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Ballet Notes

Serenade Alice

The National Ballet *of* Canada

JAMES KUDELKA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

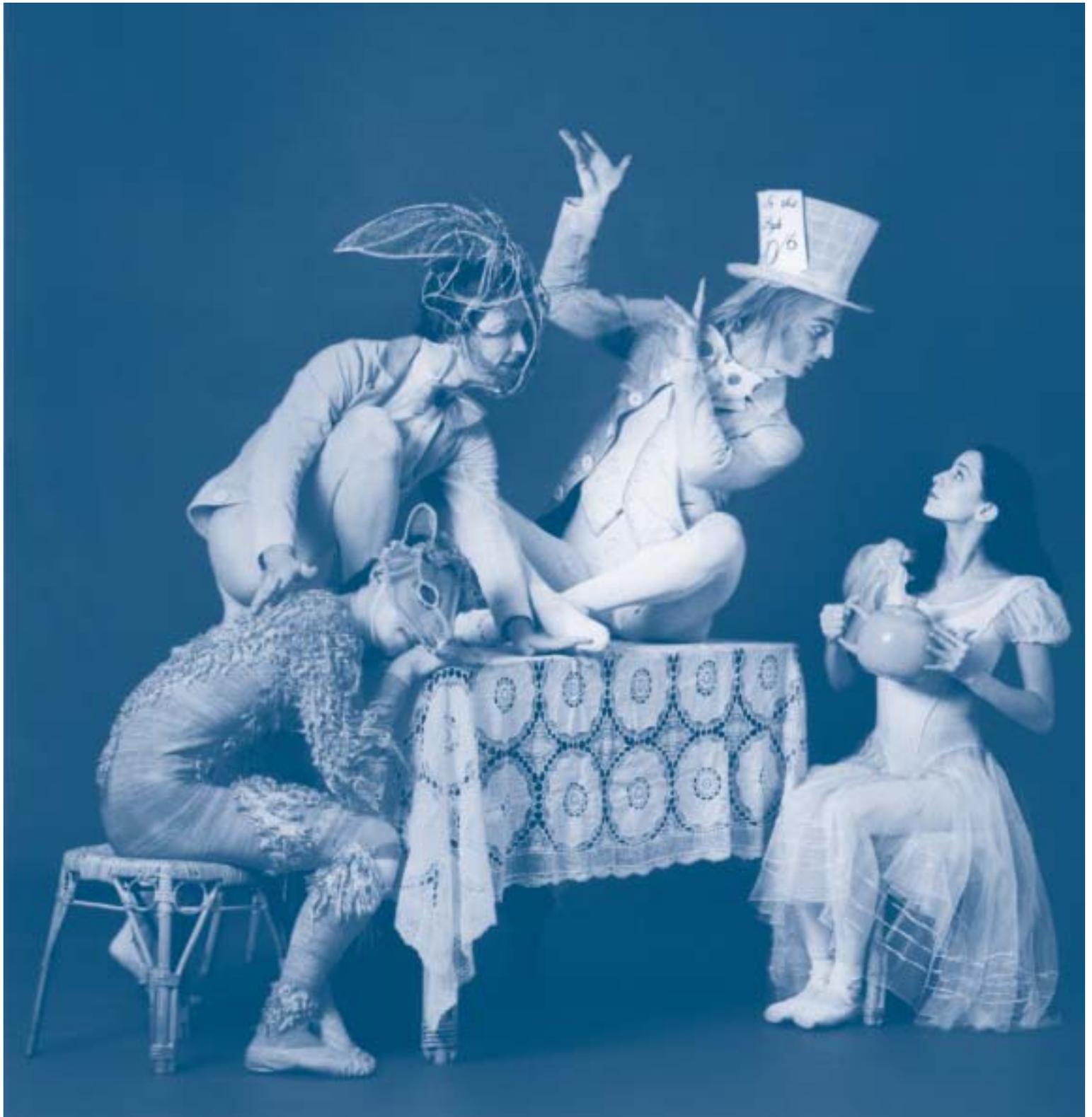
KEVIN GARLAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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I | Serenade

CHOREOGRAPHY: George Balanchine

STAGED BY: Joysanne Sidimus

MUSIC: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky — *Serenade in C Major for String Orchestra*

LIGHTING DESIGN: Ronald Bates

The performance of *Serenade*, a Balanchine® Ballet, is presented by arrangement with The George Balanchine Trustsm and has been produced in accordance with the Balanchine Style®, and Balanchine Technique, Service standards established and provided by the Trust.

