

Passion and Poise

Kenn Burke, Acting Artistic Director of Scottish Ballet and Artistic Director of Ulster Youth Dance Summer School talks to *Just Dance...!* and answers a few questions...

Fife-born Kenn trained in his home town of North Queensferry before joining Scottish Ballet's Scholarship Scheme. After completing his training at **The Royal Ballet School**, London, he returned to Scotland to join **Scottish Ballet** and was soon promoted to soloist, with leading roles in 'Othello', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Le Spectre De La Rose' and many other works. In 1988 he was invited to join the **Hong Kong Ballet** as Principal Dancer and during his time with the company, staged Jack Carter's 'Three Dances to Japanese music' and Peter Darell's 'The Nutcracker' and 'Cheri'. He was appointed Artistic Director of Scottish Ballet 2 in 1990, bringing a varied repertoire of dance to isolated communities in Scotland, smaller venues throughout England, Wales and Ireland; as well as to China and Malaysia.

Now Acting Artistic Director of **Scottish Ballet**, Kenn maintains responsibility for the company's artistic programme as well as much of the work of the Education Department and **Dance School of Scotland** as well as being Director of Dance at **Aberdeen International Youth Festival**.

Q: Why did you chose to be a professional dancer, and if you were beginning today, would you still make that choice?

A: "I had always danced, ever since I was three years old. I used to dance at kindergarten and then I went on to dance school. When I transferred to

secondary school, I was about 14 or 15 years old, I went to class three or four times a week. School started letting me have a day and a half off each week for dance and so my passion and commitment grew.

My decision to become a dancer was a natural choice, I was never forced but encouraged, there were some ups and downs but the choice was mine and I would still chose it again today."

Q: Why is it important to encourage outreach work in the field of dance?

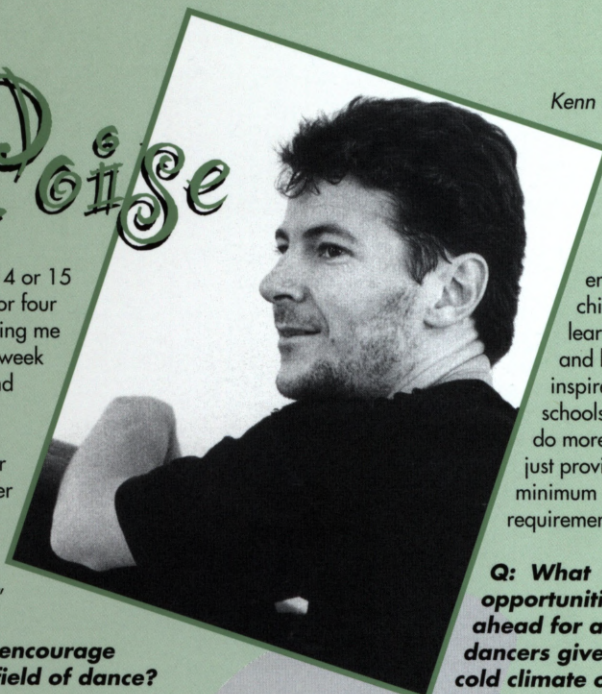
A: "Students need other experience, such as dance, but they have to want to do it and most importantly have fun. The outreach work is essential because it encourages the pupils to learn that dancing is a disciplined art form but also fun and accessible. It is important that those who dance do it for themselves otherwise they shouldn't do it. It is also important that the earlier we can work with them and introduce them to dance the better. Dance is about movement and sometimes children can be blinkered about this, but it can be changed. It is important to break down the preconceptions and stereotypes of dance for children, making them understand the importance of technique but have modern interpretations, make them understand the importance of the body and how it moves, give them a sense of all round training."

Q: What do you get out of your work with young dancers, and what do they get out of it?

A: "Firstly it is important to enjoy the day of work with the pupils, encourage the discipline and the fun too. Not everyone in the class is going to make a career of dance but so many can achieve other goals by learning from the discipline that dance instils when practising. If one person goes on to have a career in dance this is a bonus but I also get a buzz when others who have learnt dance chose to support the arts in other ways, such as Administrators, Stage Managers, Designers etc. having gained access to the arts thorough dance."

Q: Why is it important to include dance into education programmes?

A: "Dance should be something you grow up with, and instead of being taught by a teacher pupils should have access to drama/dance companies that can visit and demonstrate the artform. Schools have to legally provide Drama/Dance and Music, however this should be more than a one off visit from artists. It should incorporate follow up visits to



Kenn Burke.

encourage children to learn more and become inspired. I think schools should do more than to just provide the minimum legal requirement."

Q: What opportunities lie ahead for aspiring dancers given the cold climate of funding?

A: "New initiatives will ease this problem. New funding packages which have been earmarked for training will help, but the jobs are scarce now as a result of the cuts that have taken place over the years. The question now is where do they go when they have trained? However, I always tend to think positively and believe that eventually trained dancers will rally together to recreate a dynamic dance infrastructure."

Q: Name two favourite aspects of your job.

A: "I enjoy putting a programme together, it is exciting to see new work and talent fusing together on stage. I particularly enjoy finding new pieces which balance and complement each other in an overall programme, it is challenging and fun, working within a creative team and being able to mould this into one vision."

