

Philip Mosley

ARTISTIC ADMINISTRATOR & CHARACTER ARTIST, THE ROYAL BALLET

interviewed by Sylvia Tyler

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, 24 April 2009.

Philip was born in Barnsley. His father was a coal miner and Philip was writer Lee Hall's inspiration for *Billy Elliott*. When the Royal Ballet went to the States in 2008, this had been mentioned in the press. The audiences, who had loved the film, would go wild, shouting Philip's name at curtain calls, mobbing him for autographs at the stage door. Everyone wanted to meet him at receptions – it appeared he was more famous there than the Company's principals!

Philip last came to talk to the Association 20 years ago with David Drew, Peter Abegglen, Sara Gallie and one other, who may have been Fiona Brockway.

How has his career been since then?

Looking back, Philip felt he had been lucky, he'd done lots of nice things and latterly moved on to management, 'so the Company has been good to me.' It has had its ups and downs. Philip started in the Company at 19 and did lots of nice things when he was young, but was injured quite a bit, being quite accident prone. He had a lot of bone spurs which would put him out for three months, sometimes putting him to the back of the list. Roles included Nephew in *Nutcracker*, Puck in *The Dream* – he'd been thrown on at midday, with one and a half hours' rehearsal, no stage rehearsal, but it was one of the favourite things he ever did; he did Neopolitan, Pas de Six in *Swan Lake*, lots of other small roles and then went on to character roles: Widow Simone, in *Cinderella*, Sancho Panza and virtuoso cameos.

When Philip was a student at the School doing *Nutcracker*, Christopher Carr (who was from the same home town, Barnsley) took a shine to him. Philip had been sitting at the side of the stage just watching Act 1. Christopher Newton had called James Taylor up to the stage saying that Gary Grant couldn't do Trepak that afternoon. James said he was sorry he just couldn't do it, so Christopher Newton asked Philip, could he learn it? As an 18 year old student you love to learn roles so Philip asked when would he like him to learn it? "Now.!" "When for?" "This afternoon's performance.!" So during Act 1, Christopher Carr took him upstairs, taught him

the Trepak and he went on in Act 2. Philip thinks that being a quick learner was one of the reasons Christopher Carr took a shine to him from the beginning and one of the reasons he got into the Company.

Did Philip have an ambition to go on to character roles or did it just happen?

It just happened. He used to love doing them when he was young, even small character roles like the rustics in *The Dream*. He was second cast to Jonathan Burrows.

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He had never done character make-up and he sat next to him and asked what he should do. 'Just crunch your eyes up, make the wrinkles and follow them.' They didn't have make-up people as they do now. Donald MacLeary used to come up to him and say that Philip made him laugh all the time. He grew into those roles and found he just loved it. He wasn't the great virtuoso dancer that could do all the tricks, he wasn't a big spinner. But he probably did have one of the best jumps in the Company; he had one of the highest elevations and beats – he could out-batterie anyone.

He liked all of them, although the Widow is a big favourite, also Dr Coppélius which he did for the first time a couple of years ago. One of his real favourites, although it is not one of the biggest, is in *Manon*, one of the dirty old clients "probably the dirtiest one on there." They had recently done the film of *Manon* in which he was the other old man, in Act 1. Monica Mason had come up to him afterwards and said she had made the wrong choice. Philip had always done Act 1 with Tamara (Rojo) and Monica likes to keep people together. "I should have had you doing both roles, Act 2 isn't the same without you." Philip had thought that Monica

would tell him off for being over the top, but she said no, Philip was just fantastic in it. "I am quite naughty really, there in the bottom corner," but the girls including Lauren Cuthbertson love it and love doing it with him, it makes a change. Although he does it quite a lot he doesn't get bored as there's always something else. With Alastair (Marriott) they do a whole scene with their hair in the mirror which Deborah MacMillan loves. The only thing is that everyone watches them when they are supposed to be watching the other side – Leslie Collier says she never watches the other side, she always watches him. "We shouldn't take it away from everyone else really, but no-one's told me to stop it yet so I carry on."

