

Behind the Scenes

Wellington Branch Newsletter

December 2011

President's pointe



included sketches from Gary Harris and a selection of photos from our photo archive. I thought it was a great success and noticed that there was a lot of interest from the public that helped tick the box of education and consciousness raising which is a part of our "raison d'etre. We are so fortunate to be in the home city of Royal New Zealand Ballet and also be helped by other friends of the arts such as the St James Theatre and Wellington Artists Gallery Trust who enabled us to set up the exhibition.

On a sad note, though, one of our Dance Icons, Alexander Grant, passed away recently. Ingrid Witkowski has written an obituary as she knew Alexander personally.

Pete Cowley, President

Dear Friends

2011 is almost over, hasn't it gone by with amazing speed? Christmas is nearly here!!

I trust you managed to see The Meridian Season of *The Sleeping Beauty* and indulged yourself with those amazing costumes, beautiful and cunning sets and outstanding dancing. Ahhh, sensory overload of the most joyous kind!

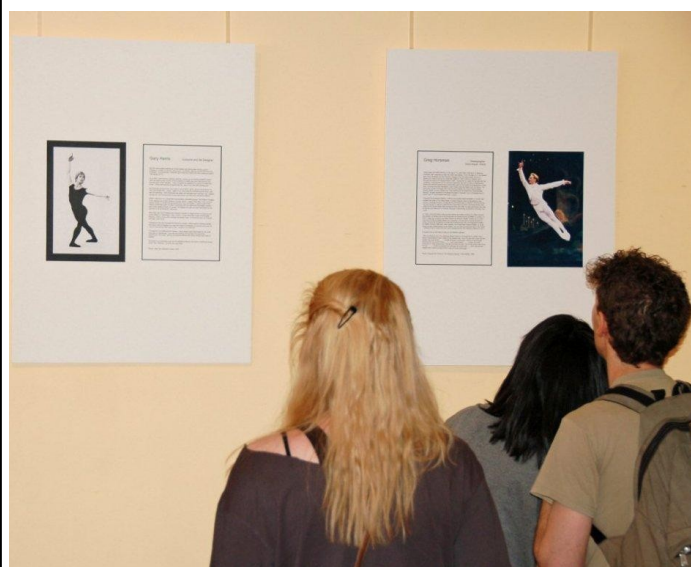


Photo by Angela de Bres

The committee also worked hard on the exhibition of *Seven Great Classics*, which was on the St James Theatre's mezzanine floor. It

Obituary: Alexander Grant, CBE

Wellington-born Alexander Marshall Grant started dance classes in 1931, aged six, with Miss Kathleen O'Brien and performed *Fairytale* and *Danse Russe* in the 14th June production of that same year. By 1941, he was studying under Miss Jean Horne (the New Zealand representative of the then Royal Academy of Dancing, London) and performing in ballets and divertissements such as *Spectre de la Rose*, *Me and My Girl* and *Mazurka*, to name a few. He also performed for the American G.I.s based in Wellington during wartime. In 1944, he won the RAD scholarship and also the Australasian Society of Operatic Dancing senior scholarship and performed for the public at his farewell

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**Our website is wn-friends.org
or ... balletfriends.org**

benefit concert, before travelling to the U.K. on the ship, Northumberland.

In 1946, while studying at the Sadler's Wells Ballet School, he danced with Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet (now the Birmingham Royal Ballet) in the role of the Old Man in the ballet, *Khadra*. Within two weeks, however, he was called to join the main company, Sadler's Wells Covent Garden (now The Royal Ballet) by Sir Frederick Ashton, who cast him in the Popular Song duo in *Facade*. Immediately, the public began to notice his very own dance style. The start of a brilliant character dance career began when Ashton gave him his first created role – a spectacular solo as a boy jumping through a hoop in *Les Sirenes*. In 1948, he was cast as the barber, the comic hero in *Mam'zelle Angot*, with the heroine being danced by Margot Fonteyn.

In 1959, he made his first return performances in New Zealand with Sadler's Wells and performed at the Wellington Opera House with Margot Fonteyn, Michael Somes, Rowena Jackson, Robert Helpmann, Anne Heaton, Philip Chatfield and Donald Britton. During his time with Sadler's Wells, he performed in over forty different ballets and had ten different characters created especially for him.

In 1965, he received a C.B.E. from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, at Buckingham Palace, London.

In 1967, Russell Kerr, the Artistic Director of what was known then as The New Zealand Ballet, invited him to perform and tour New Zealand as the character, Petrouchka, in the ballet of the same name.

During the 1970s, he was asked by Dame Ninette de Valois to take over the directorship of the educational group, Ballet for All, with The Royal Ballet. His personality and wit suited this position and he really enjoyed the contact with students.

In 1971, celebrating 25 years with The Royal Ballet, he performed the characters Peter Rabbit and Pigling Bland in the ballet film, *Tales of Beatrix Potter*, choreographed by Sir Frederick Ashton.

In 1976, he took over the artistic directorship of the National Ballet of Canada and stayed in this position until 1983. He introduced to the company a variety of Sir Fredrick Ashton's ballets.

In 1997, he was invited to restage *La Fille Mal Gardée* for the Royal New Zealand Ballet by Matz Skoog, the then artistic director of RNZB. It was during this time that Wellington Friends of the RNZB had the pleasure of inviting the public to attend *An Afternoon with Alexander Grant*, which was held at the National Library auditorium on the 15th February. It was a brilliant day, with Liz Gunn compering a truly memorable afternoon. Afternoon tea was served and a display of Alexander Grant's dance photographs from Covent Garden were displayed.