II | Alice

CHOREOGRAPHY: Glen Tetley

MUSIC: David Del Tredici — “*Child Alice, Part I: In Memory Of A Summer Day*” (By Arrangement With Boosey & Hawkes Inc., Publisher And Copyright Owner)

SET AND COSTUME DESIGN: Nadine Baylis

LIGHTING DESIGN: Michael J. Whitfield

CHOREOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: Scott Douglas

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Serenade

Rex Harrington and Xiao Nan Yu in *Serenade*. Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann.



AMONG THE MANY GREAT WORKS CREATED BY RUSSIAN BORN choreographer George Balanchine, *Serenade* is considered by many to be his masterpiece. *Serenade* was Balanchine's first work upon arriving in America. Balanchine wanted to create his own ballet company in the United States, but knew he first had to establish a school to ensure a continued life for his company and to provide a breeding ground for American dancers. Balanchine had arrived in the United States on October 18, 1933, and on January 1, 1934, with the assistance of his friends and backers Lincoln Kirstein and Edward M.W. Warburg, he opened the doors of his School of American Ballet.

To teach his students about dancing as a whole, and not just the steps, Balanchine began to create *Serenade* on March 14, 1934. He worked with whatever talent and bodies were at hand and turned them into dancers. *Serenade* was given its first performance at the estate of Felix Warburg (father of Edward) in White Plains, New York, on June 10, 1934. A "by-invitation-only" affair, the afternoon performance marked Balanchine's debut in America.

Before New York City Ballet was officially founded in 1948, Balanchine conscientiously maintained *Serenade* in the repertoires of the companies with which he worked including the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo (1940), Ballet Caravan (1941) and the Paris Opera Ballet (1947). On October 18, 1948, 15 years to the day after he had first arrived in the United States, Balanchine presented *Serenade* in the first performance by his newly formed New York City Ballet. Balanchine directed the company until his death in 1983 and *Serenade* remains its signature piece. 2004 marks the centenary of George Balanchine's birth.

A powerful, haunting work, filled with images of lyric meditation, *Serenade* emphasizes in melodic visual terms Tchaikovsky's ravishing *Serenade for Strings*. Balanchine always insisted that *Serenade* has no plot and noted "many people think there is a concealed story in the ballet. There is not. There are, simply, dancers in motion to a beautiful piece of music. The only story is the music's story, a serenade, if you like, in the light of the moon." Regardless, audiences often find themselves giving

subjective interpretation to various 'incidents' within the work. The enigmatic subtext, with its hints of melancholy drama, only serves to enrich what is already a pure dance of magisterial beauty.

The ballet, for a full cast of 28 dancers, opens on an abstract note with an ensemble of 17 women standing in diagonal lines, their right arms and palms raised. Their arms are then bent and brought toward their heads, as if the dancers are shielding themselves from a brilliant light or bidding farewell. The feet are in a parallel position facing forward, then suddenly they are made to snap out in a balletic first position, as if in acceptance of a new mode of movement.

The second movement opens, like its accompanying music, with a sweeping waltz for a couple who are soon joined by the corps de ballet. Notes dance critic and historian Marcia Siegel: "We never really lose the sense of the ensemble... The dance that the man and woman do together isn't some detached, singular occasion, but an event that can occur when the circumstances of the ensemble permit it or can absorb it."

The choreography creates the drama of *Serenade*. The central dances are composed for the corps de ballet; dancers emerge from the melee in couples, trios and solos, inevitably forming liaisons and relationships. The leading soloists are arbitrarily assigned names that subtly hint at a drama, including the Waltz Girl and Waltz Boy, the Russian Girl, the Elegy Boy and the Dark Angel.

The Waltz Girl is the one figure featured in all sections of the ballet. She is first introduced as the latecomer in the ballet's opening section. Later, the Waltz Boy touches her lightly on the shoulder and invites her to dance with him in the joyous second section. Notes dance critic Marilyn Hunt: "The woman waits quietly, as if asleep, until the first man claims her like a Sleeping Beauty." And, recalled the late Joseph Duell, who danced the Waltz Boy for New York City Ballet: "When (the Waltz Boy) walks in through this group of people, almost as if through a forest, he's only aware of the woman... Balanchine told me not to tap her on the shoulder; I rest my hand for a minute — a very gentle touch to bring her to life."



The third movement (the fourth movement of the musical score) opens with a simple tableau of five girls and builds to a brilliant allegro dance by the Russian Girl. The Waltz Girl returns at its end and collapses.