Do you enjoy doing Widow Simone?

Philip loves it. It is a role he has had to grow into. He was more of a tap dancer when he was young. He wasn't a classical dancer before he went to White Lodge. He'd done ballet but never seen a ballet before he joined. The first ballet he saw was *Swan Lake*. David Dougill gave them history of ballet lessons and told the class they were going to see it. Philip said, "Excuse me, but what is *Swan Lake*?"! So when he came to do clog dance, to him it was one of the easiest things. "One of the nicest things ever," Philip said, "was the first time I ever did it." The orchestra had asked who was dancing the Widow because they'd never heard the clog dance so clearly. Philip had seen David Bintley and Michael Coleman do it. "David Bintley was one of the best." Ronald Emblen had been Philip's dance teacher at White Lodge and Philip has his clogs. He's kept them and uses them "and no-one else is ever having them because he taught me and when you get a good pair of clogs you don't want to lose them." Will Tuckett has huge feet and had to have a pair made specially for him. Philip doesn't think the new ones are as good as the old ones, "the sound is just not as good so I've kept on to those clogs and I am not going to let them go."

Asked about his approach to the role Philip said "It's a great part to do; I love Act 2 as well as Act 1. I try to be a mother, a proper mum, not just going for jokes. I think a lot of the expression I have taken, with Sisters [*Cinderella*] as well as the Widow, is from watching David Bintley when he was young. He came from the same part of the country as me and I saw him do character roles – I saw him do Fagin in a competition when I was about eight and he was about 14 or 15." Philip hopes he'll be doing Widow again when it comes back next season, wishing he could do it every night.

How do you do you find having all those daughters?

They are all different and Philip doesn't have a favourite – but Roberta (Marquez) "is just divine. She is just a sweetheart and I can't be nasty with her too long."

Coppélia

Philip hadn't done it and when it was coming up he first went and asked Jeanetta (Lawrence) if Monica would let

him do it. She said he wouldn't be the next in line so he then asked Monica if she would put him up for it. He was then petrified when she told him that he would be doing it as he had been doing all his other roles for a long time. Dr Coppélius being new to him, one of the worst things was remembering everything, the counts, what came next. He kept blanking. In his early days in the Company, Christopher Carr used to rely on him for the counting, he taught people, noticed when they were doing things wrong, he was always spot on with everything. He put the music onto his headphones and listened in the gym, just to go through it.

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Philip pointed out that when you are doing dancing you have got steps. When you are doing character you have to think what comes next naturally. Doing steps you put them together, with character it was doing it naturally without thinking what came next, keeping the same characterisation all the way through without forgetting what followed. The first time Monica saw Philip "she absolutely slaughtered me, said she hated it." Not as severely as that, but she said we needed a lot of work on it. "I thought I was doing it really well!" Philip was nervous because it was the first time the Company had seen him do something new for eight years. They were going to do a masterclass in the Linbury and Monica said that Philip needed to go away and think about it, so he did. "Monica said it is the walk that is just not right so on my morning walk with my Labrador I'd go along the street doing different walks, wondering if anyone had seen me doing a Hunchback of Notre Dame at 6.30 in the morning. I went back and did the Masterclass and at the end I said 'You haven't said anything,' and Monica just replied 'Now you've got the walk.'"

Philip explained how you need someone other than the notator teaching you the steps. "I thought I was doing it one way and no-one was telling me it did or didn't work. Monica has always been good at that. When I was about 27, I first did Sancho Panza and I was supposed to have this huge suit on and she helped. She's herself is good at character roles. For her I got Dr Coppélius right, in her eyes, and hopefully I'll do it again next time. It was a challenge and I was petrified at the beginning but actually I absolutely adored it. It was lovely because it was just you and her, just like in *Fille*. I enjoyed learning something new for the first time in a long time."

