

Queensland **Ballet**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN



Cinderella

PRODUCTION NOTES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Cinderella

Contextual Information

Choreographer Ben Stevenson OBE
Composer Sergei Prokofiev
Conductor Nigel Gaynor
Music performed by Queensland Symphony Orchestra
Costume Designer Tracy Grant Lord
Set Designer Thomas Boyd
Lighting Designer David Walters



The History

— *Cinderella* was written by Charles Perrault and just like his other Disney-bound tale, *The Sleeping Beauty*, was one of eight stories in the book titled *Histoires ou Contes du temps pass (Stories and Tales of the Past)*.

Prokofiev wrote the music for this ballet between 1940 and 1944. It came after his other great ballet score, *Romeo & Juliet*, written in the 1930s. Prokofiev's melodic invention is a great feature of the work, and the music is written for a large orchestra. There are also three suites for orchestra which the composer authorised for use in concert.

Many ballets have been choreographed on this tale, but one of the most frequently staged productions in modern times is Ben Stevenson's interpretation, which first premiered in 1970.

Ben Stevenson's Production

Note from the Choreographer

— *Cinderella* has been an exceedingly important work for me. It was the first full-length ballet that I choreographed. I had done *The Sleeping Beauty* before, but because I kept a lot of Petipa's version, I never felt it was mine. *Cinderella* had only 28 dancers in the cast when it was first done in Washington DC and I am glad to report that it was a success! It was a door that opened for me, enabling me to choreograph other full-length works.

In creating *Cinderella* I tried to appeal to adults and children alike, from the romance of Cinderella and the Prince, to the humour of the Ugly Stepsisters. It is always wonderful to hear the laughter of the children in the audience. Each company and its dancers bring this ballet new life whenever it is performed. It is not just the same steps for every company, sometimes new things are thought of to inspire the dancers who tell the story. Having premiered *Cinderella* as part of Li Cunxin's inaugural season with the Queensland Ballet in 2013, I am delighted it will be performed once again.

Ben Stevenson OBE

— Ben Stevenson, a native of Portsmouth, England, received his dance training at the Arts Educational School in London. He appeared with the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet and English National Ballet where, as a principal dancer, he performed leading roles in all the classics.

He has received numerous awards for his choreography, including three gold medals at the International Ballet Competitions of 1972, 1982, and 1986. For his contributions to international dance, Ben was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.) by Queen Elizabeth II in December 1999. In April 2000, he was presented with the Dance Magazine Award. Ben assumed the artistic directorship of Texas Ballet Theater in July 2003.

Previously he served as artistic director of Houston Ballet (1976 – 2003), elevating the company from a regional troupe to an internationally acclaimed ensemble



Ben Stevenson's Production

SYNOPSIS

ACT 1

— The story begins in Cinderella's home where she is stopping her Stepsisters from roughly teasing her poor father. They turn on her furiously and she is ordered to clean the room. Left alone, she takes out a portrait of her dear mother.

Her father returns to the room and is overcome with remorse; his daughter lovingly tries to reassure him, but their tender exchange is interrupted by the Stepsisters, who snatch away the portrait.

Suddenly, an old woman enters, begging for food. The Stepmother scornfully gives her the portrait instead, but the woman returns it to Cinderella. She accepts some bread in return and departs.

A dressmaker, wigmaker and dancing master arrive to prepare the Stepsisters for the royal ball. When the family has departed, Cinderella tries to console herself by dancing with a broom, but eventually she bursts into tears. At this moment, the beggar woman returns and magically changes into the Fairy Godmother!

The kitchen is replaced by an enchanted glade. The Fairies of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter dance for Cinderella. She is given a pair of slippers and her rags become a beautiful gown, but she is warned that at midnight the magic will end.

The Fairy Godmother then transforms a pumpkin and four mice into a magnificent coach and horses, and Cinderella is driven to the ball.