The fourth movement begins the *Elegy*, in which the fallen Waltz Girl meets the *Elegy Boy*, who is blindly led to her by the *Dark Angel*. In this final section, the Waltz Girl is joined by the other leading soloists and an assortment of corps women, all of whom attempt to attract and distract the *Elegy Boy*, throwing themselves at him and trying to entrap him. In the end, the Waltz Girl crumples to the floor once again. During the ballet's final moments, she is carried away by the ensemble toward the infinite. Speaking to a friend (never to his dancers) on the *Elegy* section of his ballet, Balanchine once said that it was "like fate, each man going through the world with his destiny on his back. He meets a woman — he cares for her — but his destiny has other plans."

The National Ballet of Canada first performed *Serenade* in 1962. ■

THE MUSIC FOR SERENADE

Watching a Balanchine ballet is like watching and hearing a beautifully phrased conversation between dance and music. The most exciting moment of a Balanchine ballet is when you begin to "see the music and hear the dancing." Balanchine's relationship with music stemmed from his early childhood, when his musical studies were as important as his dance training. His understanding of musical theory, composition and playing enabled him to develop intimate working relationships with his composers. Noted the National Ballet's late Artistic Director Erik Bruhn: "He unravelled the intricate structure and emotional texture of music. Using the music of Bach, Mozart, Tchaikovsky and, of course, his close friend Igor Stravinsky, Balanchine actually made ballet more aware of its musical potential."

Balanchine's understanding of music allowed him to reach into the inner life of the music. It is not the obvious beat but the harmony in the music that motivates the dance. Said Balanchine of his use of music previously untouched by ballet choreographers: "If the dance designer sees in the development of classical dancing a counterpart in the development of

music and has studied them both, he will derive continual inspiration from great scores."

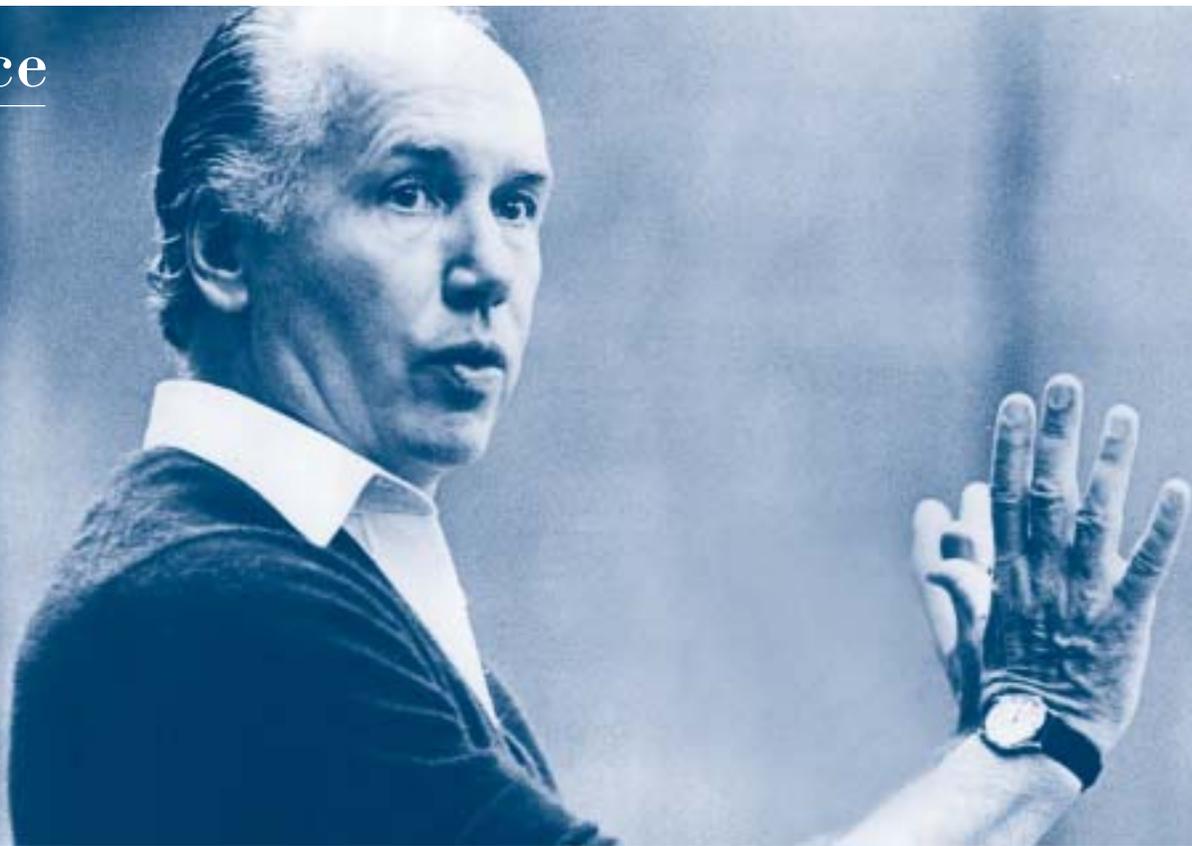
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Serenade in C Major for Strings*, one of his most popular and luscious compositions, was started in the summer of 1880. Tchaikovsky was asked to write some festive music for the exhibition celebrating the silver jubilee of Tsar Alexander II. Tchaikovsky, who abhorred the idea of creating "pieces d'occasion," nevertheless wrote a composition, on the subject of Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, which we know today as the 1812 Overture. As a reward for the torture of having to write this commission, the composer treated himself to the writing of *Serenade in C Major for Strings*. When both works were completed in November 1880, Tchaikovsky wrote to his patron, Madame von Meck: "The *Serenade*... I wrote from an inward impulse; I felt it, and venture to hope that this work is not without artistic merit." In the late 1880s, Tchaikovsky often performed this composition on his concert tours throughout Europe to great acclaim.