Don Q

Philip did Sancho Panza in both the Baryshnikov production and the Nureyev one with Ross Stretton. He was supposed to be first cast in Ross's version but because he was management he was put towards the back which he

was not happy about – Ross wasn't happy about having staff on stage. They did the performance, then they were going to film it. In the end, Ross chose Philip to do the film, so he was put back into first cast which was nice for him as he had been quite upset when he had thought he was going to do the television then he wasn't. But he ended up doing it.

Management – how did that come about? Did it just happen gradually or did you set out to go into it?

He was in his late 20s and Philip felt he had done everything he was going to do in the Company. He thought he should start thinking of doing something else. When Peter Brown was leaving Philip thought that he should apply for the company manager's job. He knew he wouldn't get it but he'd never been for an interview and was thinking ahead for when in a couple of years he would have to leave the Company. He'd gone through White Lodge, then Upper School then straight into the Company so he'd never even had to audition for anything. So he applied and was given an interview by Anthony Russell Roberts, Jeanetta and the lady from personnel. He was petrified. He hadn't told anyone, but on his way in Viviana saw him in his suit and asked where he was going, so he told her. Philip was Union rep at the time and there was an issue with the Union about filming which he knew about. He was asked how he would sort it out if he were company manager which was a bit cheeky.

The Opera House was closed then, and the Company was going to New York. Christopher Newton was a good friend and Philip had told him that Monica had said he should go into accountancy or something and he'd said I should think about training. When Philip went in for his end of season interview with Anthony Russell Roberts he'd said Philip had got a couple of years until retirement and they'd like him to think about assisting but Fig (Christopher Newton) had said that Philip might be thinking of going to college, so they'd give him one more year. All Philip could think was that he was being sacked but his partner who was with him pointed out that they were offering him another opportunity. He couldn't see it that way. It seemed to him that he was giving up dancing. So went to see Anthony Russell Roberts who said no, we'd like you to join management. So next season he started assisting Jeanetta.

What sort of work did you do in the beginning?

First it was helping Jeanetta out, then it was helping negotiate new contracts when the Company moved into the new House. They wanted to save money and Philip knew all the ins and outs. He revamped all the contracts for the Royal Ballet as he knew what was costing money. The Union wouldn't let him in the negotiations so Anthony would go in and Philip would be in the room next door. Anthony would come out and Philip would tell him what he should and shouldn't accept. The

dancers' new contract is probably the only one in the House that hasn't changed since it was done, unlike all the others. Philip has to accept that he has gone on to management side but he's still friends with the dancers. The dancers wouldn't have accepted the new deal if they hadn't liked it. The dancers know that he always takes care of them and tries to do the best for them. In the new contract, dancers do starter class which is important but not counted. The contract is for a 40 hour week, 33 hours dancing, 2 hours non-dancing (fittings) and 5 hours in class.

How did the job progress?

After Christopher Newton left, Philip took over the schedule for everyone. He started in Ross Stretton's first year and became his second-hand-man which was very good for Philip. Ross took Philip aside and used him for everything. He would tell him some things and not tell other people other things, which was hard. Jeanetta was his godsend, she was always supportive in what was a very tricky period for the Company. He would confide in Jeanetta because she supported him.

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Philip gradually learned how to do the schedule himself. It used to take two days but now he does it in about four hours. When he was a kid he used to do logic problems all the time and to him it is like a logic jigsaw. He started doing it to make the dancers' work fit within the overtime. It is complicated because unlike opera where the chorus all do everything together, someone from the corps de ballet can be doing a soloist part and a soloist doing a principal part while still doing all the corps work, keeping it under wraps and not going over their hours. When he first started, Monday and Tuesday used to be completely solid, Thursday, Friday, Saturday he used to think well... “Our schedule goes out on Friday at 12. The Royal Ballet is the only one of all the major companies that do this. At NYCB and ABT the rehearsal schedule only goes up the day before and they have to ring in; they only know what they are doing the next day; some companies, it is every two days. The Royal Ballet does the whole week's schedule in one go. I used to think I had Monday and Tuesday to try and fill Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. But the pianists started to put their foot down because their contract goes out on Friday and their schedule is not supposed to change.” Philip is called the Red Pen – all changes are done in red pen. When the Company first moved into the House, they never really used the Clore and the MacMillan stu-

