



WE WISH ALL our members a great New Year, with much memorable ballet. Since our last newsletter, we have had only two meetings. At our second in November we welcomed Royal Ballet Artists Leticia Dias and Leo Dixon. They provided us with a very entertaining account of their training and the first couple of years of their careers. Whilst experiencing very different early training, they met at the Royal Ballet Upper School, before graduating into Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Aud Jepsen Young Dancers' Programme respectively. After one year in Birmingham, Leticia moved to The Royal Ballet at the start of last season and Leo received a contract as Artist at the same time. It is always a pleasure to meet young dancers at the start of their careers and they gave us an entertaining evening.

As indicated in the last newsletter, we held this meeting in the Church's Forum Hall on the fourth floor, which is accessed by lift. We were trying this hall out to see if the sound was better. The feedback was positive, although this may partly be because the Church has purchased new microphones for both halls. The seating is also more comfortable, but sightlines are less good as there is no stage. We will discuss with the Church what can be done about this. We will use this venue for some meetings, remaining in the Sanctuary on the ground-floor for others. We will assess feedback on the two venues before making bookings for next season. This was also the first meeting since Rachel has given up making coffee. We are now using the Church's tea and coffee. In the Forum Hall, we left members to help themselves. Please put payments in the box provided by the Church. For meetings downstairs, we would be grateful if some members could volunteer to help with serving coffee.

At our first meeting of the New Year, it was a delight to welcome Principal Character Artist Kristen McNally as our guest. Kristen last spoke to the Association in 2010, so had much to talk about from the last seven years, which have seen her both develop as an extraordinary character artist on stage and a very successful choreographer both within the Opera House and for other companies. This has included choreographing for *Chance to Dance* and for the 2015 John Lewis Christmas advert *Tiny Dancer*.

Kristen has also fronted the *Royal Ballet Live*, both on Insight Evenings and World Ballet Day. Kristen gave us a fascinating and very entertaining evening, particularly in how she has developed character roles.

A summary report is available on our website once the report has been checked by the guest speaker/s. If you do not have access to the internet and would like a copy of a report, please send an A5 stamped, addressed envelope to Roger Handley, 12 Pinewood, Willow Grove, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5BT.

Members are reminded that interviews should not be recorded or filmed and that photographs should only be taken at the end of the meeting. We welcome dancers speaking freely when they come to meetings. Sometimes they say things they do not wish to see in print and edit this out of the official reports. Therefore, please do not post your own reports of meetings on social media.

Future meetings

At our second meeting of the new year on Thursday 18 January, we have our annual meeting with our Royal Ballet School Association Award winners, escorted by one of their teachers. We are delighted this year to welcome former English National Ballet Lead Principal Daria Klimentova, who now teaches second year Upper School students. She will escort our 2017 Award winners, Victoria Norris from Australia, Davi Ramos from Brazil and Gearoid Solan from Ireland. Victoria and Davi are now in their second year and Gearoid in his graduate year. All three were seen in Kenneth MacMillan's *Concerto* at the School's end of year performances and Victoria performed one of the lead roles in *Les Sylphides*.

Daria needs no introduction to regular ballet goers. Born in Prague in the Czech Republic, Daria joined the National Theatre Ballet Company on graduation as a soloist and was promoted to principal soon after. In 1995 she was invited to join English National Ballet by Derek Deane and danced with the Company until 2014 when she joined the Royal Ballet School as a teacher. Since 2003 she has been the Director of the Prague International Ballet Masterclasses, where she invites some of the greatest names in ballet to work with the next generation of ballet stars. We can expect

a fascinating evening.

At our meeting on Wednesday 14 February we have great pleasure in inviting Royal Ballet Principal Sarah Lamb as our guest. Sarah had to cancel a meeting with us at the start of the season because of injury and we are delighted to have her as our Valentine's Day guest. She last spoke to the Association in 2012. She joined the Company in 2004 from Boston Ballet, where she had danced since 1998. She was promoted to Principal in 2006.

