



Arabesque

From the desk of



Jete

and

## Wellington Branch 2007/1

# Young Friends Dance Bonanza

Young Friend's events are now called 'Dance Bonanza' and are a fun, learning events. Details below and on the attached booking form.

Date: Saturday 17 February

Time: 10:15 - 11:15

Place: Royal New Zealand Ballet studios

St. James Theatre

(meet at the lift at 9:45 am, dressed and ready to go)

Teacher: Stacey White, Dance Educator

Programme: **Ms White will take you on an adventurous, fun-filled, behind the scenes class using movement and styles from the TOWER Tutus on Tour season.**

If anyone would like to write an article about your experiences at this workshop, please contact Pam Reader on 389 8637 or [pam.reader@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:pam.reader@parliament.govt.nz)

## Hello Stacey...and welcome

*On 26 September Stacey White joined the Royal New Zealand Ballet company as education manager. Young Friends are gradually getting to know Stacey as she establishes and develops the job. She talks to Judith Doyle...*

Seeing her friend next-door practicing tap-dancing on the verandah of her home started an interest in dance for Stacey White when she was a seven-year-old in the Australian coastal town of Port Macquarie, north of Sydney. Her friend would show Stacey what she had learned at tap-dancing classes and then the two of them would start practicing the steps on the verandah. Soon her mother got sick of Stacey hounding her to have dance lessons and agreed that she could start learning too.

The tap-dancing didn't last long — about two or three weeks — before she asked if she could do ballet. Soon she became serious about it. Ballet had captured her — and it's never quite let her go!

Success came quickly when, aged eight, she took her first ballet exam — pre-primary. Only five people in the whole ballet school got top marks, all of them seniors except Stacey. "I walked to my ballet teacher's house to pick up my exam results. She told me that this was a really big thing. I decided on the walk home that dance was something I was definitely going to do!"

In the following years, she went on to do ballet exams with the school and to enter for concerts and eisteddfods, solo and in a group. After two years of ballet, she took on jazz dancing as well and then went through tap, contemporary classes, repertoire classes... But ballet was always tops for her and soon she graduated to pointe work.

When Stacey was 11, her teacher proudly showed her a half-built house on a section in Port Macquarie — it was her tailormade dance studio with a wooden sprung floor. This replaced the school hall as the venue for dance lessons.

About this time, her ballet class started a winning streak at competitions. They were called the Glitz Kids and their success continued right on until Stacey was 14. "I just loved performing," she said. "My troupe would enter every section we possibly could at the eisteddfods — national character, jazz, tap, modern, modern-expressive..." Sometimes they would successfully tackle age groups above them too.



12 year old Stacey

Her commitment to dance was shown in her daily routine. "I'd get up at 4.30 in the morning and, with a friend, I'd walk down to the studio which was a bit over half a kilometre (my teacher had given me a key to the studio when I was 12).

"We would practise until about 7am and then Miss Francesca would come downstairs and give us a lesson until 8 o'clock. Then Mum would pick me up, drop me home, I'd shower and breakfast before school." After school, she'd be back at the studio till evening.

Then she had a big shock which in retrospect she describes as a mid-life crisis at the age of 15 — she auditioned for several full-time ballet schools but didn't get in. It was more, she said, a case of 'you can come and dance with us but you're never going to be a ballerina'.

This was like a knock over the head for her; a huge wake-up call. But with typical resilience she bounced back and realised that choreography and dance education were both great passions for her too and that either could be a career direction.

She was doing a lot of choreography at this time at the ballet school and had also been an assistant-teacher there for several years. So after she left school, she joined Dance Encore Productions in Sydney who organise commercial shows that incorporate dance and allied fields. She went to Japan where she

danced in a magic show —she was both dancer and magician's assistant!

Back home again, she made a deal with her parents who 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."

She was still running her business at this time and also 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 promised herself, was 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 — *Ramonda* at Prague's National Theatre Ballet Company stands out.

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 she started teaching English on a casual basis at her old school, when she happened to see the advertisement for education manager at our ballet company in a dance magazine email, with the applications closing 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.

Stacey was in Townsville, a two-hour flight from Brisbane. After her overseas trip she was, quite simply, completely broke. Plus the fact that she'd just moved in to a new house.

"I checked online 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. Off the boxes went to her parents' home for safe keeping. Two weeks later she was in Wellington, starting her new job.

The fates obviously meant her for this job! Her experience in dance education; her lively personality and her sense of fun must surely be a recipe for success!