



Behind the scenes

Seasons Greetings

I hope you have all had a busy and productive year and are looking forward to a well-deserved Christmas break.

We all have Christmas traditions, and one of mine is to have an 'open night' on Christmas Eve. Friends pop in on their way to or from last minute shopping, church services or gift delivery rounds. The big drawcard is my homemade eggnog that a dear friend in Sydney shared with me years ago, and which I will now share with all of you. (For large numbers I increase the recipe by half again, or just double it!).

Eggnog

6 eggs, 1 cup caster sugar, pinch salt, 1 tsp vanilla essence, 2 cups Carnation evaporated milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water, 2 cups cream, 2 cups brandy, ground nutmeg.

Beat eggs til light in colour. Gradually beat in sugar and salt. Stir in remaining ingredients except nutmeg. Cover and 'ripen' several hours in the fridge. Serve in a punch bowl, sprinkled with nutmeg.

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year.

Debbie Tangen
National President



**National President Debbie Tangen with Friends' partnered dancers
Abigail Boyle and Qi Huan**



Books Feature: Biographies of Dancers ... specifically...

Harald Lander His Life and Ballets

by Erik Aschengreen translated from the Danish by Patricia N McAndrew

reviewed by Jennifer Shennan

Dance Books UK. 2009

All biographies of dancers are of interest, but the best of them set individual lives in a wider context of world culture. It's a masterful pen that can trace how the ephemeral art of dance is a defining measure of its time, and thus contributes to social history. Audiences at ballet performances and readers of dance biographies alike need bi-focal lenses – what you see is what you get, but thinking about what it all means takes longer and lasts longer.

Autobiographies are a special case, and many prefer to read what a subject actually chooses to tell about his or her own life, even if there cannot, by definition, be the wider view that a biographer scopes. Perhaps most fascinating is when both autobiography and biography (sometimes more than one) of the same subject can be compared. Obvious example is the litany of biographies on **Rudolf Nureyev** (most authoritatively, that by **Diane Solway**, and perhaps least attractive that by **Rudi van Dantzig**). Biographies on **Margot Fonteyn** by **Meredith Daneman**, **Frederick Ashton** by **Julie Kavanagh**, **Jerome Robbins** by **Deborah Jowitt**, **Mark Morris** and **Mikhail Baryshnikov** by **Joan Acocella**, **Antony Tudor** by **Muriel Topaz**, **Kenneth MacMillan** by **Jann Parry**, **Robert Helpmann** by **Anna Bemrose**, and **Marie Rambert** by **Brigitte Kelly** are all eminently worthwhile reads.

Danish ballet is a special heritage that for some time was one of the best-kept secrets in European theatre arts. Since mid 20th century that began to change, and several recent biographies of its major personalities supply revealing background to that shift. Outstanding amongst these is the fine biography on **Henning Kronstam** by **Alexandra Tomalonis**, including a poignant account of how the young dancer would stand in the wings of the theatre in Copenhagen watching in awe as **Poul Gnatt** played James in *La Sylphide*, studying the sublime and poetic heights reached in that role in which Gnatt earned such fame.

Alexander Meinertz has written the biography of **Vera Volkova** (the celebrated Russian émigré teacher who taught in London, and also at Royal Danish Ballet for many years). It is an extraordinary analysis of the somewhat enigmatic life, brilliantly backgrounded with analysis of the Russian, English and Danish schools and styles of ballet. It is a matter of some frustration to know that Meinertz has recently produced, in Danish, a biography (the second) of **Erik Bruhn**, the phenomenal world dance achiever who was also a somewhat younger colleague and close friend of Poul Gnatt. I am hoping that its English translation will appear sooner than it will take me to learn Danish to read the original. One way or another it will be a must-read.

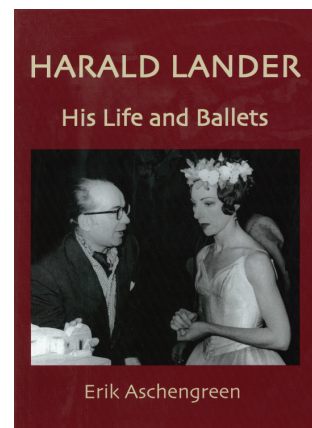
But meantime we can be grateful for the long awaited English translation of **Erik Aschengreen's** biography of **Harald Lander** who was artistic director at the Royal Danish Ballet during Poul Gnatt's years as a soloist there. Both men were extroverts and high achievers, complex personalities with great, although very different, dance talents. There is a major overlap in the politics and aesthetics of their careers and Aschengreen is probably the only ballet historian with the patience to trace all the intricacies of the subject, including the loyalties of Lander's wives (five in all) and the many colleagues who believed in his vision, as well as the number who didn't. It makes for heavy, sad, impressive, essential reading.

