta). She said it was a big time for her. It was her first chance to do an opening night which was a bit of pressure. It was also a ballet she'd never done before although she had always wanted to do it. They were also making the DVD, so there was a lot going on. She had just done *Sylvia* so she was already a little familiar with the style. But *Fille* really was a natural. 'The character is perfect, you can have so much fun. It was easy to understand Lise in every way.' Marianela had had a ball and she can't wait for it to come back. 'It is fantastic, the Fanny Essler pas de deux is very tiring, beautiful – and there are lots of props.' She recounted how in the first show she finished her first solo 'and had to open a door, go off, and close with the music.' She got there – and the door wouldn't open. She wondered what to do now? 'In my head I could see Alexander Grant going 'Why didn't you open the door?' I was panicking and kept pushing it.' So she had to pretend – 'I acted something' – and left through the wings. 'Yes, a lot of props – those ribbons! – and I'm not very good with props. Whatever I have I my hand on I manage to drop it.'

She had a wonderful cast, Will Tuckett, Carlos, 'it was fun, easy to gain the atmosphere.' Alexander Grant was great, he knows exactly what he wants and it is amazing to hear someone who had worked so closely with Ashton, knew him so well. Lesley Collier also, who was one of the most beautiful Lises. Marianela was additionally coached by Alexander Agadzhanov who did all her pas de deux and solos. 'I had different people giving me different information, it was wonderful.'

What was the next role?

'My first *Swan Lake* – I did a lot of first things that season!' It was quite exciting, she had been going to do her debut with Thiago and they were very lucky to start the rehearsal period early. Marianela had always said that the first time she did the role she wanted to work a lot on it 'as you really have to study it, especially the white act.'

So they started three months in advance. Thiago had done it many times before which had helped her a lot – but then the debut moved forward because Darcey hurt herself two days beforehand. So Marianela was called and told she would have to do the opening with Roberto (Bolle).

They had to rehearse quickly – 'and that was my debut.' She has good memories. Asked about the differences she said there was so much going on, she didn't remember very much. Both Roberto and Thiago do the same version of the pas de deux so it was easy to adapt to Roberto. Also, because Thiago had danced it so often and they had worked it so much, she was very comfortable and could change and adapt very easily.

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How do you get into the white act?

That was the biggest challenge. Everyone thought that the black act would be technically so much easier for her. But looking back she feels her personality goes more with Odette and she actually enjoys the white acts more. She always found it hard to get Act III right, it was only in this last round that she felt that both characters were starting to have the right shape, the white and the black and she could make a big difference between them, it wasn't just superficial.

How does Marianela cope in the black act when dancing with Thiago whom she actually loves and yet she has to be not very nice to?

Marianela pointed out that it's the same in *Sylvia* only he is not very nice to her! Thiago has the incredible ability to get every character he does right so Marianela trusts him 100 percent and sometimes he helps her develop the character in so many ways, the lifts, the way she walks, how she stands. He can be very precise so between the two of them they have found a way to make it work. Obviously it's all an act. From Thiago she has learned so much about stagecraft, 'it's wonderful to have someone like that in the studio, who also gives you support in the part.'

Other classics Marianela has done are Makarova's *Beauty*, the current *Beauty* – in fact she's done a lot of *Beauties* lately. Marianela thinks it is probably the ballet she has done the most. 'It probably sounds boring but I am at the moment in my career when I am loving, really loving, everything I do and starting to really discover myself as an artist and as a dancer. So everything feels pretty new to me even though I have done a lot of *Beauties* it, still feels fresh.' She feels she is bringing new things to herself and the audience every time she

does it. She doesn't want to stop developing, she wants to keep herself growing and that is still happening with *Beauty*. 'I adore it. Most ballerinas go "Oh my god, *Sleeping Beauty!*" but I love it. I actually love the first act very much, it is brilliant to do. The Rose Adage is seriously scary. Before going on you doubt yourself so much. But that music is incredible, like everything with Tchaikovsky.' Marianela was rehearsing *Nutcracker*, 'It is just heaven to be dancing with that music. It's the same with *Beauty* and *Swan Lake*.'

