

Thiago Soares

PRINCIPAL DANCER, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by David Bain

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, 30 May 2008.

David Bain welcomed Thiago, who'd last spoken to us in December 2003, and asked him to begin by telling how he learned of his promotion to Principal and his feelings at the time.

Thiago said it happened in Washington during a run of *Sleeping Beauty*. It had been a very difficult season with lots of hard work, guesting away with Marianela as well as a trip to his native Brazil, and he was working tirelessly to improve himself. All this made him nervous as he was ambitious for promotion to enable him to grow as an artist and to dance more wonderful roles. The news came unexpectedly. He'd done his first show of *Beauty* and the following morning Monica had approached him in class with lots of corrections and notes, and lists of improvements to be made, so it seemed tougher and more pressurised than ever, though at the time he didn't realise exactly everything she was talking about. When she asked him to see her in the office, he thought that the performance really hadn't been at all good! He did a few big jumps and left the class to go to see Monica who then said she had very good news for him. He had been performing in principal roles for a year, there were more things he could achieve and she wanted to squeeze as much from him as possible, so now he was being promoted, would have the title and could go ahead with developing himself. He was naturally delighted because that's what all dancers work for, but didn't know what to do and wondered if he could tell anyone or had to wait. That morning Marianela was a bit upset as they'd had a little tiff the day before and, because she didn't know what was going on when he didn't return to class, she went into town looking for him in case he was shopping! Because of this she wasn't there when the news of Thiago's promotion started to circulate and the Company had had a little celebration before she returned, so she was the last to know and thought Thiago had gone and left her!

In a dancing career Thiago said it was brilliant to perform in a Company like the Royal but so hard as you always question yourself and your abilities. Promotion

puts a stamp on who you are and enables you to progress. By this stage, Thiago had been four years in the Company. He'd already done principal roles in South America, Japan and Russia where he was known. Coming here meant a change of directors who did not know his reputation so it took a while for Monica and the management to realise what he could do. He began to show his abilities in both dancing and demi-character roles. His first major role was Carabosse in Natalia Makarova's *Beauty* – she already knew him from Brazil. While still there, he had been to competitions and galas so coming here meant readjustment and a different way of looking at things. But meanwhile he was growing all the time as an artist.

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Speaking about the two versions of *Sleeping Beauty* (Natasha's and the current production) Thiago said he'd done the Prince in both but only Carabosse in the first. For his first performance as the Prince he went on at the last minute. Jonny (Cope) wasn't well, Inaki Urleza wasn't there, and Tamara (Rojo) needed someone to partner her, so Monica gave him the opportunity as he'd done the role before. Everything was a rush and there was no time for analysis, he just had to get on with it. So he did the two contrasting roles in as many weeks. With her production Natasha had gone back to her roots and taken from the Kirov version of *Beauty*. It was hard – a very Soviet Union approach – and there were some wonderful elements in it. But for Thiago the current revival which is more lyrical seems more in keeping with the Royal Ballet traditions and bodies, and the way people appear on stage. He really prefers it as he can understand it better and so enjoy it more. He's also enjoyed being part of the revival, including dancing the

sarabande solo which was done for Anthony Dowell, a dancer of amazing ability, so is very difficult.

Talking of his first big chance, Thiago said Carabosse was the first time he was 'alone' on stage. But his first big dramatic role, while still a soloist, was *Onegin*, which is wonderful – fantastic, very special ballet, everyone wanted to be part of it. Again he thanks Jonny, who was supposed to perform but was unwell, for giving him the chance. Tamara Rojo was originally dancing Tatiana and as he had done some work with her beforehand Monica had put him down to learn it, which he did in two weeks. He immersed himself in books, videos and archives to get into the role and worked a lot with Tamara. The whole process was fantastic and working with Reid Anderson, the Stuttgart Director, was superb. Thiago felt there were similarities between the two of them as dancers, both tall, long and good at partnering and could perform and act as well as dance. His reputation was built on his ability as a good partner and to make any girl look good, and he wanted to get all that from Reid. He spent six days with him – he's a tough man and expects you to work hard but just the sort you need to get on. You felt you wanted to please him. But for reasons which Thiago wasn't aware of, Reid changed his partner. It is a very special ballet which is treated like a baby, but Reid and colleagues know exactly what they want. Reid wanted Thiago to continue but with another partner. Laura (Morera) stepped in at the last minute. They only had five days rehearsing together in the middle of which he picked up an injury to his back so missed the first show. But it was such a wonderful opportunity for him and even if he'd been shot he would somehow have got on stage!

