

19 March 2009

Firebird and other legends

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET OPENS 2009 SEASON WITH A SYDNEY PREMIERE OF GRAEME MURPHY'S FIREBIRD

Lana Jones and Kevin Jackson. *Firebird*. Photo Alex Makayev

"It is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of this triple-bill celebration..." *The Age*

"... a new work by this leading choreographer never fails to set the ballet world abuzz." *The Sunday Age*

"...fascinating and complex." *Herald Sun*

"...Stunning choreography." *The Australian*

The Australian Ballet kicks off the Sydney 2009 season with a premiere work from star choreographer Graeme Murphy, delivering a brand-new interpretation of *Firebird*.

This stunning production will debut alongside two of Mikhail Fokine's best-known works, the sublime *Les Sylphides* and the vibrant ballet classic *Petrouchka* at the Opera Theatre, Sydney Opera House, from 2 - 22 April.

With the debut of the famed Ballets Russes in Paris in 1909 a treasure trove of Eastern European fables and exotica came to the West. To mark the centenary of the appearance of these legendary Russian companies we present *Firebird and other legends*.

2009 also marks the conclusion of our four-year exploration and celebration of the Ballets Russes impact on the world of art – in particular, their influence on the arts in Australia.

Sylphs, living dolls and mystical birds will come alive to magnificent scores by Igor Stravinsky (*Firebird* and *Petrouchka*) and Frederic Chopin (*Les Sylphides*) to be performed by the superb Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra.

Firebird and other legends also celebrates the anniversary of Sir Robert Helpmann's 100th birthday. In recognition of his contribution to the arts in Australia and in particular to The Australian Ballet the performance on 9 April will be dedicated to his memory.

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SYDNEY 2 - 22 April (21 performances only)

Bookings:
australianballet.com.au or 1300 369 741

For media enquires:

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Supported by The Australian Ballet Endowment. *Firebird* made possible with the support of the Kenneth R Reed Fund. *Petrouchka* supported by Friends of The Australian Ballet (S.A.), the Frank & Thora Pearce fund and the Neil Hopkins fund.



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Firebird

Mikhail Fokine created his masterful interpretation of an old Russian folktale in 1910. *Firebird* explores the story of a magical bird that bestows wishes and curses in equal measure. Sergei Diaghilev commissioned a 28-year-old Stravinsky to create the score, making the composer a star overnight. The combination was sublime, prompting a critic to declare it "a miraculous equilibrium of movement, sound and form". In 2009 Graeme Murphy teams with designer Leon Krasenstein to present a brand-new interpretation of this iconic work. *Firebird* will be Graeme Murphy's first work for The Australian Ballet since 2002's smash hit *Swan Lake*, which enamours audiences and sells out wherever it plays.

Petrouchka

Another great Fokine/Stravinsky collaboration set against the colourful backdrop of a village fair *Petrouchka* follows the foibles and flirtations of a group of puppets who come to life. Stravinsky's plaintive score imbues the puppets with great depth of feeling, especially poor Petrouchka, in love with a ballerina-doll who rejects his affections. After a 40-year absence, *Petrouchka* returns to The Australian Ballet's stages in its original form.

The Australian Ballet wishes to thank Birmingham Royal Ballet for the use of their sets and costumes for *Petrouchka*.

Les Sylphides

The ethereal beauty of Fokine's choreography combined with the dreamy nocturnes, languorous waltzes and animated mazurkas of Chopin's music has established *Les Sylphides* as one of the most famous and popular of all Romantic ballets. Set in a moonlight-flooded glade the enchanting sylphs, partnered by a lone poet, make for a ballet that's both otherworldly while sublimely human.

Les Sylphides was part of the repertoire of The Australian Ballet's debut national season of 1962/63. The most recent version was reproduced in 2006 when The Australian Ballet welcomed legendary former Ballets Russes ballerinas, Irina Baronova and Anna Volkova, who shared their personal expertise alongside Valrene Tweedie, the only Australian dancer to audition successfully for the Ballets Russes

companies. *Firebird and other legends* will be a tribute to Irina and Valrene who passed away in 2008.

About Mikhail Fokine

Born in St Petersburg in 1880, Fokine choreographed over 60 ballets. He was one of the first choreographers to break away from the stilted and old-fashioned style of the late 19th century, looking to new ideas and other cultures for inspiration. His choreographic style was based on a distinct philosophy - to expose and express the 'meaning' behind his artistic creations.

Fokine was one of the first chief choreographers of Diaghilev's Les Ballets Russes. In 1938/39 Fokine came to Australia with Colonel de Basil's Ballets Russes to personally supervise the production of his works in the company's repertoire. He died in New York in 1942.

About Graeme Murphy

Graeme Murphy, an alumnus of The Australian Ballet, is both a master storyteller and one of Australia's greatest choreographers. Along with his artistic associate Janet Vernon, Murphy is best known for his long and influential tenure as the leader of Australia's internationally renowned contemporary dance troupe Sydney Dance Company.

Murphy trained at The Australian Ballet School and started his career with The Australian Ballet. He has created a remarkably diverse repertoire of works, including over 30 full-length productions. His works reflect a discerning interest in music, drawn from a variety of 20th century composers. He has created works for The Australian Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater, the Royal New Zealand Ballet, and Mikhail Baryshnikov. He has also choreographed for the skaters Torvill and Dean, the Canadian Opera Company and The Metropolitan Opera, New York.

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