

# Canadian ballets

## National Ballet returns after 8 year absence

The National Ballet of Canada has just completed an engagement at the Coliseum after an eight-year absence from the London stage. Their programme included George Balanchine's *Serenade* and an exciting new ballet by Glen Tetley, entitled *Alice*.

Tetley's ballet, which has already received critical acclaim in Canada and New York, was inspired by David Del Tredici's Pulitzer prize-winning composition *In Memory of a Summer Day* for soprano and orchestra. This in turn is based on the prefatory poem to *Alice through the Looking Glass* in which Lewis Carroll recalls a picnic excursion on the River Isis with ten-year-old Alice Liddell and her two sisters. Tetley uses many of the characters from *Alice in Wonderland* interwoven with the real characters of Carroll and Alice.

Nothing is more quintessentially English than a river picnic, but then the 36-year-old National Ballet of Canada boasts a strong UK connection. The company, for instance, had an English founder, the dancer Celia Franca, who intended that it should concentrate on the great classical ballets. Nowadays, however, its repertoire has been extended to embrace contemporary works and original ballets such as *Alice*.

Another British link was Alexander Grant from the Royal Ballet who was the company's artistic director from 1976 to 1983. Apart from introducing many of Sir Frederick Ashton's works to the company's repertoire, Grant encouraged talented choreographers from inside the National Ballet to produce works of their own.

One of the greatest male dancers of our age, Eric Bruhn from Denmark, took over the helm in 1983 after an association with the National Ballet and National Ballet School, which reached back some 20 years. A highlight of his period in office was a five-nation tour of Europe by the company in the spring of 1985.

National Ballet performing *Serenade*.



Photo: National Ballet of Canada

The past 12 months have been an adventurous time for the Toronto-based dancers. Apart from *Alice*, they have premiered Jiri Kylian's *Transfigured Night*, Danny Grossman's *Hot House*, *Thriving on a Riff* and (in celebration of their 35th anniversary) Ronald Hynd's *The Merry Widow*.

Since Bruhn's death in April, 1986, the artistic direction of the company has been in the hands of Valerie Wilder and Lynn Wallis whose stated objective is to increase the company's profile internationally. 'The company's return to London is an exciting opportunity to showcase the wealth of talent and repertoire within the National Ballet,' says Miss Wallis.

The National Ballet of Canada has already performed in virtually every major dance centre of the world. The critical acclaim that they received for their performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York last year and at the Coliseum this July suggests that the two associate directors are well on the way to achieving their aim of international pre-eminence.

## Les Grands Ballets Canadiens tours Europe

One of the world's greatest modern ballet companies, Canada's Les Grands Ballets Canadiens from Montreal, recently completed a two-week engagement at London's Sadlers Wells Theatre.

This London stop on Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' major European tour gave London audiences a rare chance to see the company perform famous works by George Balanchine, Paul Taylor, and Antony Tudor together with spirited Canadian choreography by James Kudelka, Ginette Laurin, and Linda Rabin, including five British premieres.

In 29 years, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens has grown into a world-class company that has given Ludmilla Chiriaeff, its founder, many an occasion to be proud. 'Madame', as she is fondly referred to, came to Montreal more than 30 years ago as a young dancer and choreographer and decided that the city should have a ballet company.

Her credentials were impressive; her determination even more so. Inspired especially by Michel Fokine, who encouraged her to expand beyond performing and explore the creation and teaching of dance, Madame founded Les Ballets Chiriaeff in Montreal in 1952. In 1958 she changed the company's name and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens was born.

Over the years, the company gained renown for a repertoire that stretches from the bastions of classical ballet into the realm of the avant garde of dance as a 20th-century art form. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens can switch from Petipa to Balanchine to works by Paul Taylor and Elisa Monte in one evening. Some say variety is too great a challenge for dancers. Les Grands Ballets Canadiens say it is their strength, and it was this very versatility and adaptability to all styles of dance that attracted such major names as Fernand Nault, Brian Macdonald