

Paul Mercurio

Born in Swan Hill, Victoria, Paul Mercurio grew up in Perth, Western Australia, with his mother and three siblings. He began dancing at the age of nine, inspired in part by watching musicals at Saturday matinee movie screenings. He attended John Curtin High School in Perth and his theatrical interests were nurtured there as a result of the school's performing arts curriculum.

Mercurio was a scholarship student with West Australian Ballet and choreographed his first work, *Just Another Poor Boy*, during that period. In 1981 he left Perth to study at the Australian Ballet School but left after a year. He began his professional dancing career with Sydney Dance Company, which he joined in 1982. With Sydney Dance he performed in many works choreographed by Graeme Murphy and was acclaimed in particular for his performances as Tadzio in *After Venice* and in the leading role of the Voyager in *Some Rooms*. While with Sydney Dance he choreographed several works for the company including *Waiting* and *Dancing with I* in 1989, *Cafe* in collaboration with Kim Walker, also in 1989, and *In the Company of Wo/Men* in collaboration with Murphy in 1990. In 1990 Mercurio took leave from Sydney Dance Company to take the leading role of Scott Hastings in the film *Strictly Ballroom*. On the completion of *Strictly Ballroom* he returned to Sydney Dance Company and choreographed *Edgeing* in 1992.

In July 1992 with the support of grants from the New South Wales Ministry of the Arts and private donations, Mercurio established his own company, Australian Choreographic Ensemble (ACE). At the same time he established Feel Good Films. For ACE Mercurio restaged several works he had choreographed for Sydney Dance Company, created new works and commissioned choreography from others. ACE disbanded in 1998.

Throughout the 1990s Mercurio devoted himself increasingly to acting. Following the success of *Strictly Ballroom*, Mercurio went on to perform in a series of movies, including *Exit to Eden* (1994), *Back of Beyond* (1995), the cable movie *Joseph* (1995), *Cosi* (1996), *Red Ribbon Blues* (1996), *Dark Planet* (1996), the short film *Spilt Milk*, (1996) which he wrote, directed and choreographed, *Welcome to Woop Woop* (1997), *The First 9 1/2 Weeks* (1998), *Sydney: A Story of a City* (1999), *Kick* (1999) with fellow dancers Russell Page and Rebecca Yates, and the television movies *The Finder* (2001), and *Code 11-14* (2003). Mercurio's acting roles during the 1990s have also included television dramas and stage productions, including the role of Roy Fields in the television series *Medivac* (1996-1997), and roles in the television docudrama *Day of the Roses* (1998), which saw him nominated for a best actor Logie award. He also toured with the theatrical show *A Passionate Women* (1999), starred in the shortened three week season of the Australian version of *The Full Monty*, which opened in Melbourne on 31 December 2003, and had guest roles in *Blue Heelers* (1994), *Water Rats* (1996), *Murder Call* (1997), and *All Saints* (1998). In 2004 Mercurio was involved with the television mini series *Through my Eyes* (2004), based on Lindy Chamberlain's autobiography of the same name. That year he also appeared on stage in *The Full Monty*. Mercurio was also a judge on both the Australian and New Zealand versions of *Dancing with the Stars* until mid 2008. He teaches at Dance World Studios in Melbourne and is host of a television series called *Mercurio's Menu*.

