

# Behind the Scenes

Wellington Branch Newsletter

April 2011

## President's pointe



FRIENDS of the  
ROYAL NEW ZEALAND BALLET



Alison Underhill Photo: Ingrid Witkowski

## Dear Friends

Welcome to 2011, and what a wonderful way to start off our dance year, by supporting our very own Royal New Zealand Ballet, with "Friends" members filling the stalls area of the Wellington Opera House on Saturday 26th February for *Tower Tutus on Tour*.

An exciting night where dancers pushed the classical boundaries. *Verdi Variations* choreographed by Greg Horsman, was absolutely brilliant.

*Pinocchio* is Toby Behan's first choreographed piece for the RNZB. A much loved children's story in two acts. A small excited child, dressed in a tutu seated next to me saying, "Look at the Blue Fairy, I want to be like her."

What more can one say than a child's fairytale came true on stage that evening.

Ingrid Witkowski, President

## Wellington Branch history A-Z

### E – Events (continued) – 1997

**Please note, I have only listed dance seasons and events where Wellington Branch was involved.**

## Alison Underhill QSM, Wardrobe Department of the RNZB

Friends congratulated Alison Underhill, head of the RNZB wardrobe department, who was awarded a QSM in the New Year's Honours List. Alison started with the RNZB in 1969, in the days when designers drew intricate designs and suitable material was very hard to obtain in New Zealand. Fabrics would come from overseas at a huge cost and money was often not available. Alison would ask shop owners or people in New Zealand to donate money, or become sponsors of fabric and also, many a time, an SOS would go out to "Friends": "Do you have any ribbon, buttons, lace, fabric (doesn't matter what

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**Our website is [wn-friends.org](http://wn-friends.org)  
or ... [balletfriends.org](http://balletfriends.org)**

colour or type, that could be used by the ballet company?" All these items were stored in the work room, for use at a later date.

Alison excelled not only in the art of pattern drafting and cutting (one of her specialities), but also in the art of dying material and lace. Many will remember the stove, with its large, witch-style pots full of bubbling colours! The washing machine was in action, more often than not, filled with dyed fabric. Other times, designs were hand-painted onto the material.

The SOS for sewing ladies would go out well before a ballet season started. They were referred to as The Tutu Brigade, because most of the time, they were up to their eyeballs in tulle! Betty Adams is someone who will tell you what a magnificent, talented woman Alison was. During her time, you would learn how to make a tutu and to bead and sequin costumes correctly. The latter was important so as not to hurt the male dancers' hands, during Pas de Deux work, and to prevent the dancers themselves from being scratched. Many people offered their services to the work room, not only to help out, but also to learn from a craftswoman.

Alison started under the guidance of Nancy Seaton and retired from the ballet company in 2000, after 30 years of service.

### **La Fille Mal Gardee - An Afternoon with Alexander Grant OBE**

This event took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> February at the National Library Auditorium, in Molesworth Street. It was a brilliant day, with Alexander Grant's old friends, family, and Friends of the RNZB from all over New Zealand, all in attendance. Compered by Liz Gunn, it was a



Alexander Grant talks to a young performer. Photo: Ingrid Witkowski

truly memorable afternoon. The event was based around Grant's visit to NZ to stage *La Fille Mal Gardee*.



Enthralled audience! Photo: Ingrid Witkowski

Alison Underhill spoke about the RNZB Wardrobe Department and then Liz Gunn presented a "This is Your Life" tribute to Alexander Grant, with colleagues from past years participating.

Special thanks was extended to the British Council for the support they had given to the Wellington Branch Friends Committee for this very special occasion.

Afternoon tea was served and a collection of Grant's dance photographs, on loan from Covent Garden, were displayed for all to view. Friends were very eager to go to future rehearsals and seminars, after attending this event.

### **Different Shoes**

The Governor General, The Right Hon Sir Michael Hardie Boys GNZM, GCMG, GCVO, DBE, QSO and the then Patron of Friends of the RNZB, along with his wife, Lady Hardie Boys, welcomed Friends to Government house, Wellington, for a special evening entitled *Different Shoes*.