Modelling the *Serenade* on the musical style of the 18th century, which he so loved, Tchaikovsky acknowledged that the first of the composition's four movements was his homage to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: "It is intended to be an imitation of his style, and I should be delighted if I thought I had in any way approached my model..."

The composition, like many of Tchaikovsky's works, has a strong dance quality. This is evident in his *Fourth Symphony*, written that same year, and, of course, in his famous dance compositions — *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. It was not surprising therefore that George Balanchine choose the *Serenade in C for Strings* to create his first work in America.

The movements in Tchaikovsky's *Serenade in C for Strings* occur as follows: 1. Pezzo in forma de Sonatina: Andante non-troppo; 2. Walzer: Moderato. Tempo de Valse; 3. Elegie: Larghetto elegiaco; and 4. Finale (Tema Russo): Andante-Allegro con spirito. For the ballet *Serenade*, Balanchine changed the order of the third and fourth movements from Tchaikovsky's original composition. ■

Alice



Glen Tetley. Photo by Andrew Oxenham.

Glen Tetley's name has been synonymous with first-class contemporary ballet for more than a quarter century and his ballets are in the repertoires of the world's foremost ballet companies, including England's Royal Ballet, the Rambert Dance Company, American Ballet Theatre, the Stuttgart Ballet, the Netherlands Dance Theatre, the Australian Ballet and the Royal Danish Ballet.

Tetley created *Alice* especially for The National Ballet of Canada in 1986, his first original commission for the company. The much-anticipated world premiere of *Alice* took place at Toronto's O'Keefe Centre (now renamed the Hummingbird Centre) on February 19, 1986, to great acclaim. This production was later filmed for television and broadcast in 1991. The film was directed by Norman Campbell and co-produced by Primedia and the CBC.

Danced to the haunting music of David Del Tredici's *Child Alice, Part 1: In Memory of a Summer Day*, the ballet has a complex thematic structure that borders on the abstract. A sense of loss, missed opportunities and passion wasted is woven into the fabric of the work. And by cutting across the drama with lighter moments from the *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* books, Tetley creates a world where illusion and reality are filtered through fantasy. What makes *Alice* riveting is the way choreographer Tetley has touched the nerve of truth in both the relationship of Alice Liddell and Lewis Carroll and the later romance of Reginald Hargreaves and the mature Alice.

Following the premiere of *Alice*, Anna Kisselgoff of the *New York Times* was profusive in her praise, calling the new work Tetley's "best ballet." *Alice*, she said, "has the vertiginous impact of a sudden onrush of memories. It is a mood piece, a tone poem in which music and dance combine into an expressive surge of feeling that does not remain simply depicted upon the stage. It cascades, so to speak, immediately over the footlights."

Alice's success proved to be the National Ballet's passport to return engagements at New York's Metropolitan Opera House and the Coliseum in London, England, in 1987. *Alice* has also been performed by the

National Ballet in engagements in Washington, D.C., Southern California and throughout Germany.