ACT 2

— At the palace, a Jester welcomes guests to the ball. The Prince gallantly invites each of the Stepsisters to dance, much to the amusement of all.

Festivities are interrupted by the arrival of Cinderella. She is so beautiful and graceful that the Prince is immediately smitten.

Oranges, the rarest fruit in the land, are offered to the guests by the Jester and Cinderella kindly gives hers to one of her Stepsisters, who had missed out on the treat. In a moment of quietness, the Prince invites Cinderella to dance a romantic pas de deux before the festivities of the ball continue.

The clock strikes midnight, Cinderella's clothes turn to rags, and she rushes from the ballroom, leaving one slipper behind in her haste.

ACT 3

— Back in her family kitchen, Cinderella finds the remaining slipper in her pocket, but hides it quickly when the family returns.

The Prince and his courtiers arrive in search of the owner of the lost slipper. The stepsisters try to fit the slipper in vain, and then the Prince notices Cinderella sitting shyly by the fire. The second slipper falls from her pocket, and he is overjoyed to find his love. Despite her ragged appearance, he asks her to marry him. Cinderella kindly forgives her Stepmother and Stepsisters and lovingly embraces her father.

In the magic glade, the Prince and Cinderella dance again to celebrate their love. The Fairy Godmother, Fairies, Angels and Cinderella's family gather to witness their marriage and the new Princess is acclaimed by all.



Ben Stevenson's Production

Movement

— The choreography is fluid throughout the work, seamlessly flowing from one section to the next and purely classic in its form. Ben Stevenson's gift for creating both comedy and romance in his productions is evident and his choreography demonstrates wonderful contrast through the range of characters.

Cinderella dances with a feminine grace, endearing her to the audience. Whether she is dressed in her rags or her ball gown, her movement shows her youthful naivety as well as her strength. In the first pas de deux, Cinderella and her Prince's movements start small evolving into spectacular lifts and intimate embraces as their relationship and romance develops.

The Fairy Godmother dances en pointe with a light, effortless quality to show her magical and ethereal spirit, which is echoed by the Fairies of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter and the dragonflies who accompany her.

Other characters in the production are equally as commanding with their unique movement styles. From the impish athleticism of the Court Jester to the vaudevillian clumsiness of the Stepsisters, each character's movement is unique to their role. The comedic skills of the Stepsisters are evident in their exaggerated and farcical steps, where they often manipulate traditional ballet technique to demonstrate their inept and brash personalities. Seeing these roles played by men, further heightens both the comedy of the movement and the contrast between their role and that of Cinderella.

Stevenson has a particular talent for geometric formations, and this is beautifully realised in the ballroom scene where the company create a theatrical world of movement.

Music

— The score opens with a sad and desolate theme in E minor that conveys Cinderella's desire to escape from the mistreatment she endures from her stepmother and wilful stepsisters. The music then broadens into her beautiful and haunting theme in C major, full of yearning and hope for a life of joy. While Prokofiev's music is richly melodic throughout, he uses much dissonance, which creates an atmosphere of angst, turmoil and struggle. His music offers the choreographer many opportunities for comic scenes, which are wonderfully brought to life by the choreography.

'From the orchestra's perspective, the music is very difficult to play! Prokofiev was himself a virtuoso pianist and so he demands much from the musicians. At times the composer requires grotesque and ugly sounds from sections of the orchestra, which needs to be encouraged. Musicians spend so much time perfecting beautiful tonal sounds, so it can be uncomfortable to produce harsh and abrasive sounds one moment, then sweet and pleasant tones the next. While this score is bittersweet, there are many beautiful and expressive passages to enjoy.'