In 2005 he was awarded the New Zealand Living Dance Icon award.

Upon Sir Frederick Ashton's death, Alexander Grant was bequeathed the ownership of *La Fille Mal Gardee* and *Facade*. When he retired from the National Ballet of Canada in 1983, he travelled the world, not only re-staging these two ballets, but also judging dance competitions.



Alexander Grant as Bryaxis (the pirate chief) in *Daphnis et Chloe*, choreographed by Michel Fokine.
Photograph: Dudley Harris.

I corresponded with Alexander Grant over the past twenty-five years and received wonderful dance information from him, from all over the world. We also had great discussions about our shared love of gardens (including vegetable ones) and about his home in France. In October, a month after his death, I had great pleasure in being able to donate many items about him to the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

These included material covering his personal dance history from 1931 to the present day, photographs, newspaper clippings, programmes and magazine articles. Also included were personal items such as letters to his parents. I certainly will miss his sense of humour, the exciting mail from him about all things dance and his postcards from all over the world. New Zealand, and indeed the world, has lost one of its truly brilliant character dancers.

He passed away in London, in hospital, on 30th September 2011, after complications from a hip replacement. He is survived by his partner, Jean-Pierre Gasquet and his brother, Garry Grant.

Sumptuous Gowns, Tantalising Tutus and Terrific Tight

Born in Petone, Kristian Fredrikson was one of Australasia's most esteemed designers for dance who created opulent costumes for both the New Zealand and Australian ballet companies. From The Dowse collection, a new exhibition called *Bedazzled*, 26 November 2011- 4 March 2012, presents over 25 costumes designed for The Royal New Zealand Ballet as well as dozens of his exquisite drawings.



Curator Leanne Wickham with just a few of the magnificent costumes.

Bedazzled includes costumes and drawings from nine Royal New Zealand Ballet productions. Highlights include Cinderella's ball dress, Princess Odile's tutu from *Swan Lake*, the phantoms from *A Christmas Carol* and the brightly patterned chorus from *A Servant of Two Masters*. The show offers a detailed look at Fredrikson's designs, acclaimed for their sumptuous, jewel-like qualities, hidden meanings and underlying symbolism. Fredrikson understood the role costumes play in revealing the narratives of the ballet and the complexities of the characters on stage. His eye for detail, use of colour, decadent material choices and glittering embellishments infused the ballets with life, blurring the lines between dancer and costume.

From saris to feathers, silky satin and ripped linen rags, fabric formed the foundation of his work. Fredrikson famously collected material wherever he went, from second-hand shops and the like, transforming it into part of an exquisite costume. His extravagant use of decoration; lace, sequins, diamantes, as well as imagery, motifs and symbolism, formed the signature inherent in his design.

The Dowse holds the largest collection of Royal New Zealand Ballet costumes in the country with over 70 of Fredrikson's drawings and garments from ten ballets gifted. The relationship between the two organisations has flourished since The Dowse's 2003 exhibition *Inside the Royal Wardrobe*, which toured nationally in 2004. The Royal New Zealand Ballet and The Dowse are also collaborating on a series of lively public events to complement *Bedazzled* over summer.

Kristian Fredrikson was born in 1940 in Petone as Kristian Adrian Sams, son of a Danish merchant seaman and his British born wife. He studied design in Wellington and was influenced by the work of English stage designers including Leslie Hurry and Oliver Messel. In the 1960s, he created his first designs for ballet, including *The Winter Garden*. In 1963, while the Australian Ballet was on tour in New Zealand, Fredrikson met Peggy van Praagh who invited him to move to Australia to design *Aurora's Wedding*. Over the next 40 years, he designed for The Australian Ballet, The Sydney Dance Company and The Melbourne Theatre

Company, while remaining a loyal supporter of and designer for The Royal New Zealand Ballet. During this time, Fredrikson developed acclaimed partnerships with choreographer Graeme Murphy and director George Ogilvie. Fredrikson has received many awards including Erik Design Awards, Green Room Awards and in 1999 he won the Australian Dance Award for Services to Dance. In 2003 his work on Swan Lake earned a Helpmann Award. He died in Sydney in November 2005.

Behind the Scenes Forum

In an inspired move by Royal New Zealand Ballet, the *Behind the Scenes Forum* was held on the same day that RNZB held its Open Day.

I say this was inspired because it provided an opportunity for a great number of people who were interested enough to come to RNZB studios to see what happens there, to also discover this gem; to see and hear the inside story that we, as Friends, have become accustomed to. The RNZB Open Day is going from strength to strength as word gets around that there are a lot of interesting



L to R: Nigel Gaynor, Australian Conductor and Composer, Greg Horseman, Ballet Master, Amanda Skoog, General Manager, and Gary Harris, former Artistic Director who redesigned and restaged *The Sleeping Beauty* Photo: Angela de Bres,

things to see and a chance to get those long-held questions answered.

Of course, we also made sure our exhibition of *Seven Great Classics* was open so the same people who came to the open day would also enjoy our exhibition and enhance their knowledge.

Coming Events

Included in your envelope is next years programme from Royal New Zealand Ballet.

The 2012 year looks to be an exciting mix of new, contemporary and classic seasons – something to please us all somewhere along the line!

Now that we know the dates of RNZB performances in Wellington we can start planning next year's Friends Events. You can look forward to a new Diary with the first newsletter next year.

I should also note a special *congratulations* to Tara and Brooke Kinajil-Moren, winners of the dressed doll raffle held over Meridian Energy's Season of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

I wish you all a joyous Christmas, safe travelling and a happy 2012.

Pete Cowley



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