As well as dancing the lead roles in the classical and heritage repertoire, Sarah has created roles in many of Wayne McGregor's ballets, including the title role in *Raven Girl*. Other creations have included Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* and a role in David Dawson's *The Human Seasons*. Most recently she created the new pas de deux with Steven McRae in Twyla Tharp's *An Illustrated Farewell*, has danced the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker* and will be dancing Giselle and Perdita around the time of our meeting. We can expect a very interesting evening. Please note, that this meeting will be held in the Church's Forum Hall on the 4th Floor, access by lift.

We are delighted to welcome newly promoted Principal Yasmine Naghdi as our guest on Thursday 22 March. We had asked her immediately after her promotion but Yasmine felt it more appropriate to talk after her performances as Giselle. Born in London of Belgian and Iranian parents, Yasmine last spoke to the Association in 2011. She graduated into The Royal Ballet in 2010 from The Royal Ballet School, where in 2009 she won the Young British Dancer of the Year Competition. During her time at the School she took part in an exchange programme with the Vaganova Academy in St Petersburg. Her roles in The Royal Ballet have included Juliet, Sugar Plum Fairy, Aurora, Olga in *Onegin* and The Girl in *The Invitation*. As well as making her debut as Giselle this season, she will also dance Lescaut's Mistress in *Manon*. Yasmine is also a keen musician, singing, playing the piano and composing and we can expect her to give us a very entertaining evening.

Provisional dates for meetings this season are: Thursday 12 April, Friday 20 April, Thursday 10 May, Thursday 24 May, Thursday 7 June. Please note that the meeting scheduled for Thursday 25 January has been cancelled.

Meetings begin at 7.30 p.m. and are at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church which is at the eastern end of Shaftesbury Avenue, opposite the Shaftesbury Theatre. From Covent Garden, walk up Endell Street, cross over Shaftesbury Avenue and walk past the opticians. Doors open at 6.45 p.m. unless otherwise stated. Entrance is £4 for members, £3 for concessions, £8 for guests.

News

It is with great sadness that we announce the deaths of two of our members, Violetta Hanington and Tanya White. Both had been members of the Association for many years and in Violetta's case was well known to members of The Royal Ballet as she waited at the stage door after performances most nights until about two years ago. They will be missed. Violetta's funeral will be at Putney Vale Crematorium at 12pm on Wednesday 10 January. [Before the general rehearsal of *Giselle* on Jan 19 Kevin O'Hare announced that the performance was dedicated in memory of Violetta.]

Gary Avis @balletboy09 · Jan 8
With love & sadness I pay tribute to a beautiful soul Violetta Hanington who sadly passed away before Christmas. A lovely lady who waited patiently at stage door @RoyalOperaHouse night after night to say hello, smile & cheer us on our way home You will be sorely missed x #Respect



A tribute on Twitter from Gary Avis

Members will also have been saddened to hear of the death of Annette Page, former Royal Ballet Principal, who died on 4 December two weeks before her 85th birthday. Her farewell performance in the Royal Opera House was as Lise in 1967 and her final performance was in Seattle as Cinderella. Often partnered by her husband Ronald Hynd, she assisted him during his tenure as Director of The Bavarian State Ballet in Munich and when he was mounting his productions worldwide. Their daughter Louise danced with English National Ballet.

On a happier note, we send congratulations to Tara Brigitte Bhavnani on the birth of her daughter Chloe Anjali on 5 December, Emma Jane Maguire on the birth of her daughter Emilia on 14 December and Roberta Marquez on the birth of her son.

We send our congratulations to those who were recognised in the New Year Honours List. These Included former Royal Ballet Principal Darcey

Bussell who received a DBE and former Soloist and now Education Administrator David Pickering who received an MBE. Promoter Lilian Hochauer, one of the impresarios behind the Russian Summer seasons at the Royal Opera House received a CBE and Nicky Spencer, who retired in the Summer after 44 years at the Opera House, the last 22 as House Manager, received a BEM.