When did Marianela first do Voluntaries?

It was in 2005, the following season, with Glen Tetley who was still alive. 'I was so happy to have the chance to work with him. He was wonderful. I was bit worried about it but he was lovely to work with.' He didn't come until they were already on stage so Marianela didn't spend that much time with him in the studio. 'But the little bit I worked with him was wonderful and I was very happy to have a chance to meet him.'

The rehearsal period for *Voluntaries* was very hard, very difficult, very intense because the work is slightly contemporary although the dancers are on point. There are a lot of contractions. 'For us it is very difficult to suddenly do a balance coming from a contraction. Usually you are so straight you are already set to find your balance but here you are coming from somewhere else which means changing your technique a bit.' But, again, Marianela feels lucky doing this kind of different work as she can take something from it and use it elsewhere. 'You find something you can use in another ballet, even one like *Swan Lake*.'

Will seeing Marianela in such work make Monica Mason look at her and think there's a whole lot of MacMillan repertoire that Marianela could do?

Until *Voluntaries* Marianela had not done any partnering work. That was pure partnering which was a good lesson. The first time, she did it with Jason Reilly from Stuttgart Ballet who had done it and other Tetley pieces many times, with Tetley himself. Being in Stuttgart Ballet he had done a lot of partnering. He is very strong and, knowing the work very well, he helped Marianela a lot.

The experience opened her eyes to pas de deux work. Until then she had just done the classics and that's not the same thing. 'I find it quite dramatic. I found second time round that I could bring that much more, really go into it, it was completely different. I can't explain it, but it's what is happening to me these days. Like *Diamonds*. There's no story but there is so much going on inside, a lot of emotion, it is wonderful to feel like that on stage. I try to share that with the audience.'

Diamonds – it was the piece that everyone wanted to do in that ballet? Or was it?

Marianela didn't know but she was very happy that they

were cast. Even though, at the moment, as she had said, she loves doing everything, *Diamonds* is one of her favourites, probably at the top of her list and she loved doing it. 'That music, the way the pas de deux is choreographed especially, you can feel it so much, it just takes you to another place. I can't wait to do it again in the summer.'

You didn't have a desire to do Rubies?

Marianela actually thought they would cast her to do Rubies. It is wonderful as well, 'But that *Diamonds* pas de deux is just the best and I am sure that Thiago agrees, it is just brilliant to do.'

She is loving Balanchine. She has done quite a bit; it's where she started to get her first chances, with *Agon*. She thinks that to do Balanchine when you don't have a certain maturity, you don't have anything to grab on to. It is just steps and if you are not feeling really secure yourself it is really difficult, you feel so exposed. 'But now with a little bit more experience I am just loving his work – *Serenade*, I can do it any time, for breakfast, every day! Same with *Diamonds*. I would have loved to do *Theme and Variations*, I think it is a fabulous ballet. His work is so musical, so clever, like *Apollo* which we did. All wonderful to do.'

“ *What was wonderful was to work with Suzanne Farrell. 'I actually wanted to meet her, to see how she worked, to spend private time with her.'*

And Tzigane?

'Ah. It was... interesting.' What was wonderful was to work with Suzanne Farrell. 'I actually wanted to meet her, to see how she worked, to spend private time with her. If you see a video of her doing *Tzigane* it is amazing. Without doing much she has so much intensity it works.'

Marianela said it was very difficult to get it right and she would like to do it again. 'It is a strange feeling because the first solo doesn't have really clear steps, there's not a lot to grab onto. But the whole cast had such a laugh doing it. It is a very tiring piece, we were dying by the end.'

Marianela agreed that Monica Mason had wanted the Company to experience working with Suzanne Farrell and it was wonderful having her around. Marianela asked her so many things about working with Balanchine but she is a very private woman and doesn't talk very much. The little things she did say were lovely. She asked her a lot about *Diamonds*, it was good to have her around.

