

# Behind the scenes

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## Spreading the word on dance



Wellington Friend Judith Doyle talked to Stacey White who took up the job as Education Manager of the Royal New Zealand Ballet in September.

The first couple of months in her new job was by way of a baptism by fire for Australian Stacey White. Not long after her arrival, the company set off around the country with *Giselle*, playing in Invercargill, Dunedin, Christchurch, Palmerston North, Napier, Auckland and Hamilton. Just ahead of the company went Stacey.

After a few short weeks getting used to a new job in a new company, she was on the road introducing herself to dance and theatre people whom she didn't then know and running community events in each of the seven venues. All the while she was taking a speedy course in New Zealand geography — it was her first time in this country.

Not that all these simultaneous demands fazed this friendly, vivacious, lively young woman from Port Macquarie, north of Sydney. With an easy approachable manner, she's a multi-tasker par excellence who has always revelled in having lots going on in her life. And she certainly will have plenty to get her teeth into here. Her predecessor, Louise Fielder, put a lot of work into school visits which are an important part of the job. Stacey plans to initiate more where they don't exist at the moment, while developing and enlarging those that do. Here, her several years' experience teaching dance at schools in Queensland, will be invaluable.

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## Introducing our new sponsored dancers; Abigail Boyle and Qi Huan

Commencing in January 2007, the Friends of the Ballet are delighted to be partnering two Royal New Zealand ballet dancers, Abigail Boyle and Qi Huan (pictured below).



Auckland born Abigail graduated from the International Ballet Academy in Christchurch, and also trained at the New Zealand School of Dance. In 2001 she was the recipient of the Sir John Logan Campbell Award and received the Royal Academy of Dance Scholarship in 2000.

Qi Huan joined the Royal New Zealand Ballet from China in 2003. Most recently he danced the role of Albrecht in *Giselle*. Before coming to New Zealand he held a teaching position at the Beijing Academy where he worked alongside former RNZB principal Ou Lu. While a student at the Beijing Dance Academy in 2000, Qi Huan reached the finals of the New York International Ballet Competition.

### Pointes to note

- In the latest Dance Australia Lucy Balfour and Kate Venables were nominated by The Courier Mail (Brisbane) and Dance Australia, respectively, as Most Outstanding Dancer.
- The costume and set designed by Tracey Grant for *The Wedding* have been selected for the New Zealand exhibition at the 11<sup>th</sup> Prague Quadrennial International Exhibition of Scenography and Theatre Architecture in the Czech Republic next June.

She also has great plans for the general community. This involves not only support for the forums and masterclasses which already take place but also providing more opportunities for people to watch company class, tour the theatre, and meet the dancers.

When we talked in January she had just completed the new education section on the RNZB website ([www.nzballet.org.nz](http://www.nzballet.org.nz)) and pressing the new 'education' button reveals a bevy of ideas.

One is a *Day in the Life* where school students and members of the public can spend the morning in the theatre seeing the everyday workings of the company — dancers working in class perhaps or with choreographers in rehearsal; watching wardrobe staff making costumes or preparing them for a performance...

Other ideas are for members of the public to see a warm-up class before going to a performance or attend a question-and-answer session geared to the current ballet.

"When I was going to ballet as I was growing up, I always used to go on the weekend that had the most education programmes. I wanted to watch company class, go backstage, meet the dancers, go to the talk to speak to the artistic director and ask who had designed the costumes and why."

Stacey started dancing at seven years old in her home town of Port Macquarie. She had an early success when she was one of only five dance students in the school to get top marks for her first ballet exam. When her teacher told her that this was a very considerable achievement, she decided that ballet was going to be her career. Soon her class at ballet school started a winning streak at competitions. The group was called the Glitz Kids and their success continued right on until Stacey was 14. "I just loved performing," she said.

But a bombshell was awaiting her. She auditioned for several full-time ballet schools but didn't get in. This was like a knock over the head for her. But with typical resilience she bounced back and realised that choreography and dance education were both great passions for her too — she'd been doing both at ballet school — and that either could be a rewarding career. So after she left school, she joined Dance Encore Productions in Sydney. They organise commercial shows incorporating dance. She went to Japan where she danced in a magic show — she was both dancer and magician's assistant!

Back home again, her parents didn't want her to continue dancing until she had something academic to fall back on. So a compromise was reached. She went to the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane and took a four-year course in dance and in education, gaining a Bachelor of Creative Industries and a Bachelor of Education.

During this time at university, she also started her own company doing entertainment management, mainly centred on the Gold Coast. Her company provided dancers, acrobats, musicians, jugglers and impersonators for corporate events, opening shows, galas and the like.

On the last day of university, she was offered a job teaching dance at Pimlico State High School, the biggest performing-arts high school in the region with a theatre on site, a studio with a fully-sprung floor and a big dance programme. She loved her two years there "teaching is in my blood; it's second nature to me."