The biography, published in English by Dance Books UK, is beautifully translated from Danish by **Patricia McAndrew** (who also translated the huge tome of Bournonville's own memoirs, *My Theatre Life*, and a major accomplishment in ballet history that has proved to be.) It is a particularly handsome hardback volume with 70 black and white illustrations, and 370 pages of text that include appendices of Lander's performances and choreographies, and a bibliography and index ... in other words, extremely high standards of publication.

Lander's performing talents are evocatively described (he had particular strengths in character, especially Spanish, dance - and one cannot help but be reminded of Shannon Dawson's style and talent in these respects.) Lander was a prolific choreographer and is most celebrated for *Etudes* which was later staged on England's Festival Ballet, where the cast included – **Russell Kerr, June Greenhalgh, Anne Rowse, Ken Sudell, and Donald McAlpine**.

Russell recalls how helpful Lander was to him personally, how enthusiastically he built momentum in the rehearsal process, and how he conveyed excitement for a performance. Anne Rowse admired Lander's eminently practical approach to making the very best of everyone's talents, and how he achieved the near miracle of ensuring that Festival Ballet conquered the challenges in *Etudes*.

All these New Zealand dancers were in the historic performance of *Etudes* performed by Festival Ballet at Tivoli Theatre in Copenhagen when Lander, with his wife Toni in the lead role, returned after years of exile. They were greeted with eruptions of applause. The Prime Minister of Denmark welcomed Lander back, apologising for the way in which he had earlier been treated, saying "Denmark is ashamed." It is in some ways shocking to learn of the extent of management and governance complexities that at least some ballet companies are heir to, but that in turn only emphasizes the achievements of productions actually making it to the stage. Want to know more? Read the book.



From a Young Friend of the Ballet:

To the Royal New Zealand Ballet.

Hi my name is Maddisya Chloe Dahm and I am a friend of the Royal New Zealand Ballet. I have just finished practising my ballet and I decided to write a letter to you. I would just like to thank you for letting me become a member. I also enjoy getting mail from you and opening it because I don't get any mail. I have got all of my postcards that you give me in a secret place. I have got a lot of medals and a few trophies. A few weeks ago I had to do some homework the homework I had to do was a project on a thing starting with A and I chose Arabesques. When I have got some spare time I look at the pictures of ballerinas. I enjoy dancing.

From Maddisya Dahm. Here is a picture of me,



From our dancers:

2009 has been a big year for our partnered dancers with, of course some lows as well as highs! For both of them TOWER Tutus on Tour was an absolute highlight for many reasons – they loved the varied programme and they were both dancing a variety of challenging roles. They both toured with the South Island group and to our, and their delight, were often partnered with each other.

We also saw lots of Abi as the dancer featured on the poster for TOWER Tutus on Tour. For Qi, the tour to China in June was a wonderful opportunity to visit his family and to dance the role of Romeo in *Romeo & Juliet*.



The bad news for them both was that Qi was injured during Abigail Boyle and Qi Huan in *Holberg Suite* rehearsals for The Meridian Season of *La Sylphide* in September which meant he was not able to dance at all during that season, nor was he able to partner Abi in *Dances from Napoli* as was originally cast.

We have enclosed a brochure for a fabulous cruise from Shanghai to Hong Kong with Guest Lecturer, the acclaimed dancer and author of *Mao's Last Dancer*, Li Cunxin. For every Friend of the Ballet who books for this exciting cruise, we will receive a contribution from Renaissance Tours – if you decide to take this wonderful opportunity don't forget to say you heard about it from the Friends of the Royal New Zealand Ballet! The movie *Mao's Last Dancer* will be opening in cinemas in February.

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2010 – A YEAR OF IRRESISTIBLE CHARM



The TOWER Season of *From Here to There*
Song in the Dark

Choreographer: Andrew Simmons

Poulenc Variations

Choreographer: Christopher Hampson

A Million Kisses to my Skin

Choreographer: David Dawson

Dunedin: 25 February **Invercargill:** 28 February

Christchurch: 4-6 March **Hastings:** 9-10 March

Hamilton: 13 & 14 March **Auckland:** 17-20 March

Wellington: 24- 27 March

The Meridian Season of *Carmen*

Choreographer: Didy Veldman

Music: Georges Bizet

An electrifying contemporary ballet, set in modern day Rio de Janeiro, this stylish sensuous production has been hailed as “brilliant dance theatre” and “a raunchy, fast-paced production not to be missed”.

Wellington: 5 & 6 June & 9-12 June

Invercargill: 17-19 June

Christchurch: 23-26 June

Palmerston North: 29 & 30 June

Napier: 3 & 4 July **Auckland:** 7-10 July



The Nutcracker

Choreographer: Gary Harris

Music: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Design: Kristian Fredrikson

Just what the doctor ordered –
a Christmas classic with a twist!

Wellington: 29-31 October & 3-6 November

Invercargill: 11-13 November

Christchurch: 17-20 November

Palmerston North: 23 & 24 November

Napier: 27 & 28 November

Auckland: 1-5 December



Photos: Ross Brown