What is it like working with Pat Neary?

It is always fun! Marianela has only done *Serenade*, *Apollo*, *Agon*, with her. She hasn't done *Agon* in ages;

when she did it the first time she was only 17. ‘You really have a real laugh when you do things with Pat, she has so much energy I don’t know where she gets it from. Incredible.’

Working with choreographers: Glen Tetley worked with Marianela on Voluntaries briefly but that was a work that had already been choreographed. What about experiences of working on ballets which are new?

‘It is something every dancer wants to do, have people exploring and challenging you, finding and taking the best out of you.’ Marianela hadn’t done a lot of new work, only DGV with Chris Wheeldon where her part wasn’t very long. She did a piece with Will Tuckett, a little moment in *Seven Deadly Sins* and now with Wayne. ‘That was something wonderful, I felt someone gave me a special place, spent special time with me, understanding me. I was worried as I had never done work like that before but he was so patient and so kind and I am so grateful to him for giving me a special place, a special moment closing his ballet, beautiful music, a lovely pdd. I am very, very grateful he did that.’

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What was the rehearsal period like?

Wayne has an incredible way of working. For example, the pas de deux Marianela does with Ed (Watson). Wayne spent two rehearsals doing this solo on her, steps and movements, by herself. Marianela thought she was going to do a solo, without Ed behind her. ‘Then Wayne came to a rehearsal and Ed was in it; he did his solo and that became our pas de deux. You never know, because Wayne works in sections. He does them in such a clever way and then joins everything together. Then it just looks like something completely different, although the steps are the same. Wayne is a very special person, very intelligent. You want to give him everything, because he is just so wonderful. He makes you feel very good about yourself always, he is very positive, the atmosphere is great. In an hour you feel you have worked for five with him. He’s fabulous.’

With Wayne doing different bits with the dancers and only one cast, they never get to see the ballet?

Marianela didn’t see the ballet until it was on TV. But as she comes on at the end, she did get to watch it from the side, so saw pretty much the whole thing. Even though it doesn’t have a story, Wayne gave the dancers a little idea, there is a logic, a little story. Although obviously it is not a story ballet, it is very modern, but somehow it does something, it is actually very emotional and Marianela can tell that everyone feels the same. ‘When all those

people come walking on just before the pdd, it is incredible to be on the stage.’

Seven Deadly Sins?

Marianela absolutely loved the ballet and was glad it was coming back although she didn’t know if she would be in it this time. She had actually forgotten which sin she was but ‘it was fabulous, fun to do’ despite it not being very clear which sin was which. ‘I love William Tuckett’s work. Like Wayne, I find him a very intelligent guy, he can do so much, like all the things he does for the Linbury. He is a lovely person to work for, fun. In rehearsal period you can have a laugh and you still get your work done. Thiago feels the same, he loves working with Will too. We have a big respect for him.’

You have worked with Chris, Will and Wayne. You’ve explained how Wayne choreographs, what’s the difference with the others?

Chris is much more straightforward. ‘His language is more familiar to what we do, the classical way. Wayne is the odd one out, doing a solo which combines another dancer’s steps to become a pas de deux – he is the one who changes things around a little bit. Chris and Will have the same way, although Will has a story. The three have completely different styles and personalities.’

Marianela always said she would have loved to work with Forsythe but doesn’t know that that will happen. Matz Ek is coming but she is not involved in *Carmen*. She didn’t even audition as she knew there wouldn’t be time as she is really busy with *Bayadère*, both roles, DGV and a lot else going on as well. Maybe in the future she would like to work with him. ‘It is wonderful what he does but you have to be committed to that a hundred percent because he is quite intense.’ And then she’d like to work again with Kylian whom she worked with a little bit in *Sinfonietta*, and with Wayne again as she had so loved the experience. She hopes she’ll get another chance with him.

There was a period when it almost looked as though Marianela wasn’t going to get new choreography because Monica always wanted to put her into revivals and there is only so much you can do at a time.