dios, Christopher only ever used three studios. Now all five studios are fully working, so Philip is packing it in. "Sometimes I don't know myself how I do it because I also have to work out all the overtime. When I go back and look at the schedule I wonder how have I done that?" Christopher used to write it all out. Philip has it all on the computer screen, so he can't sometimes see the other studios but he has where it all is in his brain, he knows in his head where everyone is. Then he types it all in and adds the last couple of rehearsals when he knows where the spaces are. He does the corps de ballet first as they are the hardest. The principals can be done at any time, by seniority and who's on next. The corps de ballet has to be done within contract whereas principals don't work in contract, they don't get overtime. Fig used to do the principals first.

Philip does double book, with so many dancers doing so many parts. "They tend to tell you at 12 on the day when you can't really change them. Then you have to ask another dancer to change and you have to pay them. The kids are very good and not many ever say no. They know I try to do my best for them and they see me run round after them all the time." If one of the rehearsal directors wants to change something during the week it has to be done the day before by 12 or it is automatic overtime. There can be changes in an emergency, if someone goes off before a show. With 24 hours notice of a show, Philip can change a whole day if he has to.

How did he learn to work on a computer?

When Philip went for the interview for company manager's job he had never touched a computer. The personnel lady afterwards told him that he had done well but he didn't know how to use a computer so he was sent on courses while he was still dancing. "Jeanetta thinks I am a whizz kid but I am certainly not. I use Excel, I don't use Word at all." Philip showed a typical rehearsal sheet.

So you know things ahead of us, what about next season?

Philip described the 2009-10 schedule and explained that, because of financial climate, *Nutcracker* is being brought back again which it wasn't supposed to be. *Fille* is being done because next year is the 50th anniversary of its first performance. There are new ballets from Jonathan Watkins (with a commissioned score), Liam Scarlett and Wayne MacGregor. There's a MacMillan triple bill of *Solitaire*, *Judas Tree* and *Elite Syncopations* which the Company hasn't done since 1992. The Company would tour (hopefully) to Barcelona, Japan and China. It would be a very packed schedule.

This year's been one of the worst from that point of view because of *Acis* and *Dido*. It meant an extra bill had to be fitted in and Wayne (MacGregor) had begged Philip to use Royal dancers and to make it work for him. Philip said that it would have to be rehearsed throughout the season but it didn't work out like that. January and February "had been quite heavy for the kids." "Wayne

is one of the most remarkable people to work with. He never gets really upset, he's so calm. So he can understand when I say no, you can't have the dancers. It all worked out in the end."

How do you fit in dancing with your other work?

Most of the parts Philip has done for years "so I can say to Christopher Carr would you mind if I don't come today? Or I run in, do a part then I run back out to the office, then run back in again. Most parts I know back to front so I don't have to be in the studio constantly. On Thursdays I just say I can't come today as I have to do the schedule (which gets done on a Thursday as it has to be out on Friday)." Philip works with Jeanetta planning the schedule for the following years and they have meetings every two weeks. "Sometimes I can go to rehearsals but it depends what meetings I have. Most parts I can do in my sleep now."

“ Monica has asked me if I might do *Catalabutte*. I've watched *Beauty* so many times now and I like *Beauty*, but I'm not sure.

So you are not taking on new parts?

"Well... not at the moment. Although Monica has asked me if I might do *Catalabutte*. I've watched *Beauty* so many times now and I like *Beauty*, but I'm not sure. I don't know if I am going to do it. It's a nice role but I'll wait and see."

Do you get involved with casting too?

Monica does casting, but someone like Christopher Carr who is charge of the ballet will do things and Christopher Saunders will too. Philip will see that something is not going to work. "I'll say you can't have all these people in all three ballets, it's impossible."

Do they put onus on you to try and make it work?