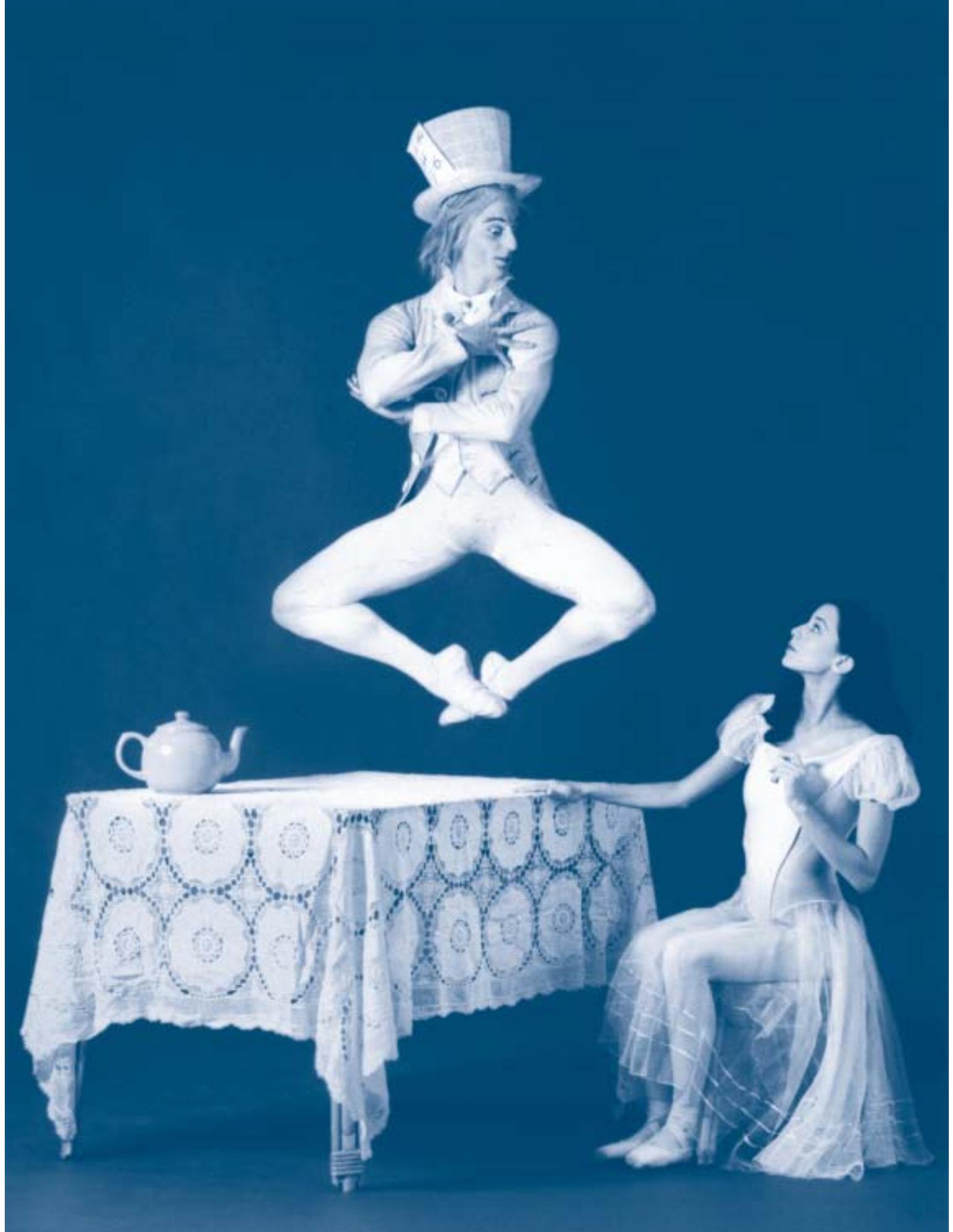
Known as an intellectually and visually stimulating choreographer, Tetley has created work that has always been complemented by fascinating intellectual complexity, so that it communicates on two levels simultaneously. His innovative use of dance images has proven widely influential, providing a basis for other choreographers' movement language.

Another extraordinary aspect of Tetley's choreographic language is his fusion of ballet and modern technical elements. His blending of these contrasting styles has led to an entirely new concept in movement vocabulary and provided for a greater range of dynamics and images. This style of movement, introduced by Tetley as a novel concept in the early 1960s, is today's voice of contemporary ballet. Tetley often combines these talents with an interest in psychological undercurrents of human emotion and behaviour. This is evident in probing dance dramas that include both *Alice* and *La Ronde*.