Marianela is happy that people are finally giving her the chance. ‘I am loving it and want to do more because discovering your abilities is very nice and also pushing yourself to the limits and creating something that in a few years time someone else will dance. So you are leaving something behind. But I still love my tutu and the classics and I want to keep those going for ever.’

Natasha (Makarova) cast Marianela as both Gamzatti and Nikiya and it was probably Nikiya that showed some people that she could do ‘the other role’ as at that stage she was getting the mistresses – a little bit type cast.

‘It was quite scary then. I knew there was so much more to me. It was quite a difficult thing to break, to show if

you give me the chance I can show you that I can do something else. I am glad that chance came along. I was happy that Nikiya came along. Even after that it was still quite hard for people to open but finally I think I am getting there.'

Differences between dancing a role like Nikiya and Gamzatti?

This is where Marianela thinks she is quite lucky, to have experience of both roles and a chance to be versatile on the stage is amazing. 'I love doing them both, though with my personality I feel more at home doing Nikiya. That's what happened later on with *Swan Lake*. In the white act I can really just let go. With Gamzatti and all the nasty roles there is so much to discover which is quite fun. I think the same is going to happen dancing Giselle after Myrtha. But I love to do them both. I am going off to Italy, to La Scala, to do Gamzatti. Svetlana Zhakarova is doing Nikiya and Roberto (Bolle) is Solor. Gamzatti is a role that has helped me, it was one of my

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first main things. I love *Bayadère*, and it's fabulous to experience both sides of the story.'

Let's talk about guesting. You are going to Milan...

'Makarova is going to Italy next week for the rehearsals and I am leaving at the end of the week. It is the same production as here so it will be easy to bring it back. When I get back we have *Nutcracker* and then we open in *Bayadère* here.'

Other guests?

'We are doing the festival in Japan. We got invited after all the shows with the Company and we are keen to do that summer festival as it is quite something. Every dancer from around the world is there, so there's a good atmosphere.' There are nine shows and Marianela and Thiago are doing three pas de deux, *Winter Dreams*, *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux* and *Le Corsaire*. 'That's enough. It's going to be an intense season here which I am very happy with and *Giselle* is coming up. It's a major thing and I want to spend time on it which is why I don't want to go anywhere else.'

Last year was a major year for guesting. They went to Prague and to Italy 'almost every weekend' and to Brazil a few times. Thiago did his own show in the summer. 'Thiago is like a celebrity there, he can't even walk in the streets! We jump into cabs and the driver goes 'Hey it's Thiago!' They went to China and again when the Company also sent them there in January. They danced *Winter Dreams*. 'For me it was for the first time

and I hope I get a chance to do it here in London if they ever do it again.' They danced *Corsaire* as well.

So you are still keeping up your show piece pas de deux which first got you noticed?

Things like *Corsaire* are what Marianela did at home when she was a little kid. 'It works in those shows, people want to see you dance.' It's hard these days. 'People start to explore and you go to those ballet galas and nobody wants actually to dance that much.' Marianela's view is that it's important to give the audience real dancing like *Sleeping Beauty* pdd or *Don Q*. 'Audiences want to see people dance, they don't want to pay for a ticket to see someone wander around for two seconds. It's important to give them everything.' Marianela appreciates Monica allowing her to do *Winter Dreams* 'which Thiago had done before. So I can show people a bit of drama and a bit of dancing, both in one night.'

In Brazil they did *Winter Dreams* because no-one had done it there before. 'It was lovely because we had a pianist on stage so we did *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*. Thiago had done some stuff with Roberta (Marquez) and Laura (Morera) and Ricardo (Cervera) came and did *Coppélia*. Jason (Reilly) was there from Stuttgart with Alicia. It was a really good programme, the houses were packed, we travelled all around Brazil, so it was a very good experience.'