Nigel Gaynor, Queensland Ballet Music Director and Principal Conductor



Ben Stevenson's Production

Costume

— Tracy Grant Lord has designed beautiful costumes for *Cinderella* with layers of braiding, beading and crystals. There are 42 different designs for 29 different characters and 130 costume sets, each comprising up to five pieces. Several thousand metres of fabric and trim were sourced and transformed with every piece of costume handmade for this production. Head of Wardrobe, Noelene Hill had a team of 30 talented craftspeople to make patterns, costumes, jewellery, headpieces, hats, and shoes. They spent nearly 7,000 hours in total working on the entire suite of costumes.

For costume designer Tracy Grant Lord, designing is about lyricism and beauty. Her belief is that costumes should be designed to focus on movement, character and the shape of the performer. Costumes for *Cinderella* needed to accurately portray each character while remaining true to the period. Her vision was to embrace period designs while giving them a contemporary update to remain fresh and relevant. Tracy is very interested in colour, utilising a range of pinks as a connecting motif throughout the designs. Cinderella's transformation by the Fairy Godmother sees the use of some beautiful, soft, feminine, graduated pinks. In stark contrast, the use of mismatched and harsh pinks identifies the Stepsisters.



Set

— Set Designer Thomas Boyd brings this spectacular story book to life. The grey and barren interior of the home where Cinderella lives is a visual reflection of her plight. This magically and swiftly dissolves into the light and airy realm of the Fairy Godmother. Colour floods the stage and the audience are transported to the ethereal world which culminates in Cinderella's transformation for the royal ball.

The Prince's ballroom is opulent and grand providing the perfect backdrop for romance to blossom. The final scene is the forest glade, a whimsical picture to leave the audience delighted in the fairy-tale magic of this classic.



Q & A with Vito Bernasconi

Soloist, Queensland Ballet

— Can you describe your character as a Stepsister in Cinderella?

The Stepsister is mean, horrible, selfish and thoughtless. Not a nice character!

When I first joined Queensland Ballet in 2013, Stepsister was my first lead role with the Company. Although it doesn't have as much dancing as the roles of the Prince or Jester, it is such an important role. From the moment the curtain rises, it is your job to make sure the audience feels empathy for Cinderella and dislikes you!

— How does the choreography communicate the type of character the Stepsister is?

There is a lot of pantomime acting in this role and elements of physical theatre. The choreography is essentially ballet steps performed badly for comedic value.

— How do you prepare for the role of the Stepsister?

While I'm putting on my elaborate make-up to look like a woman, I focus on my facial expressions and think of someone who is pure evil — like some of the evil characters in Disney animations.

— What do you like about dancing this role of the Stepsister? Are there any challenges?

I like being able to become a different person and to transform the stage with my character. It's like putting on a mask. The physical element of falling to the ground and trying not to hurt yourself is a challenge. I've performed this role twice before, so I have the experience to do this confidently.



Q & A with Tracy Grant Lord

Costume Designer

— What inspired you when designing the costumes for Cinderella?

I had Prokofiev's brilliant music as the perfect inspiration for the design of this *Cinderella* plus Ben Stevenson's wonderful original choreography and Li's clear vision for this Queensland Ballet production.

— Are there thematic elements which recur across the designs?

An elegant, magical fairy tale is the main driver for this design. Refining the visual definitions inside the production, alongside the history of the work and the requirements and expectations of a company, naturally brings a design together.

— How do you collaborate with the set designer to ensure that costumes and sets will work together?

