

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Christian Brown
Public Relations Director
cbrown@houstonballet.org
Press@houstonballet.org



DIRECTOR'S CHOICE: AMERICAN INGENUITY LAUNCHES THE 2016-2017 SEASON

HOUSTON, TEXAS [September 2016] Company revives George Balanchine's theme and variations

HOUSTON BALLET PREMIERES OF JEROME ROBBINS' *OTHER DANCES* AND WILLIAM FORSYTHE'S *ARTIFACT SUITE*

From September 8 - 18, 2016, Houston Ballet launches its 47th season with a mixed repertory program entitled **Director's Choice: American Ingenuity** featuring George Balanchine's tribute to Imperial Russian Ballet, **Theme and Variations**, and the company premieres of Jerome Robbins' dynamic **Other Dances**, and William Forsythe's **Artifact Suite**.

Artistic Director Stanton Welch AM notes, "I am excited for **Director's Choice: American Ingenuity** because all three works are stunning examples of American choreography. Balanchine is one of the fathers of American ballet; it's fitting that he would appear on this program. He created a new approach to ballet with his insistence on light, speedy footwork that challenged dancers to move in new and unexpected ways. All the while, he never lost sight of the beauty of classical ballet. **Theme and Variations** is his tribute to the grand classicism of Petipa and the tradition of grand ballet in Imperial Russia.

"Jerome Robbins was one of the true masters of dance. He had a unique and subtle sense of choreography which is lovely, and **Other Dances**, which is a new work of his to enter the company's repertoire, shows his beautiful interpretation of Chopin's music. William Forsythe is a world renowned choreographer and an important part of the dance scene in this country. **Artifact Suite** is a powerful piece that shows how he is constantly redefining the boundaries of contemporary dance and is an exciting addition to our repertoire," remarked Mr. Welch.

Houston Ballet's **Director's Choice: American Ingenuity** program is generously sponsored by: **Green Bank**.

MAJESTIC RETURN TO BALANCHINE'S *THEME AND VARIATIONS*

George Balanchine created **Theme and Variations** as the grandest tribute to his alma mater, the Imperial Russian Ballet, which Houston Ballet last performed in 2012. Balanchine originally created the work for American Ballet Theatre Principal Dancers Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch, and it premiered on November 26, 1947 at the City Center in New York City.

Set to the music of Tchaikovsky's *Suite No. 3, in G*, **Theme and Variations** explores classic ballet training, focusing on preparatory movements that were developed to train and warm-up the dancer's body. Taking these steps further, Balanchine produced some very challenging choreography.

Themes and Variations was intended, as Balanchine wrote, "to evoke that great period in classical dancing when Russian ballet flourished with the aid of Tchaikovsky's music." The final movement of the composer's third orchestral suite consists of 12 variations. The ballet opens to reveal a corps of 12 women and a principal couple. As

the ballet moves from variation to variation, the solo performances of the ballerina and her cavalier are interspersed among the corps performances.

Dance critic David Clarke from *BroadwayWorld*, praised Houston Ballet's performance of **Theme and Variations** by writing, "A fantastic reminder of how perfectly poised and regally elegant ballet can be. . . The piece is nothing short of graceful and courtly, majestic and refined" (May 25, 2012).

Although Balanchine once said, "I am more American than Russian," he still turned to the music of the great Russian composers, notably Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky, for his ballets. "My teachers were people who knew Tchaikovsky, who talked with him....My first time on stage was in a Tchaikovsky ballet," he stated. **Theme and Variations** was also choreographed with a classic Russian ballet in mind, Marius Petipa's **The Sleeping Beauty**. Balanchine has mentioned, "Thanks to **The Sleeping Beauty**, I fell in love with ballet. [Tchaikovsky] is like a father to me. In everything that I did to Tchaikovsky's music, I sensed his help."

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, George Balanchine (1904-1983) is regarded as the foremost contemporary choreographer in the world of ballet. Balanchine served as ballet master and principal choreographer for New York City Ballet from 1948 until his death in 1983. Balanchine's more than 400 dance works include **Serenade** (1934), **Concerto Barocco** (1941), **The Nutcracker** (1954), **Symphony in Three Movements** (1972), **Stravinsky Violin Concerto** (1972), **Vienna Waltzes** (1977), and **Mozartiana** (1981).