When you came last time Giselle was the ballet you said you wanted to do. You were covering Giselle when Ross Stretton was Director and you've had to wait a bit of time. 'It finally came! That and Juliet were the two roles I wanted to do so I'm really looking forward to it. I haven't started to rehearse but can't wait. I want to study like I did *Swan Lake*. I've got so much going on. Because I've always wanted to do it there are ideas that are just waiting to come out. It's going to be a big challenge.'

Romeo and Juliet?

Marianela spent the whole first show crying! 'I couldn't believe I was finally there. I wish I had had more shows, and more time. We didn't have enough time to get it ready. 'Even so, it was one of the most incredible experiences. 'It was fabulous. Every ballerina has to try. Incredible. It was my first proper MacMillan work and I have just good things to say about it.' Marianela hopes it comes back next season and that she gets some shows.

How did you prepare?

Marianela had read the story of course. 'I had to adapt to the choreography as I had never done that type of pas de deux. So I had to find a way for my body to move in that style. I watched a lot of tapes, I worked together with Thiago as you have to find own way of doing it. I watched the movies... everyone knows *Romeo and Juliet* but it is so cleverly choreographed and the music tells the story so it is actually very easy to go there and just be Juliet.'

Again, just yourself?

'Yes I think so! That's why getting there was quite natural.' Marianela especially absolutely loved Act III. 'There are so many emotions coming out, it is wonderful.'

Hopefully not too much yourself in Act III, your father foisting you off...

It's about having strong feelings. 'A strong feeling of knowing what you want and fighting for it, so passionate.' That's not the case with her father! She is really pleased she had the chance of finally doing it.

Other MacMillan roles?

'Are still on hold. We'll see when and if they come – hopefully.' Tatiana in *Onegin* is another role Marianela would love, 'but we'll see.'

You've already done Olga...

With *Onegin* it is even harder to tell if you will get a role. 'You never know, the casting comes with Reid and, of course, I'm sure Monica, but they only had four casts last time and it is very hard to get into that repertory. It's the same with *Manon*. But I would love to.'

What about MacMillan's one act ballets?

Marianela would love to get into them, 'but again, there are already so many people doing those roles so it is always difficult to get in there.'

Tamara and Alina say the same – they do that role and would love to be doing the other one.

'I actually haven't done a lot of MacMillan. Juliet is the first main role. I've done supporting roles, Mitzi in *Mayerling*, Mistress in *Manon*.'

Mitzi Caspar when you take the chair with you?

'That wasn't fun... and they changed the chair!' Marianela explained that the mistress costume has cross ribbons and there's a moment when she sits down, there's a lot going on, and Rudolf makes her stand up and points a gun at her. Jonny (Cope) was Rudolf and Marianela noticed when she stood up that the chair was following her, it was stuck to her costume. 'It is such a difficult role for the man and Jonny is wonderful but I wanted to stop – it was a general rehearsal. But he was really into it and whispered 'Don't stop!' so I had to drag the chair round. Now it's funny, then... ? You see – I'm not good with props!'

Dances at a Gathering?

That was a *long* process. They auditioned from September, from beginning of last season, till it went on. People came in and out of the ballet the entire season. Marianela ended up doing a role she wasn't even auditioning for – 'that's how crazy the whole process as.' Marianela was mainly learning the apricot girl that Laura did, the one that Lauren did and also the pink girl. She thought she had less chance of doing pink girl than the other two, then people were injured and she started

to rehearse it. Finally she was the only one left so ended up doing all the shows.

'It's a wonderful ballet. A lot happened – there were nights people skipped numbers, the order changed, but it was fun.' Marianela is pleased she ended up doing pink girl as the pdd are beautiful and it helped her a lot in pdd work. One pas de deux, with Johan, disappeared but she did do it with Carlos and Jason.

Michael Corder's revival (L'Invitation au Voyage)?

Marianela wasn't meant to be in it, she jumped in. It was a pas de deux that was created for Alex Ferri. Marianela had worked with Michael before in other ballets. She only had that lovely pas de deux at the beginning, a young couple in love, 'very easy going.' It was a shame she couldn't do all the shows and only managed to do opening night. It was lovely.