Sometimes Philip will say to Monica "If you want new works in the Linbury it has to be completely different casts. Everyone is fighting for the same limited time. But if Mon says that's what she wants then I have to make it work. I have been quite lucky, I've never really had any major problems yet in getting something done in time."

Are people – choreographers – sometimes arranging their own ballet casting unaware that a dancer is committed elsewhere?

Not really as Monica in charge and will know who is in what. Before the casting goes out Philip might say it won't work, can you change this, but if it has to be then the onus on him to make it work. Next year will be harder as up until now he has been able to rehearse people into their lunch breaks. From next season, the Union has said he can't which is going to make it worse for him. "Dancers have got to have their lunch breaks

which they should do but with the amount of work we have been doing, the young ones have been doing quite a lot and I've had to work them through their lunch break which is not great for them. They get paid overtime for it but from next year I'm not allowed to do it any more. Something has to give, and we'll just see how it goes."

Are you going to move on to different work?

Philip said he is happy where he is. There is a new company manager and he had thought about going for that job as he gets on very well with the Company and he's good with the Development people – and it would be a change. "But I would have to give up dancing, stop the character roles, and I don't want to do that. I have found my niche within the Company. Years ago when I took the job on, Christopher Carr who had done it himself for a couple of years said do you know what you are doing? You need to think about it because a couple of years down the line you might wish you were doing something else. But I don't. I absolutely love it. When I give up is when I leave and I don't think I'll change my job. I love what I am doing. I've been lucky. We are very lucky in the Royal Ballet, you get paid for something you did as a hobby to begin with. It's not a hobby any more but I still love doing it."

How does scheduling on tour work?

The schedule is set out. "On tour we can work eight or nine days, at home we can work seven days if you work on Sunday and then next day. On tours we can do eight days and then have a day off. There has to be a day off each week. It's easier to schedule as most of the ballets we've already done before we go. There's more time to play with. Often there are fewer studios and Philip has to reduce studio rehearsals for principals, but altogether it is much easier.

Do you like touring?

"I love it! I've been to see the world. When I was a young kid, coming from where I grew up, I don't think I ever dreamed of seeing so many places. My brothers and sisters can't believe where I've been. We go for practically a month every year now. I still enjoy it."

Favourite places?

Philip used to hate Japan. "When I first went, I really didn't like Tokyo. Now it's one of my favourite cities in the world. When I was young, I didn't like the food, but that's changed now. It's the most obscure city, with the most bizarre people I've met in my whole life. Ladies in kimonos with harajuku girls. Bizarre! It's so fast, faster than here. I love Tokyo, and New York and Sydney too."

Do you have to organize costume fittings?

It's part of the job. There are two different production departments, one for new productions and one for those in the repertoire. All productions have to be fitted and refitted and fittings have to be scheduled within the contract. The time comes out of the non-dancing hours.

Philip also has to plan all stage calls for three years in advance to make them work. The opera gets first choice as their singers are booked so far in advance. So their schedule gets done first and ballet is done second. "I have to make sure that we get enough time on stage so I negotiate with the opera to have enough stage time to get things done. Dancers rehearse far more now than they have ever done. I think sometimes people get over-rehearsed, which I am going to have to cut down with the lunch break infringement."

Do you think dancers become more self-conscious if they over-rehearse?

Some people just love to rehearse. Tamara Rojo will rehearse all day. "She never gets tired and if I don't give her enough time... I get three girls on to me – Benjamin, Rojo and Cojocarú, all the same. I have an expression 'I have just been Benj'd/Rojod/Coj'd!' They all set what they want for their week. Tamara leaves a phone message every Thursday night with exactly what she wants. I fight my corner sometimes but I have to give it, when I can. They set out what they want, they ask 'Why am I rehearsing in front of her...?' I have all of that to deal with."

“Some people just love to rehearse. Tamara Rojo will rehearse all day. ‘She never gets tired and if I don’t give her enough time...’

Suppose there's no studio space available?

