

## The Australian Ballet

The Australian Ballet gave its first performance on 2 November 1962 at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney. The company was led by principal artists Kathleen Gorham, Marilyn Jones, Garth Welch and Caj Selling and the opening night production was a full length *Swan Lake* with guest stars Sonia Arova and Erik Bruhn dancing the principal roles. Many of the soloists in that first company were former members of the Borovansky Ballet, as were Gorham, Jones and Welch.

Since the company's foundation it has been directed by Peggy van Praagh (1962-1974) - a position she shared with Robert Helpmann between 1965 and 1974; Robert Helpmann (1975); Anne Woolliams (1976-1977); Peggy van Praagh (1978); Marilyn Jones (1979-1981); Marilyn Rowe (1982) as caretaker ballet director; Maina Gielgud (1983-1996), Ross Stretton (1997-2001) and David McAllister (2001-).

The company is a touring repertory company, a model it inherited from the Borovansky Ballet and, before it, from the Ballets Russes companies that toured in Australia between 1936 and 1940. From the beginning the Australian Ballet aimed to present a variety of works to its audiences. The company's founding documents stated that the company would stage the great classics from the nineteenth century, the most distinguished ballets of the twentieth century from all countries in both classical and contemporary styles, and new works of Australian origin. In effect the company's repertoire has largely reflected the background and experiences of its various directors. The English-ness of van Praagh, the European background of Gielgud and the American experiences of Stretton have all been noticeable, for example, although each director has to a greater or lesser degree also encouraged the development of Australian choreography.

Throughout its history the company has had five resident choreographers. In 1976 Graeme Murphy rejoined the company after a period spent dancing overseas. He rejoined not as a dancer but as the company's choreographer, although by the end of 1976 he had left the Australian Ballet to take on the direction of Sydney Dance Company. In 1995 Maina Gielgud appointed Stanton Welch and Stephen Baynes as resident choreographers. Both have choreographed a number of works for the company since their appointment. In 2000 Ross Stretton gave a similar appointment to Natalie Weir who held her position until 2001. In 2003 David McAllister appointed Adrian Burnett as the fifth resident choreographer in the company's history. Burnett held his position until 2006, leaving Baynes and Welch as the continuing resident choreographers.