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In between you got engaged...

Thiago and Marianela have been dancing so much they haven't had a chance to get married. 'Maybe on stage, next time we do *Romeo* – why not? Cheaper, a lot of guests, perfect – Thiago, think about it.'

The Association had heard Thiago's side of the engagement story. Marianela described how they were doing *Beauty*, she was not happy with the show, was complaining until she saw the little box with the sparkly ring 'then I wasn't upset any more It was lovely. My Mum was there, the Company was lovely, they'd got photographers so we had pictures, Jonny and Lesley who had been coaching us were there, everyone that has been close to us. We don't have our families here so these are people who share our everyday lives. It was lovely to have them there. It was a very special night. I was screaming all over London!'

QUESTIONS

What is the difference between Wayne McGregor's and Christopher Wheeldon's choreography?

'Choreography is an art, you can't compare. I know everyone has a favourite dancer. But you can't compare artistry. Wayne and Chris are very different. I spent more time with Wayne in the studio, but both gave me the chance to be in creation and I love them both. They have a different language, a different way of working, you can't compare.'

Marianela's favourite role?

'Invite me back in another four years' time and maybe I'll know!' Marianela is at a stage when she can't say

which is her favourite, she is loving all of them, abstract, the story work, the classics. 'It is wonderful, I hope this moment in my career never finishes.'

*How do you cope with the physical effects of choreography like *Infra*?*

'It's like doing Forsythe, you are pushing your body beyond the limit but it can take it. I don't know what we are made of but we can take it! I didn't suffer anything at all. *Voluntaries* is as demanding. You can get a stiff back, but then you can get that with *Swan Lake*. It looks oh my god! but the body can take it.'

How do you cope with dancing you actually don't like?

'I can't answer that because at the moment I am loving everything. I didn't like Winter Fairy in *Cinderella*, that killed me. Before going on somehow I couldn't like it. Still, once on stage I did enjoy it. I love being on the stage.'

*Is Peter Wright coaching you for the mime scene in *Giselle*?*

'He has promised to come especially to help me with it so I am very happy. And he is also going to coach us for *Nutcracker*. I love him, love his production of *Giselle*. I'm glad he'll be around to help me for it.'

Do you ever notice the audience and do you notice different reactions on different evenings to the same programme?

Marianela has been 10 years with the Company and feels at home, feels the audience is there. She loves it, loves to be dancing here, loves being on that stage. 'That's what's lovely about the atmosphere in Covent Garden. It's like being with family, safe. That's why you want to give it all. It's funny you asked this question because the last show we did of the triple bill after the BBC programme it felt like the audience was slightly different. But usu-

ally that's what lovely about the atmosphere in Covent Garden, it is there all the time. I don't see a difference. English audiences know a lot about ballet which I really appreciate. Where I come from it's a lovely company, a beautiful theatre, incredible repertoire but I feel people don't appreciate ballet. When I arrived in London I was surprised how much people love ballet, how much they know about it. That for a dancer is so special, you know that people are watching, knowing what they are seeing. You get a wonderful feeling from that.'

How does Marianela cope with roles when the personality is different from her own – serious roles when she can't smile?

Checkmate surprised her. After the show Monica Mason said 'You see... very good!' It was like something new that she hadn't seen in Marianela before. 'I had to work really hard at it; the way you stand, look, it's not just being nasty. I am starting to like this. I've had chance to find out different aspects, change the way I act, do things I never thought I would do and I find it interesting. I'm glad to be given these different opportunities, it's good to be versatile.'

Maybe opening up a wide range of new roles?

'Well, maybe. So far I've done things I thought I would never do, they've come along and I have surprised myself.'

Marianela thanked everyone very much for all the support they have given her over the years, saying how important it is for an artist and how truly grateful she is. It really helped her that she had people who were out there for her from the start.

Report written by Belinda Taylor, corrected by Marianela Nunez and David Bain. ©The Ballet Association 2010