The Viviana Durante Company, which includes Royal Ballet Principals Lauren Cuthbertson, Francesca Hayward, Akane Takada and Edward Watson presents a programme *Steps Back in Time* in the Barbican Pit on 18-21 April. The programme includes pas de deux from Kenneth MacMillan's *House of Birds* and *Danses Concertantes*, and the whole of his *Laidrette*. Akane will be joined by José Alves and Benjamin Ella in *Danses Concertantes*.

Members may have heard that Birmingham Royal Ballet's Principal Iain Mackay is retiring from the Company after 19 years this January, and will become Artistic Director of the Yorkshire Ballet Summer School. You may also have heard that English National Ballet's Principal Cesar Corrales will be joining the Royal Ballet at the start of next season as a First Soloist.

Keith Cavers is giving a lecture, *Digging Up Giselle*, for The Society for Theatre Research on Thursday 11th January at Swedenborg Hall. Admission is free.

Annual Dinner

Tuesday 24th April 2018, The Chesterfield, Mayfair

We are delighted to announce that this year's Annual Dinner will be on Tuesday 24th April. After 22 years, we will be moving to a new venue as the Rubens can no longer seat more than 100 in its main dining room. This year's dinner will be at The Chesterfield, Mayfair. The hotel is in Charles Street, about five minutes walk from Green Park Station and close to Berkeley Square and, like The Rubens, is a member of the Red Carnation group of hotels. Dinner at 8.00pm will be held in the hotel's Restaurant and Conservatory. It will be preceded by drinks in the Royal Suite on the first floor, which can be accessed by lift. We have kept the cost at £49.50, the same as last year. However, this will not include tea or coffee. If you wish to order tea or coffee and biscuits to finish the meal, these can be booked at an additional £5.

We have investigated a few other venues, but found costs are all around the same, if not more. We hope members will approve of our new choice of venue. Its closeness to Green Park Station means it is easily accessed from Covent Garden via the Piccadilly Line, but is also on the Jubilee and Victoria lines. The Chesterfield are very keen to host our event, their Events Sales Executive having trained as a ballet dancer in Eastern Europe.

The dining room is smaller than the old one at the Rubens and seats a maximum of 140, mostly on round tables seating 10 each, so there will be around 112 places for members and 28 for dancers, etc. We expect a heavy demand for tickets, so early application is advised. As always, we will not be announcing the guest list until 10 days or so before the event. You will then have an opportunity to let us know which dancers you would like to sit near. Please note, payment is non-refundable unless we have a waiting list.

Please print and complete the attached form and send it with your cheque and a stamped addressed envelope to Melanie Shipton, The Ballet Association, 7 Dutch Gardens, Kingston, Surrey, KT2 7TT. Please note, if you fail to send a stamped addressed envelope you will not receive your ticket and may lose your place if we are over-subscribed. If you wish to pay by electronic transfer, please send the form and include an email address so that Mel can send you our bank details. Please then forward her evidence of the transfer.

National Dance Awards, Critics' Circle

Once again, your Committee has agreed to the Association sponsoring the National Dance Award for Best Classical Choreography. The nominations are: Akram Khan for *Akram Khan's Giselle*, English National Ballet; Crystal Pite for *Emergence*, Scottish Ballet; Crystal Pite for *Flight Pattern*, The Royal Ballet; Liam Scarlett for *Symphonic Dances*, The Royal Ballet; Kenneth Tindall for *Casanova*, Northern Ballet.

Other nominations from the Royal Ballet Companies for awards are:

Marcelino Sambé, Dancing Times Award for Best Male Dancer; Francesca Hayward, Yasmine Naghdi, Zenaida Yanowsky, Grishko Award for Best Female Dancer; Kristen McNally in *Flight Pattern*, Outstanding Female Performance (Classical); Brandon Lawrence in *Wink* and Marcelino Sambé as Colas in *La Fille mal gardée*, Dance Europe Award for Outstanding Male Performance (Classical). Former Royal Ballet dancers Xander Parish and Alina Cojocar are nominated for Best Male Dancer and Outstanding Female Performance for *Giselle* in *Akram Khan's Giselle* respectively.

