

Report of an interview of Ricardo Cervera by Joan Seaman

Swedenborg Hall, London

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Association members turned out in force to hear Ricardo Cervera. A favourite with audiences, Ricardo gave engaging, honest and hugely entertaining replies to Joan Seaman's questioning.

Like so many male dancers, he followed his elder sister to ballet classes. At the age of 6, he had seen a video of Fonteyn and Nureyev in 'Romeo and Juliet' and decided that that was what he wanted to do. He is a native of Torremolinos, on the south coast of Spain, and it was there that he started at the local dance school, the only boy out of 40 students, learning tap, modern dance as well as classical ballet. His teachers were themselves trained in England and it was, therefore, natural that he should aim for the Royal Ballet Upper School, when aged 16.

He came to London with great determination, immediately adored the city and all its opportunities and variety (although the weather was a bit of a shock!) and threw himself into his classes. He made it very clear that he found the whole experience energising, not only because he was now in a class with 10 other boys, allowing him the opportunity to compare his standard with others, but also because his teacher was a man, German Samuel, who naturally focused on other aspects of technique. Pas de deux work was a novelty and he started from scratch.

Unlike many dancers of the Royal Ballet, he never danced with the Company before joining it. His contemporaries at the Upper School included Yohei Sasaki, Tom Sapsford, Julie Lack and Michael Revie. At the end of his first year, he danced in Hans van Manen's 'Five Tangos' and 'Soirées Musicales', a MacMillan piece, which the choreographer expanded for the School performance. Ricardo is very proud to be able to state that he did, therefore, work with MacMillan. He didn't do a final School Performance, because he had already been taken into the company. His contract from Anthony Dowell came as a complete surprise, given that during his second year at the RBS, he had had a spurs operation and had been 'off' for a long time. He was, needless to say, delighted.

His first appearance with the Royal was in Paris (part of their European tour which also included Frankfurt, Turin, Palermo, Athens and Istanbul), at the back in the Polonaise of 'Swan Lake'. His first featured part was as one of the side boys in the Peasant pas de six in 'Giselle', a part Ricardo found difficult, on account of there being no characterisation or role to portray. This emphasis on the character of a role was a recurrent theme in his comments – he obviously relishes the acting opportunities of some ballets. His first appearance alone on stage was in Dartford on one of the Dance Bites tours when he danced Matthew Hart's 'Solo'. He adored it.

Here are his comments on some of the major roles he has assumed to date:

Alain (La Fille mal Gardée - Ashton). He didn't want to do it at first, having found the character irritating. However, he decided to play it 'his way', i.e. not stupid or irritating but rather shy and uncomfortable, thereby making him more engaging and sympathetic; Alexander Grant had said in rehearsal that Alain wasn't simply stupid and he took his cue from that. He didn't enjoy rehearsals but adored the performances and especially as Belinda Hatley was his Lise.

Mercutio (Romeo and Juliet – MacMillan). His first performance was at the Labbatt's Apollo, Hammersmith. He was shocked to learn that he would be performing the role, as he had assumed that one would have to graduate from Benvolio first. He had never covered the part (usually, dancers learn and cover a role, before then being scheduled to perform it), he didn't feel ready but in performance, he found it easy to play, on account of everything being contained in the choreography. He loves the challenge of the acting, especially the "death scene" which has to look real and spontaneous. His model remains Stephen Jefferies' interpretation of the role, which he prizes for its superlative characterisation. He also paid tribute to Monica Mason's coaching. He was asked why he had opted for Mercutio's accidental death at the hands of Tybalt, and he stated that that was Tybalt's decision! He has no ambition to dance Romeo, indeed, he has very few 'principal' roles in his sights because he feels that not only are they more technically demanding and exposed, but they are often more bland than the secondary parts.

Lescaut (Manon – MacMillan) This was harder for him, because Lescaut is an older, more controlling character and he needed to work on making himself more 'adult', weightier. He worked hard on a heavier, more

'masculine' walk for the role, with a different use of the arms. The drunken pas de deux is not, he assured the meeting, as difficult as it looks, but again, understatement is the key in order not to 'kill' it.

Tirrenio (Ondine –Ashton). He first did the part at the Sadler's Wells and enjoys it tremendously. It is physically very demanding, the flowing quality comes at the price of exhaustion. He likes the music, which he finds is closely married to the choreography and the character – a very rewarding part to dance. He finds Ashton very comfortable to dance and feels that the body movement of twists and bends, which is called, for comes naturally to him. Ricardo paid tribute to his Ondine, Miyako Yoshida who was easy to partner. He said that he finds that he can learn steps very quickly, but needs time to perfect his interpretation.

On the question of Ashton or MacMillan, he loves them both, although he marginally prefers MacMillan on account of the emotion, which lies within the choreography itself.

Song of the Earth – MacMillan. At first he thought he would not respond as well to the piece on account of it being 'abstract', but work on the poems and the glorious music meant that he found the 'emotion' he loves in Sir Kenneth's work.

Modern works. He enjoys them (he had also been trained in modern when in Spain) and likes Duato very much. For 'In the Middle' the background beat, repeated exposure to the music and continuous counting mean that he finds the 'music' easy. He loves working with William Tuckett, who is a friend, and the creative process is fun. Tuckett, he said, knows him and the other dancers well and is familiar with their bodies and way of moving so well, that he gets the best out of them. He adores dancing with Laura Morera, with whom he feels he has the right stage 'chemistry'.

The present season started dispiritingly with corps work in Don Q and Onegin, but outside choreographers / staggers have chosen him and we have therefore seen him in Nutcracker, Leaves are Fading, Beyond Bach and Por Vos Muero. He is happy.

Of roles that he covers, he would love to have the opportunity to do Oberon (The Dream), the solo of which he chose to do at the RBS and indeed Puck. Beliaev too would be of great interest.

Whatever the roles that Ricardo Cervera does, there will continue to be a great following for him. He came across as engaging and honest, a thoughtful and dedicated performer who has found his greatest pleasures in the treasures of the English repertoire.

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Report written by Gerald Dowler and checked by Ricardo Cervera.