Along with **Theme and Variations** (created in 1947, performed by Houston Ballet in 1985, 1987, 1994, 1996, 2004, and 2012), Houston Ballet has 16 works by George Balanchine in its repertory: **Agon** (created in 1957, performed by Houston Ballet in 1996), **Apollo** (created in 1928, performed by Houston Ballet in 2004 and 2010), **Ballo della Regina** (created in 1978, performed by Houston Ballet in 2010, 2015), **Ballet Imperial** (created in 1941, performed by Houston Ballet in 2013), **Concerto Barocco** (created in 1941, performed by Houston Ballet in 1971 and 1977), **The Four Temperaments** (created in 1946, performed by Houston Ballet in 1988, 1997, 2003 and 2014), **Jewels (Diamonds, Rubies, and Emeralds)** (created in 1967, performed by Houston Ballet in 2010), **La Valse** (created in 1951, performed by Houston Ballet in 1988, 1996, and 2004), **Pas de Dix** (created in 1955, performed by Houston Ballet in 1969 and 1970), **Prodigal Son** (created in 1929, performed by Houston Ballet in 1974), **Raymonda Variations** (created in 1961, performed by Houston Ballet in 1971), **Serenade** (created in 1934, performed by Houston Ballet in 1985, 1987, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2008, 2016), **Symphony in C** (created in 1947, performed by Houston Ballet in 1992 and 2008), **Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux** (created in 1960, performed by Houston Ballet in 1971 and 1994), and **Western Symphony** (created in 1954, performed by Houston Ballet in 1986, 1990, 1994, and 2006).

OTHER DANCES, AN ICONIC ROBBINS BALLET, ENTERS THE REPERTOIRE

Famed American choreographer Jerome Robbins' **Other Dances** is a pas de deux created on legendary dancers Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov. Set to music by Frédéric Chopin, four mazurkas and one waltz, the piece was specifically crafted to display Makarova and Baryshnikov's legendary technique and artistry. **Other Dances**, through its simplicity and virtuosity, pays homage to both Chopin's Romanticism and the fluidity of classical ballet technique, while also containing playful influences of folk dance. **Other Dances** had its premiere in 1976 at a New York Public Library for the Performing Arts benefit.

New York-born choreographer Jerome Robbins, one of the first great American ballet masters, had a wide-ranging career in the fields of both theater and dance – as a performer and choreographer in ballet and musical theater, and as a director and choreographer in theater, movies, television and opera. In a career that spanned five decades, he won four Tony Awards, two Academy Awards, an Emmy, and countless other awards for his achievements. He joined Ballet Theatre (now American Ballet Theatre) in 1940 and choreographed his first work, **Fancy Free**, for that company in 1944. This was followed by **Interplay** (1945) and **Facsimile** (1946), after which he embarked on a prolific and enormously successful career as a choreographer and later as a director of Broadway musicals and plays. He was simultaneously creating ballets for New York City Ballet, which he joined in 1949 as associate director with George Balanchine. Among his outstanding works for that company were **The Guests** (1949), **The Age of Anxiety** (1951), **The Cage** (1951), **The Pied Piper** (1951), **Afternoon of a Faun** (1953), **Dances at a Gathering** (1969), **The Goldberg Variations** (1971) and **Glass Pieces** (1983).

Houston Ballet has five other works by Jerome Robbins in its repertoire: **The Concert, Afternoon of a Faun, In the Night, Fancy Free, and West Side Story Suite.**

COMPANY PREMIERES FORSYTHE'S CONTEMPORARY EXPLORATION, *ARTIFACT SUITE*

Rounding out the evening is the company premiere of William Forsythe's dramatic **Artifact Suite**. Intended for 35 dancers, **Artifact Suite** is an edited version of an evening-length ballet **Artifact** created in 1984 for Ballet Frankfurt. Here Mr. Forsythe shortens the ballet into a stunning piece that preserves all of the original ballet's striking innovation and power.

Artifact Suite is considered a major choreographic achievement that succeeds in deconstructing and reconstructing the rules of traditional ballet without denying its traditional technique. Rules are both extended and broken in this work whose powerful images perturb theatrical imagery and push the play of optical illusions to their limits.

Writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, dance correspondent Allan Ulrich wrote, "But Forsythe's skewed classicism, the abrupt transitions, the constantly evolving patterns for the 30-member corps and the omnipresent tension simmering under the surface suggest a vision of ballet for the 21st century" (February 26, 2011).

Raised in New York and initially trained in Florida with Nolan Dingman and Christa Long, Mr. Forsythe danced with The Joffrey Ballet and later the Stuttgart Ballet, where he was appointed resident choreographer in 1976. Over the next seven years, he created new works for the Stuttgart ensemble and ballet companies in Munich, The Hague, London, Basel, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Paris, New York, and San Francisco. In 1984, he began a 20-year tenure as director of the Ballet Frankfurt. Under his leadership, the Frankfurt Ballet was transformed from a capable regional troupe into one of Europe's foremost dance ensembles.

Mr. Forsythe's ballets have entered the repertoires of the world's leading companies, including the New York City Ballet, the Paris Opera Ballet, the Royal Ballet of London, the Nederlands Dans Theater, and the Royal Swedish Ballet. In March 2003, he received the prestigious Dance Magazine Award for his contribution to the field of dance. After the closure of the Frankfurt Ballet in 2004, Mr. Forsythe established a new, more independent ensemble, The Forsythe Company in 2005.

Houston Ballet has two other works by William Forsythe in its repertoire: **The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude** and **In the middle, somewhat elevated.**

For more information on Houston Ballet, visit www.houstonballet.org.

###