



*Nigel Percy's association with the Royal New Zealand Ballet goes back to 1995 when he first worked with the RNZB as Head of Lighting. But his career in lighting also covers films, drama and children's theatre, as Wellington Friend Judith Doyle discovered. He lives in Khandallah with his partner, Kat Sprowell (RNZB Corporate Administrator) and their 6-year-old son.*

**What led you into a career in creative lighting?**

I worked on local High School productions and was lucky enough to have a drama teacher whose husband worked in the industry. I thought I would work for a year then go to uni, I just never made it to uni.

**Did you have specific training/apprenticeship? Or was it 'trial and error' on the job?**

No, I just worked in the industry, I was fortunate to be able to work with a great bunch of Lighting Directors and learn through their work. It also helped to be able to work in all the different departments of the theatre - each has its own set of skills that complement each other. Training really can't make up for the real thing, in my opinion.

**You joined RNZB as Head of Lighting for a year in 1995; again in 1998; then you lit the 2010/2011 seasons. How has lighting changed/developed over these years?**

I don't think it has really changed greatly, the major thing is video projection has got cheaper and easier to do. But the technique is still the same.

**When you are starting to work out lighting, do you envisage it in your mind first; get ideas as you watch the dancers practising or wait until you see the whole thing coming together at rehearsal?**

Quite often I have a concept or equipment that I want to try but it is a funny process as I often have to provide a lighting plan before I have talked to the choreographer or even seen the work. Often seeing the dancers working provides clues but there is really no set pattern. With *Satisfied with Great Success* I remember watching a rehearsal with the sunlight streaming through the window creating lots of lines. I sat there and thought that it went quite well with the work which is where the 'box' concept came from.

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**Some background to *The Sleeping Beauty***

*The Sleeping Beauty* started as a fairy story written by Charles Perrault in 1697, and was translated into the most elusive and beautiful of the arts: ballet.



The original production of *The Sleeping Beauty* 1890

In 1890 Marius Petipa of the Imperial Theatre St Petersburg choreographed and Tchaikovsky wrote the glorious music. This was the era of the Ballerina – the male dancer's main role was just to support her. Thankfully today the male dancer now plays an equal role in dance and character.

The ballet's focus was undeniably on the two main conflicting forces of good (the Lilac Fairy) and evil (Carabosse); each has a leitmotif representing them, which runs through the entire ballet.

*The Sleeping Beauty* was the first ballet Anna Pavlova saw, when she was eight years old, and it inspired her to become a dancer.

By 1903 *The Sleeping Beauty* was the second most popular ballet in the repertory of the Imperial Ballet having been performed 200 times in only 10 years. Thirty years later it was Diaghilev's Ballets Russes that brought *The Sleeping Beauty* to the West.

On 2 Feb 1939 Sadler's Wells presented the ballet in London with Margot Fonteyn in the title role... This was the first successful production outside Russia.

American Ballet Theatre soloist Stella Abrera will perform the lead role of Aurora in The Meridian Season of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

***You've worked on Tutus on Tour too, haven't you? How do you work out a lighting system that works in vastly different theatres and halls — some of them far from perfect in space and facilities?***

*Tutus* does come with certain parameters, which does limit what you can do. I try to make the design as flexible as possible so you can adapt to the environment. It is quite a magical tour. It's very hard work but also very rewarding — like the local ladies coming into the theatre to drop off scones for the crew!

***You've worked on films too — Lord of the Rings, King Kong, Avatar, The Lovely Bones. Could you describe some of the challenges of lighting these films?***

I like the scale of film work, everything is large but it is also an industry where you can spend all night rigging lights that never get turned on! A sense of humour is important. I don't find it particularly creative work. I think my favourite would be *Lord of the Rings*. I was on from the beginning of principle photography right through to each set of pick-ups. There was a real sense of family. We all went through births, deaths and marriages together.

***How does film lighting differ from theatre lighting?***

Theatre has far fewer rules and can be abstract. Film always references the real world. You always have a source of light whether it's the sun or moon. When you move away from those, it can look weird. But there is huge cross-over as well. Film tends to be much bigger and brighter.

***You've worked with Capital E on children's shows and you're lighting Hear to See, a puppet show.***

***Are there any special aspects to lighting a children's show?***

Not really, it's pretty much the same, however that was a challenging production as you had to light the actors and puppets without lighting the puppeteers!

***You work across an incredible diversity. Which skill do you hope to develop in the future? Or is the diversity itself the attraction?***

I would love to be able to support myself from being a Lighting Director but I must admit I enjoy the variety of work. It's nice to move round different productions and companies.



Members of the new Friends of the Ballet National Committee elected recently: (clockwise from left) Andrea Watson, Christine Connor, Valerie Hellberg, Lee Patrice, Maria Hammond, Debbie Tangen (National President) and Susie Clarke (National Administrator). Absent: Heather Gribble.

## Pointes to Note

The RNZB Green Room has been renamed the Russell Kerr Green Room to recognise the huge contribution Russell has made to the RNZB and in particular the dancers over so many years.

- Some websites to explore:  
Abigail Boyle:  
<http://www.abigailboyle.com/>  
or  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYeWlcn4dxI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYeWlcn4dxI)  
New York City Ballet dancers talk about the challenges of dancing the Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*.
- There will be **Warm Up Curtain Up** in Wellington 30 October, Invercargill 9 November, Palmerston North 19 November, Auckland 1 December. Also **Q & A** straight after the matinee in Wellington 5 November and in Auckland 3 December.  
Visit [www.nzballet.org.nz/community](http://www.nzballet.org.nz/community) for details
- RNZB dancers will perform a work choreographed by Brendan Bradshaw and Cat Eddy (current and former RNZB dancers) at WOW in September.
- The RNZB is looking for four boys aged 9-12 to be extras during the upcoming season of *The Meridian Season The Sleeping Beauty* – visit the RNZB website and Facebook for details.

## Tamsin Cooper for RNZB



A beautiful new range of accessories designed especially for *The Meridian Season of The Sleeping Beauty*. Available from the RNZB website: [nzballet.org.nz](http://nzballet.org.nz)

**Please note that the 2012 RNZB subscription brochure will not contain the usual booking form. Friends will be able to renew their memberships as usual through their branch and also when purchasing tickets at the Box Office, by phone or online.**

### Contact us:

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