Asked how he got into that very complex role, Thiago said that at the time, although he really wanted to do it and was focussing totally on it, he was a bit worried as he was aware the Company had other wonderful artists performing the role and there was a reputation to uphold. But the moment he read the book, saw the movie and started to work on it he felt more able to put himself in that place, particularly so in the last pas de deux, because there had been the history of something similar in his own family. It was hard but was so beautiful – the choreography, sets and costumes, the steps and the meaning of it all. It would be difficult if not impossible to dance such a special role and not be moved by it.

David asked for the differences of interpretation between dancing with Laura and his other partner, Roberta Marquez, who he partnered the next season. He said he admired Laura a lot and likened her to Marcia Haydée, the original Tatiana. As an actress Laura has a lot of stories and a lot of ideas in her head which helps enormously. They spent four days not talking much, but her coordination was fantastic and at the time they were both in the same place. Although she had a longer history in the Company, they were both desperately wanting

to do it all and it was a great opportunity for them both. With Roberta it was also good as he'd known her from Brazil, so it was nice as they used to dance together there and had a lot to chat about with each other. This role also provided her with a great opportunity. That time round they had two months to prepare so it was easier. Jane Bourne was here rather than Reid. This makes a difference to a male dancer as he really likes Reid who has himself danced the role many times, so Thiago wanted to see in great detail how he did it. But Jane knows everything and can teach everybody the pas de deux, the grips, the whole ballet, how you should look and where you should be. This time Marianela was Olga so flirting was easy! They had a wonderful time. She was dancing with Johannes (Stepanek) and also Valeri (Hristov) and they all know each other well so it was just like working with a family.

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On Balanchine, Thiago said this season they had *Jewels* which was new to the Company. It was a wonderful production which everybody loved it, and wanted to do it well – fantastic to be part of. *Diamonds* is great, especially the pas de deux and it's the sort of work Thiago likes. Maria Calegari came to put the performance together, and different repetiteurs came for the other two acts but they were wonderful people to be with and everyone worked well together. Although it was very hard work rehearsing he was performing with Marianela so it was very special for them both. He likes that sort of role – a classical style with a certain modern approach within the choreography which is different.

On other Balanchine works, Thiago said he'd done *Four Temperaments* and *Symphony in C* and during his time in Rio he did *Serenade* and *Prodigal Son* so knew Pat Neary who put them on there. At the time he'd only just joined the Company there so was young but was getting parts and did some galas. He believes Balanchine is a choreographic master whose work everyone wants to do. You need good classical training to do it well as the mixture of classical and modern requires a relaxed upper body making different shapes, and arms in another way, while keeping your legs together in fifth position! But Thiago really likes big ballets, with big groups such as *Symphony in C* and *Ballet Imperial*. As well as Tchaikovsky, Balanchine also used wonderful Stravinsky scores.

Thiago likes to use his partnering skills. He really trusted his teacher in Rio, Slawa Muchamedov, who helped him discover things within himself which he didn't know he had. He did competitions and won medals and began to attract some attention and at the

time he wanted to jump, do tours and pirouettes. But his teacher said he should learn to partner and because of his shape and height he was put with tall girls. For a year he partnered the biggest girl in the company but she was a wonderful dancer. It was hard at first with different coordination but it was great training for pas de deux and now he's grateful to his teacher for making him understand totally the need to please the girl. After all, most big ballets are really about the ballerina, and the male has to make her look as good as possible. The pas de deux is usually the longest part of any ballet – unless it's a Nureyev production! And it sets the story and the characters' feelings so he tries to portray that as well as he can because now he understands what his teacher meant. He's partnered a lot of dancers with different types of bodies. In Rio he partnered Svetlana Zhakarova, who was 20 at the time and doing her first *Swan Lake*. She was wonderful and wanted to show everything at once with such flexibility and great ability and she was already very famous so he knew he had to do well.