Alongside running her business, she started a youth dance company for young people in the area who hadn't had dance opportunities in their lives. After a while she felt that some time out, and a trip overseas that she'd long promised herself, were overdue. She resigned her teaching job, did a lot of organising ahead in her events business so that it would tick along in her absence, and took off.

Dance filled her horizons (of course) during her 2006 trip overseas. She saw almost all the shows on Broadway, New York, and many at Las Vegas; then flew to Europe and took in as many there as she could manage! The whirlwind trip fulfilled its purpose and she came home brimming with ideas and plans, totally inspired, but, though her business was ticking over all right, she needed a job.

This was when fate stepped in. Back in Townsville and teaching casually at her old school, she happened to see the advertisement for education manager at our ballet company in a dance magazine email. Applications closed next day. "I was moving house that day. I finished work at 3pm and raced out the door with this print-out in my hand. I went to my storage shed and moved everything I owned to my new house where I sat down at my laptop with removal boxes up to my ears to type my application which I emailed through to the company."

After unpacking her boxes over the next two days, she then had a call from Gary Harris, artistic director of the Royal New Zealand Ballet, who was then in Brisbane. "I think you should come here to talk," he said.

Townsville is a two-hour flight from Brisbane. After her overseas trip she was completely broke. "I checked on-line and found I had enough Frequent Flyer points to get to Brisbane and back. Just." So to Brisbane she went; talked to Gary Harris; liked what she heard; returned to Townsville and continued unpacking.

One week later, she had just unpacked the last box when Gary rang to say, "You're moving to New Zealand!" So she picked up that last box and re-packed it — plus all the others. Two weeks later she was in Wellington, starting her new job.

## Wellington Friends

### TOWER Tutus on Tour

The TOWER Tutus on Tour season started in Wellington on 22 February to extremely good reviews. This season is another very exciting programme of classical and contemporary dance!

"Thank you" to all of you who have bought tickets to the Friends performance at Expressions in Upper Hutt on Thursday 5 April – it is a virtual sellout! We look forward to seeing you there.

We will be holding an **Easter Basket raffle on the night** (and drawing the raffle after the performance) – Please bring a **gold coin!**

## Swan Lake Events

### Coffee & Conversation

Friday 1 June – First Interval

For just \$5.00 you can have a cup of tea/coffee/juice and a wee nibble along with some conversation with friends.

Join us in the Denis Adam Suite on the ground floor.

See booking form included

### Behind the Scenes Forum

Saturday 19 May

at The Royal NZ Ballet (Green Room)

Meet at the Westpac St.James lift

10:30 – 11:30 Morning Tea

11:30 – 12:30 Swan Lake Forum

Any problems contact Pete on 0274-849-161

Please bring a **GOLD coin for the Raffle**

### Technical Full Dress Rehearsal

Thursday 24 May – 7pm for 7:30 start

See booking form included

## Karori Wildlife Sanctuary - BBQ

The visit to the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary with BBQ lunch to start was a great success.

Around 50 Friends gathered to have lunch and then explore the fabulous environs of the Sanctuary.



Some of the kids having a great time during lunch.



After lunch relaxation before the walking lunch off began!

As you can see, we had very good weather – sunny and hot Hot HOT!

But walking through the tracks in the Sanctuary was a very pleasant experience. There were tuataras to see (if you looked very carefully) and the wetas in the old gold mine! Fascinating but very CREEPY!!!

All in all it was a fantastic day out with Friends!

# The Meridian Energy Season of Swan Lake



**Yu Takayama, company artist.**  
**Photo: Ross Brown**

Nothing compares with Swan Lake – arguably the most loved of all classical ballets.

From its first incarnation in 1877 at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow to the many productions staged around the world today, this timeless story of a young man's love continues to capture audiences and inspire new generations of dancers and dance lovers.

Spectacular ensembles and virtuosic solos are the signature of this grand ballet set to Pyotr Tchaikovsky's magnificent score. Swan Lake is a showcase for the art of ballet and for any company that presents it.

For this season, the Royal New Zealand Ballet has several guest artists. They are: Lisa-Maree Cullum and her partner Roman Lazik (from the Bavarian State Ballet), Gaylene Cummerfield and Matthew Lawrence (from the Australian Ballet). Lisa-Marie, Gaylene and Matthew are Kiwi's!

After its very first opening night, the music was considered 'undanceable'. More than a hundred years on, it is now the most recognised of all ballet music.

The version of the ballet most audiences are familiar with was staged in 1895. It featured choreography by the legendary Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, and commemorated the death of Tchaikovsky two years earlier.

New Zealand's most prolific choreographer, Russell Kerr, joins Artistic Director Gary Harris to restage this enduring masterpiece that stands alone as ballet's most intimate classical experience.

Choreography: Marius Petipa/Lev Ivanov  
Restaging: Russell Kerr/Gary Harris  
Music: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
Design: Kristian Fredrikson

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