Photo: Ingrid Witkowski

A wonderful evening of ethnic dance took place in the Ballroom. 36 dancers took part, show-casing a variety of dance styles - Samoan, Polish, Chinese, Highland Fling, Irish Jig, Indian, Spanish, Greek, Filipino and Maori (a group from Wellington East Girls College.) Everyone enjoyed the streams of colour and styles.



Photo: Ingrid Witkowski



The evening finished off with everyone being piped into the dining room for supper. There was also the opportunity for people to wander through Their Excellencies' many drawing rooms and admire the artworks.

**Alice - A Ballet is Born**

This event was hosted for Wellington Friends by His Excellency, the British High Commissioner, Robert Alston and Mrs Alston, at their beautiful residence, Homewood, in Karori.

The Mad Hatter (Kim Broad), was dancing in the entrance hall when Mr Alston arrived and, as if on cue,



The Mad Hatter welcomes His Excellency Robert Alston. Photo: Ingrid. Witkowski

made an impromptu dash to be the doorman and escort Mr Alston into the house, much to everyone's amusement!.



Pieter Symonds and Gennadi Koutchin as cards in *The Pack of Cards* Photo: Ingrid Witkowski

Friends spent a wonderful day there, with talks about the ballet, *Alice*, by Eric Languet (choreographer), Janet Roddick (composer), Hilary Niederer (costume designer) and Andrew Thomas (set designer.)

Costumes and sets were displayed throughout the rimu-panelled hall and elegant drawing rooms. The gold and royal blue lounge was filled with Alice memorabilia. RNZB dancers Pieter Symonds and Gennadi Kouychin performed the Pack of Cards scene in the dining room and then afternoon tea was served, in the enclosed balcony overlooking the garden. A magnificent setting for the Queen of Hearts (Nadine Tyson), the White Rabbit (Shannon Dawson) and the Mad Hatter (Kim Broad) to entertain.



**Friends Seminars**

These were conducted by Matz Skoog, the then Artistic Director.

I hope you have enjoyed Part 6 of our A - Z Wellington Branch history - Ingrid Witkowski.

## Friends' Ambassador



I would like to introduce Norman Knipe to those of you who have not met him before. He is our *Friends' Ambassador* and will be talking to dance lovers in the intervals and before performances and at various Friends' events. He will have information about future events as well as the current one so please introduce yourself to him.

## Coming Events

There is a separate diary page with these and the rest of the years events in it but these events are coming up soon:

**Watch company class, Wellington branch AGM, lunch and a tour of the RNZB wardrobe. - Cost \$20 p.p. Saturday 7 May, 10am**

This is a great chance to see the RNZB dancers in class, rehearsing for *Stravinsky Selection*, followed by our AGM. A break for lunch and then a tour of the RNZB wardrobe – it is a must see if you have not been before!

***Stravinsky Selection Forum* Saturday 14 May, 1:00pm - Cost:free**

The RNZB artistic staff will give us a behind-the-scenes look at how the production is devised and brought to fruition. They welcome your questions!

***Stravinsky Selection* Dress Rehearsal – Cost: \$25 p.p Thursday 19 May, St James Theatre at 7:30pm**

This is an opportunity to see the final rehearsal before opening night. See the diary page for details, costs and how to book tickets. *Note conditions apply.*

## Why You Are You

Kapiti Branch of the NZ Society of Genealogists is pleased to announce its 2011 "Why You Are You (YURU) Guest is Sir Jon Trimmer.

A research team is working with him on his family history. Sir Jon, a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Kiwi, will be telling his story to audiences as part of national Family History Month in August. His Kapiti presentation will be a matinee and evening show on Thursday August 18 at Southwards, Paraparaumu. He will also be present at the Family History Fair in Hamilton on Saturday August 27.

Details of ticket sales for these performances will be announced shortly by the various hosts.

Sir Jon has a relative in the South Island and a sister in Hamilton helping the production team with the family story.

Clive Palmer  
YURU Coordinator

## Committee members 2010/2011

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