Moving back to Balanchine, Thiago talked about *Tzigane*, a short 1970s piece of art to a fantastic Ravel score which the Company had done recently. Technically it's not hard, but it is difficult to get it right and set the right mood. He had seen a video made for TV in a studio in New York with sets and original costumes but here it's less intimate on the big theatre stage. Performing it gave him the fantastic opportunity to work with Suzanne Farrell who'd been a very important dancer, and a mysterious woman. She was concerned with angles and small details and what looks good for each individual. He thought it was worth putting on *Tzigane* – although we are now in a different time it is always possible to learn from such works. Suzanne had created many roles so he was also able to talk to her about *Diamonds* on which she had some helpful hints. She and Marianela became friends and now exchange emails.

On unusual roles, Thiago also talked about *Different Drummer*. He said this was a challenge because there were no steps so in the middle of all that tragedy and dirt it was hard to set the mood and suddenly become a crazy Nazi army captain just by walking and screaming. You need to use the body to express emotion rather than dance. It's a theatrical, dramatic piece, but there is some dancing and some pas de deux. You have to be a Nazi as it's written and play it as it should be done. That's the wonderful thing about the Royal Ballet – you get to do such a variety of work and you can grow in two dimensions which is very important for a dancer.

Thiago was cast as Orion in the *Sylvia* revival with Darcey Bussell and Roberto Bolle as Sylvia and Aminta. It's a very key role in the ballet and, with Sylvia, has the whole of Act II. There's a lot of dancing with Sylvia and Orion is important to her role. He liked the production, had fun and enjoyed doing it. The ballet is really the

ballerina's with lots of different solos, and pas de deux and a tutu finale which is very Ashton – Aminta's part is not so significant. Thiago will also be dancing Orion on opening night in Japan with Marianela and David (Makhateli). Then it probably won't be danced for the next few seasons.

On *Seven Deadly Sins*, Thiago said he loves working with Will Tuckett and had great fun with him. He thought Will was joking when he talked about the role and his costume including gold watch, odd shirt, and tight leather trousers but Will showed him pictures to prove it was true! Will knows the strengths of the Company and its dancers and seeks to explore people's ability. The work was made in three weeks so it was very quick, something which the audience would be unaware of but was quite amazing. They were working with Martha Wainwright, the singer, as sets were built around them. It had the feel of a musical, and everyone got into the story, which is perhaps a bit shocking but real theatre. It was Will's idea and Thiago was with him all the way. Asked if Will went into the libretto, Thiago said he was a very intelligent man with an intelligent approach who likes to study and set things exactly so he did go into it into detail with all the dancers. In the strip club, with Marianela stripping, and Lauren learning her role, they were creating and learning and getting on well together. Without analysing or being too specific about the moves, Will gave them background but allowed them a certain freedom to create the piece.

David said that although Thiago had danced many roles in the rep, he hadn't been seen in a lot of other new work. He's doing new roles for his rep which is great and one of the reasons why he's here. Thiago is happy with the opportunities he's getting though would obviously like to do new work. He did cover one of Chris Wheeldon's but Chris states exactly who he wants in the cast. And whenever a creation is doing on, they are also doing other big ballets in which he's always involved.

On *Romeo*, Thiago said he danced Tybalt previously and although he'd premiered his Romeo in London this week, he had previously danced a version of it in Brazil. It's a fantastic role which everyone wants to do, and now he knows why. It's very demanding for the man, non-stop with lots of quick changes and things which can divert your concentration. It was a very busy time with *Dances at a Gathering* in rehearsal too, so the process of training was a bit difficult but you just have to get up and keep going. Although he'd been in the production as Tybalt, this time he was seeing it from a different angle so he had to feel it in a different way and it even seemed as if he'd never seen the sets before. It's a very strong piece and the dancing is extremely hard for a tall dancer with stops and turns and swivels plus it's very fast so for Thiago it's hard after his training based in the Russian and Cuban schools which are slower and grander. He has to work hard on the tricky, tiny things

but the pas de deux and building up the story is fantastic. He only wishes they had more shows to get it right.