Tetley's *Alice* is not simply a re-telling of Lewis Carroll's beloved and much-read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It deals both with Lewis Carroll's warm affection for the real Alice, Alice Pleasance Liddell, the child who inspired the telling of the tale, and with Alice Hargreaves, the mature, married woman who Alice later became. Tetley plays on the idea of past meeting present through a choreographed, looking-glass approach as real life and fantasy characters meet in a mix of nostalgia and ecstatic wonder. The ballet deals with what was, what could have been and the wonderland that is. Kisselgoff noted that Tetley "created a true dramatic ballet — all of a piece, seamlessly wending its way toward an emotional climax. And that climax is Alice Liddell's realization, in retrospect, that she loved Lewis Carroll just as much as he loved her."

Nadine Baylis, a long-time Tetley collaborator and one of England's prize stage designers, created both the costumes and set for *Alice*. Her "pop-up storybook" concept combines elements of fantasy with the Victorian setting of Carroll's story. ■

Kevin Bowles and Sonia Rodriguez as Mad Hatter and Child Alice in *Alice*. Photo by John Lauener.



CHOREOGRAPHER'S NOTE ON ALICE

By Glen Tetley

On the memorable afternoon of July 2, 1862, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson made a picnic excursion on the River Isis with 10-year-old Alice Pleasance Liddell and her two sisters and improvised for them the story he later wrote down as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and had published under the nom de plume Lewis Carroll.

Alice's encounter with the White Rabbit, her fall down the rabbit hole and her entry through the tiny door into the enchanted garden has fascinated generations of children and adults. Alice finds a world that seems upside down, full of arbitrary rules and regulations that no one seems to follow. The elusive White Rabbit, the Mouse who almost drowns with her in Alice's pool of tears, the attacking birds and beasts, the taciturn Caterpillar, the irascible Ugly Duchess and Queen of Hearts, the sorrowful Gryphon and lachrymose Mock Turtle and, of course, the hostile and antic Tea Party with the Mad Hatter and March Hare are all linked to incidents in Alice Liddell's life and people she knew.

Alice's father, Henry Liddell, was dean for many years of Christ Church College at Oxford. Charles Dodgson was also an ordained minister at Christ Church, but was kept from ever delivering a sermon by a pronounced stutter. A recluse, a brilliant mathematician, and one of the most famous 19th-century photographers of children, he felt most at ease in the company of young children, especially the daughters of the Liddell family.

Alice grew into a mature woman who married Reginald Hargreaves and bore children, suffered the death of two sons in the First World War, and later saw her husband die. She lived to the age of 82, a solitary figure. She never forgot Lewis Carroll.

Carroll wrote two Alice books — *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass and What She Found There* — both of which carry prefatory poems by him. In the second, the author in memory looks back at that golden afternoon. The meteorology charts say it was an overcast, rainy day, but that is the nature of memory. The only clouds in Carroll's memory are the great disparity in age between them, that with his death he will never know the older Alice of his imagination, nor will she in time remember the moment they shared.

With characteristic levity, Lewis Carroll apologizes in the last couplet of the fourth stanza:

*We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near.*

David Del Tredici's score is *Part I* of his evening-long *Child Alice* and is subtitled *In Memory of a Summer Day*. For large orchestra and soprano, it uses as text this poem, which prefaces the second *Alice* book. Del Tredici writes: "*In Memory of a Summer Day* seizes upon the six-stanza preface to the second *Alice* book and, with two contrasting settings separated by an orchestral movement, attempts to evoke one of those glorious summer days. It is not just the surface scene that is suggested — '*Many a day had we rowed together on that quiet stream — the three little maidens and I, and many a fairy tale had been extemporized for their benefit*' — but more importantly, and more appropriately, the music's expressive power also suggests the interior landscapes of the people involved."

As the poem suggests, the feelings were complex and varied: the simple delight of the child-listener is always placed in counterpoint against the story-teller's bittersweet, adult sensibility. A sad presentiment of loss fills many of the lines. After all, Carroll was so much older than the children he adored: *I and thou / Are half a life asunder.*

And he realized:

*No thought of me shall find a place
In thy young life's hereafter.*

The fact that Lewis Carroll wrote these stanzas years after the actual events they record is important. The peculiarly human mechanism that causes us all to recollect past joy and happiness with a special idealized glow is something that worked with particular efficiency in the psyche of the reclusive Lewis Carroll. ■

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