Philip explained that they have actually run out of studio space. There are the studios in the School across the road but they have Australian lino down which is different, "it's like an ice-rink." They are about to change one of the studios to the same lino as in Company studios so that when it is free it can be used. At the moment the School studios can't be used because when the girls are on pointe they are scared. The School is used to it. "We have a different lino, the same as on stage. Dancers are used to it and the grip."

Does it work the other way?

No, the School use the Company's and they don't seem to mind.

Could you let us know the cast for Sensorium?

It's still a secret, Philip doesn't think Alastair Marriot has made up his mind. "If he didn't tell you at the Insight evening I had better not. There are two casts and I don't think he has decided."

Is there a Company Union rep like you were?

Ernst Meisner and Richard Ramsay are the Union reps. David Pickering, Philip's new assistant, now poached into management, was Union rep before them. Now he's also doing education work and he is great.

How do you fit in with the opera company and stage calls?
They are currently planning 2011/12. Peter Katona sets out stage time for the opera. Because their stars and operas have to be booked so far in advance they set out their requirements to begin with. The ballet has blocks of stage time which Monica then allocates. If there isn't enough they have to fight back, for instance if there's a new production which needs more time.

Do all principals get stage time?

"No. Lauren Cuthbertson is going on in *Giselle* never having done Act 1 on stage before. She's just done a full call today. She got on stage before the performance last night. But she has been in the ballet before as a peasant so she knows where things are and she has seen people going on and off. If someone is completely brand new in a major production, they would normally get a stage call."

What if they have only heard the music on the studio piano, aren't the acoustics completely different on stage?

"We are used to that, being on stage. It's nice to have the stage call with the orchestra, but it doesn't bother people."

Do you get a lot of griping when you produce the schedule, and does it just wash off you?

"I used to go hide in the physio department sometimes! I know some people will be upset and I have a few fights with Alina, Tamara and Leanne. It's par for the course. They are just trying to make me give them what they want. I have to stand my ground and I hate the atmosphere afterwards. Two hours later we'll be hugging. I've never fallen out with any of the principals."

Is overtime costed into estimates?

Yes, some months are down, some up so it balances off. There was trouble in November because the overtime bill was enormous and Kevin came to talk about it. With so many performances over Christmas there weren't any rehearsals for two weeks. Come January they had to go into overtime to get through the programme, including the triple bill which was huge. Philip has had to cut back now, but then people needed to be rehearsed.

When a principal has great ambition to do particular role and is not offered it, do they get a chance to have an explanation?

Monica talks to all the principals individually about

what they are doing in the following season, before it comes out. She explains she is giving them this but not that and why. Work load and roles have to be spread round and it is Monica's choice. If someone wants to ask for a role they will do, but the decision is Monica's.

How did a girl from the Maryinsky come to be selected to dance in Swan Lake?

With all the injuries, someone was needed. Why Monica rang the Kirov Philip didn't know, probably it was a question of who was available. Olga Evreinoff was working with the Company; she works with all the major companies so would have been able to advise on where the right sort of dancer might be. Monica rang three companies to see who was available to take those shows on.

Do you have to call on additional dancers for the corps because there often look like more corps than there are names in the programme?

If we are down on numbers we use the students from the School, we don't hire dancers.

Do you have counterparts or an opposite number in other companies with whom you exchange views?

Philip has met people from New York City Ballet and ABT 2 and when they were in London helped them with studios at the House because they were at Pineapple; also when Stuttgart were here he gave them studios when they were available. He has exchanged views and when the Company went to Australia he met the guy there. "But their lives are so much easier, they only have to do one day at a time." Now Bruce Samson is going to San Francisco Ballet he's been emailing asking Philip asking when does this come out when does that? They only do two days at a time. When Nigel Gurling went back to Australia, they used to do one day and now they do two days. "We are the only ones that do a full schedule a week in advance, except maybe ENB. Now other companies are pressurising their management to do more in advance. At NYCB and ABT where they do it day by day, their dancers don't know when they are free or not."

Report written by Rachel Holland, corrected by Philip Mosley and Sylvia Tyler ©The Ballet Association 2009.