

Tuesday 1 June 2010

Peggy! Celebrating our founding Artistic Director with a season of exuberant dance



The Australian Ballet's Founding Artistic Director Dame Peggy van Praagh, 1962. Photo courtesy Australian News and Info Bureau.

From 25 June 2010, The Australian Ballet presents *Peggy!* - a tribute to the woman who shaped The Australian Ballet: Dame Peggy van Praagh.

On the centenary of Dame Peggy's birth and as The Australian Ballet's 50th anniversary draws closer, *Peggy!* will dip into the company's history to celebrate the lady, the legend and her ballets with a gala-style programme of highlights from her long and glittering reign.

The programme will present a series of divertissements choreographed and commissioned by Dame Peggy - including ballet favourites *Cinderella*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Giselle* - culminating in a full-length performance of Anthony Tudor's *Gala Performance*.

Set to a brilliant score by Sergei Prokofiev, *Gala Performance* satirises ballet's backstage machinations, as three prima ballerinas - each with an ego bigger than the last - try to *grand jeté* the others from the limelight.

Peggy! will be complemented by the combined forces of The Australian Ballet and The Australian Ballet School in Mark Annear's *Birthday Celebration*.

This Melbourne-only season opens at the Arts Centre with Orchestra Victoria on 25 June and runs until 5 July (11 performances). Bookings can be made at australianballet.com.au or 1300 369 741.

australianballet.com.au
behindballet.com

2 Kavanagh Street Southbank Victoria 3006 Australia
Telephone: (03) 9669 2700 Facsimile: (03) 9686 7081

Peggy! is a feast of dance celebrating our founding Artistic Director Dame Peggy van Praagh.

"If Dame Peggy were here today, I hope she would be proud of the company she began nearly 48 years ago," says Artistic Director David McAllister "She set very high standards for The Australian Ballet and, guided by her, we continue to celebrate this magnificent art form."

About Dame Peggy van Praagh

Peggy van Praagh was made Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1970 for services to dance, but in the Australian ballet world she was already reigning queen. A visionary and "one woman dance institution" she laid the very foundations of The Australian Ballet and nurtured the company to greatness.

English-born van Praagh first stepped onto the ballet stage at the age of six and didn't leave the theatre for the rest of her life. In 1958 she was lured to Australia to take the reins of the Borovansky Ballet, and in 1962 became The Australian Ballet's founding Artistic Director.

Her vision for the company was dizzying in its scope and ambition. The Australian Ballet, she declared, would present the classics alongside the best contemporary choreographers, designers and composers. It must engage the world's finest dancers, teachers and guests; tour internationally; and establish its own ballet school to train tomorrow's stars. In three short years van Praagh achieved all this and more.

Tireless, determined and formidable, she brought Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn to Australia, orchestrated the company's first international tour (where the number of curtain calls it received in Berlin still holds the world record) and mentored young choreographers like Graeme Murphy.

This gala-style programme is a fascinating sample of key moments from the company's repertoire, paying tribute to the woman who started it all.

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The programme

Gala Performance is Antony Tudor's exploration of 19th century ballet and all of its excesses. Dame Peggy van Praagh created the role of the Russian Ballerina and one can see how Tudor took full advantage of her formidable technique!

BirthDay Celebration is a clever collaboration between The Australian Ballet School and The Australian Ballet. Originally choreographed by Mark Annear in 2004 for the school's 40th anniversary, it features every level of The Australian Ballet School as well as the complete hierarchy of The Australian Ballet. As the title suggests, this is a fitting homage to the centenary of Dame Peggy's birth.

In 1972 The Australian Ballet celebrated its 10th anniversary with the Australian premiere of Frederick Ashton's *Cinderella*, with Ashton and Robert Helpmann reprising their acclaimed original roles of the Ugly Sisters. Extracts from this charming ballet, including the Act Two grand pas des deux and the Prince and Cinderella solos from Act Three, will be performed.

Peggy van Praagh's production of *Giselle* was awarded the Grand Prix of the City of Paris in 1965. Kathleen Gorham and Garth Welch headed the original cast and their Act One pas de deux is a fitting homage to this significant ballet.

The 'Garland Dance' from *The Sleeping Beauty* made its world premiere in 1973 at the Sydney Opera House marking The Australian Ballet's first season at this new venue. Designed by Kenneth Rowell, directed by Helpmann and produced by van Praagh, *Beauty* also marked the farewell performance of Garth Welch, who had danced the leading male role of every classical work staged by the company.

Praise for Dame Peggy and the programme

"Dame Peggy van Praagh is a one-woman dance institution" *Dance Australia*, 1982

"Dame Peggy was the architect of Australian dance" *The Sunday Sun*, 1990

"Gala Performance is marvellous to watch for no other reason than to see a master choreographer using dance to express human vanities and faults with taste, skill and discrimination" *The Australian*, 1991

"... ample justification for celebration." *The Age on BirthDay Celebration*, 2004

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Credits

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION (2004)

Choreography Mark Annear
Music Aleksandr Glazunov
With Students of The Australian Ballet School
Lighting Francis Croese

CINDERELLA EXTRACTS (1948)

Choreography Sir Frederick Ashton by permission of Wendy Ellis Somes
Music Sergei Prokofiev
Set and Costume Design Kristian Fredrikson
Lighting Francis Croese

GALA PERFORMANCE (1938)

Choreography Antony Tudor
by arrangement with the Estate of Antony Tudor & The Antony Tudor Ballet Trust
Music Sergei Prokofiev
Staged by Donald Mahler
Costumes Hugh Laing
Lighting Francis Croese

'GARLAND DANCE', THE SLEEPING BEAUTY (1973)

Choreography Peggy van Praagh
Music Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
Set and Costume Design Kenneth Rowell
Lighting Francis Croese

ACT ONE PAS DE DEUX, GISELLE (1973)

Choreography Peggy van Praagh
Music Adolphe Adam
Set and Costume Design Kenneth Rowell
Lighting Francis Croese

Visual Montage Matthew Donnelly

The performances

Melbourne 25 June – 5 July (11 performances)
the Arts Centre, State Theatre with Orchestra
Victoria

Bookings: australianballet.com.au or
1300 369 741

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