Membership

If you have received this newsletter you have renewed your membership. There are always a few members who, despite reminders, forget to do so. So please check that your friends have done so, and please encourage others that you meet at performances to join. Thank you to all of you who have renewed and especially to the many of you who have made generous

donations towards our next support to a work by The Royal Ballet. We always lose some members each year, but usually recruit a similar number of new members. However, whilst the building works are proceeding at the Opera House we have nowhere to leave our leaflets. Consequently, our membership numbers have fallen substantially over the last two seasons. Please encourage friends and acquaintances, so that we can build our membership back up to over 500.

Annual Visit to Elmhurst Ballet School and BRB

21-22 June 2018

We are delighted to announce the arrangements for our annual visit to Elmhurst Ballet School and Birmingham Royal Ballet. If you are interested in attending, please print and complete the attached form and return to the Chairman along with a cheque for the deposit of £15 per person. This deposit will cover transport to Elmhurst on the Friday morning and our donation to BRB. Please return the form as soon as possible as our performance tickets are only on hold until mid-February.

As last year, we will start with a late lunch at about 2.30pm on Thursday 21 June, probably at a nearby Italian restaurant *Milano*. This will be followed at 5.30pm by a pre-performance talk by some of BRB's dancers. We have reserved seats for the evening performance of Birmingham Royal Ballet's *In the Upper Room Mixed Programme*. As well as Twyla Tharp's exhilarating *In the Upper Room*, the programme will contain Alexander Whitley's *Kin* and the first new commission as part of Ballet Now, a new ballet by George Williamson, Associate Artist with English National Ballet. As well as creating works for ENB, George has created works worldwide and recently won the Genesis International Choreography Competition at Milwaukee Ballet with *Wonderers*.

We have reserved seats in the Middle Stalls – rows P & Q (Please note row E is front row), Side Stalls – rows H & J, Side Circle Rows A-D. All seats are at a discounted group price of £18.85. Please indicate on the form your preference for seats.

As in previous years, we have reserved rooms in the IBIS Hotel, Birmingham Centre, which is close to the Hippodrome Theatre. For Thursday 21 June, the room rate including breakfast is £69 for single occupancy and £79 for two persons (£39.50 each). If you wish to come up the night before or stay an extra night after the rates are the same. Unfortunately, this is more expensive than in previous years. If you would

prefer a cheaper option, rooms are available at the Travelodge round the corner from the IBIS and also in an IBIS Budget hotel the other side of the Bristol Road.

On Friday 22 June, following breakfast, at about 9.45 a.m, we will arrange transportation from the IBIS Hotel to Elmhurst Ballet School, where Association members will receive a warm welcome. Our President Robert Parker will be our host for the day. Following registration and reception, members will enjoy a day in the school watching class and rehearsals together with the presentation of the Association's Annual Award to a student during lunch. The day will conclude at approximately 3.15 pm.

Discounted rates on the railways become available 12 weeks in advance. Info is at www.thetrainline.com. Senior railcard holders can obtain very cheap tickets from London, around £4-£6 each way. This visit is always one of the highlights of the Association's year and can be highly recommended. If you have any questions, please contact our Chairman.

Ballet Association Events

In November twenty members had an interesting and enjoyable backstage tour of the ROH with Martin who proved to be an excellent guide. We were lucky to be able to sit in the stalls and see Natalia in rehearsal plus goldfish bowl views of several principals and other members of the Company in the rehearsal studio. We also gained some understanding of the Rolls Royce (literally) precision of the complex backstage area of moveable floors enabling some scene changes to happen in a matter of seconds.

There will be another visit on 23 January preceded by a visit to Thurrock on 12 January. Both visits are full with a waiting list so if you can't attend please let Ann Maclennan know at ba.events.sec@gmail.com or 020 8941 1607 so your place can be offered to another member. Tickets for both events were posted on 3 January so you should have received yours by now. We are planning to arrange another backstage tour and a visit to the Freed factory later in the year.

CHAIRMAN: David Bain, 23 Capstan Square, Stewart Street, London E14 3EU

Tel: 020 7515 1254 Mobile: 07855 823 921

Email: baindavid23@talktalk.net

or baindavid@rocketmail.com