He'd been talking to Federico (Bonelli) with whom he shares a dressing room who said that because it's so tough you really need two shows to start digesting it all. He didn't get a stage call which sometimes happens when there are so many casts and there's not enough space for everyone. Even Jonny Cope and Lesley Collier were amazed they were doing it without a stage call. But Thiago said it felt good and some particular moments were wonderful. Looking at Marianela he knew at certain points how much she was relishing it as she wanted to do it so much, so these moments were very special. Sparring with Gary (Avis) as Tybalt was fun. He loves playing that sort of role with him. He doesn't really know him personally but on stage he knows him well and it's great as you always get to sense what he's feeling which is very important. Before the performance he'd

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only had one rehearsal in the studio with Gary and was then on stage so he knows how good he is – Gary is very strong so at times he wondered if there might be a different end, but Thiago gave him a few hard knocks as well! He was pleased with the fight, he'd only done it three times, but now was doing it the opposite way round so there was the chance of a serious mistake! But the Company is very experienced with the likes of Elizabeth (MacGorian), Chris (Saunders) and Gary so everything just seems to work and that makes it easier.

Following this busy season he's looking forward to a long tour of China, Japan and Hong Kong. He's also taking a 'Thiago and Friends' to Brazil. He goes back to Brazil as a guest with his old company and Roberta often goes too when they have time. He did *Nutcracker* and before that *Onegina*. He has a good relationship with his home theatre which gave him the opportunity to go out and see the world, so he likes to give something back. The producers there wanted to put on different works and asked if he would put a show together last year. He was very busy and had no experience of mounting a show so decided to think about what he could do as he felt doubtful about doing it. But they kept asking and said they were proud of him and so he's now putting on a show in Rio, São Paulo and four other cities. It will be a gala programme of some new pieces including MacMillan and Ashton. He and Marianela had guested there with Russian State Ballet (*Corsaire pas de deux*)

and they really wanted her to go too. There'll also be Jason Reilly and Alicia Amatrian from Stuttgart, Ric (Cervera), Laura Morera and David Makhтели from the Royal, and his partner from the Bolshoi. They'll be doing a programme of diverts from the *Dream* and the *Tchaikovsky pas de deux*, and a pas de trois from *Corsaire* with him, Marianela and David. Ric and Laura would do a new piece by Liam Scarlett. In two cities there'll also be a new tango with live music. His home company is very excited about it and although it's tough to put together, all the dancers taking part are very good individuals so it's easier to put a gala together. The producers would have preferred two short ballets, but there's not enough time to prepare.

Thiago has done a lot of guesting, mostly with Marianela but he'll be doing this year's Cuban festival alone while Marianela is performing *Serenade* here, so they will find him a partner, probably from the Cuban company. It's very exciting as he's never been to Havana but had a lot of Cuban teachers and knows a lot of Cuban dancers from his time in Brazil. He'll do a full length *Swan Lake* and probably a gala but as he's involved in the triple bill here (*Voluntaries*) at the same time the gala may not be possible.

David asked Thiago to relate what happened on a special occasion after one of his and Marianela's performances of *Sleeping Beauty*. He said her mum was over from Argentina and he wanted to propose to Marianela when she was there which would make it special. Everything was right but they were working very hard and going out and about with her mum so it was difficult to find a good time to surprise her. They knew when each other were in a bad mood so it wasn't always the right time. But she was having a fantastic time in *Sleeping Beauty* and the shows were going well so it seemed the end of the show would be just right, fiction mirroring life. They did a curtain call and he'd put Ollie, his dresser, in the picture and left the box (with ring) with him. After that performance, Marianela was a bit upset about the speed of the music and he was trying to calm her down saying things will be different now. So he retrieved the box from Ollie and when she saw what was in it she said 'Yes!' David recalled Marianela walking round all the tables in the restaurant afterwards showing off her ring saying 'I'm engaged, I'm engaged!' In conclusion, David thanked Thiago for a very pleasurable and interesting evening and said we had all enjoyed following his career and Marianela's, and we hoped to enjoy watching them both for many years to come.

Report written by Liz Bouttell, corrected by Thiago Soares and David Bain ©The Ballet Association 2008.