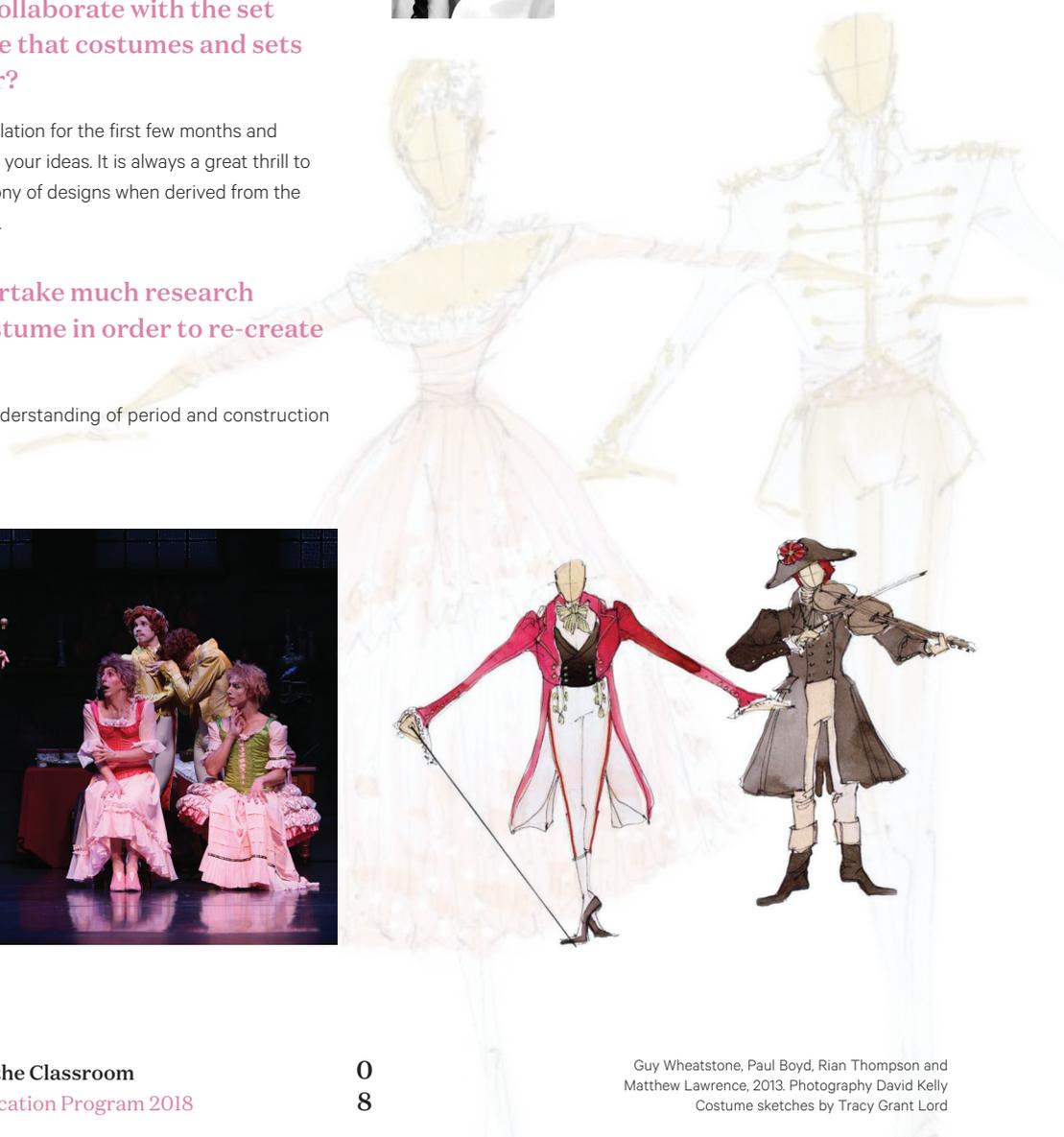
Sometimes you work in isolation for the first few months and then join together to share your ideas. It is always a great thrill to discover the natural harmony of designs when derived from the same inspirational sources.

— Did you undertake much research into historical costume in order to re-create a period look?

Yes, I need a very clear understanding of period and construction for each new work.

— How is designing for dance different to designing for theatre or opera?

The differences in practical terms are the obvious ones of ease of movement and weight of costume alongside the universal questions of appropriateness of design for character, performer and production. All forms of performance demand these considerations to greater or lesser degrees.



Queensland Ballet

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This Production Notes for the Classroom was developed in collaboration with Queensland Ballet's Education Ambassadors Rachel Grieve and Leisa Cooper