My other favourite aspect of my job is to find young talent and watch it evolve, it is glorious, be it in music, design or dance. I consider them the next generation of artists. The odd fight in trying to convince funding bodies to reward the arts is fun too."

Q: What opportunities are there for graduates of Ulster Youth Dance Summer School? And what additions would help the infrastructure of youth dance here in Northern Ireland?

A: "The presence of performing companies would encourage more opportunities, at the moment there are not enough professionals working in the field. Children need access and involvement in productions, they need hands on experience. What you ideally want is your own company and for your younger generation to have access to this. The will is there but unfortunately the inspiration for younger dancers to continue is not there. Parents also need

to be reassured that there is some job security there for dancers in Northern Ireland. More links should be made with education and there should be more regular provision of dance to encourage its natural development here in Northern Ireland. A regular provision of dance fed into schools should then be followed by touring professional companies who can access these children and show them what can be achieved. This would be a good starting point."

Q: Can you tell us briefly what your plans are for Ulster Youth Dance 1998?

A: "As wide a spectrum as possible with the time available to me. I aim to mix both contemporary and ballet classes to give each specialism a feeling that dance is not about being in pockets, you can mix and blend styles. They will have to do all the disciplines and this will hopefully open doors to new techniques. Classical Ballet technique is the one basic starting point and this needs to be built on since last year's programme. It is important that the pupils have fun and also gain contact with each other as well as learn that there are other areas of dance that they can go into."

Q: Given unlimited resources what kind of a youth dance project would you be keen to work on and why?

A: "To regularly programme auditions and to go out and do outreach work with a core group of children to encourage other children to get involved. It would be important to facilitate and not to lead a programme for children by children, allowing them access to technique classes, days of dance such as Jazz or Ballet etc. A youth for youth programme which works within the heart of the community."

Children should be given opportunities and an environment to open up in in order to use their imaginations.

Given time and commitment there would be a company or series of companies that could provide access to these groups. If children have access to someone working at their level they think all is achievable. Also a production would provide a working knowledge of performance. They should have experience of this as well as being in a theatre and learning how a production is put together. It is simply not good enough to keep pupils in their schools with outreach work on dance - they need real access to the many places where dance can perform and come alive."

Ulster Youth Dance Summer School takes place between Friday 26th June and Monday 29th June at Stranmillis College, Belfast. Auditions to be held in :

Belfast - Sunday 22nd March
Enniskillen - date to be confirmed
Derry - date to be confirmed.

For further information about times and venues contact Anne Goodwin at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland on 01232 385200.



'Performance' After training with **Ulster Youth Dance** Nonie Bradley takes to the stage as a professional dancer.

D a n c e a t a g l a n c e

FROM THREAD BARE TO WELL COVERED

The Golden Thread Theatre Belfast, built by the Flax Trust, and located in the Brookfield Mill complex, is pleased to announce exciting developments for the site. A dance studio is planned to open in mid February with demand for the facility already high and expected to be higher. The Golden Thread Theatre and **Hoi Polloi Dance Company** is in the process of a dance project between the Flax Day Centre (pensioners), Shankill Day Centre (pensioners) and the Pop Bar with Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School (13-16 year olds). This is funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council and Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. If you are interested in gaining more information about the dance studio facility or the workshops that are currently running, contact Paula McCroghan on 01232 745241

ITC DANCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

An exciting programme designed by the Independent Theatre Council and funded by Arts Council of England (ACE). The Development Programme, planned to stretch over three years, is designed to tackle a number of problematic areas for dance managers.

The first year will try to establish a solid infrastructure through Board training, staff appraisal and practical skills development. This will be combined with Action Learning. The 2nd and 3rd years, (funding to be confirmed), will look to develop mentoring, further training and the possibility of a bursary scheme for long term study secondments. Further information can be gained from ITC by telephoning 0171 403 6698

JUST BRILLIANT...!

Following a good response to our competition in the last Issue of *Just Dance...!* Nuala Reilly from Belfast won tickets to see Merce Cunningham's 'Ocean' and Mrs J Hunter from Antrim won tickets to see 'Tap Dogs'. The answer to the question "Who inspired Merce Cunningham's Ocean?" was James Joyce and the other award winning musical which visited the Grand Opera House in Belfast choreographed by Dein Perry was 'Hot Shoe Shuffle'. The winning catch phrase, also from Nuala Reilly, was "I read *Just Dance...!* because it's "just brilliant."

TOP OF THE CLASS

Winner of the 1996 Arts Council Scholarship to the Aberdeen Summer School Laura Hendley has now gained a three year scholarship to "Ballet West" Ballet School in Scotland.

BACK TO BASICS

After winning the Bass Ireland Arts Award in 1985, then working with numerous professional companies including **Northern Ballet**, Clare Noaves returns to Northern Ireland to open her own school of dance in Moira. The new term begins on 16th February, teaching mainly classical ballet and following the Royal Academy of Dancing Children's syllabus. For more information or enrolment details contact Clare Noaves on 01849 454620

CALLING ALL DANCERS

"Community Dance, now under the co-ordination of myself, with the help of Martin Lynch and the Community Arts Forum, has been working away this past year teaching a variety of dance techniques to

many community centres around Belfast. We are trying to increase the amount of centres, schools, organisations and individual groups we can service regardless of age, experience or physical abilities. Should anyone wish to be involved in our dance programme, or just want more information, please phone the CAF office on 01232 242910".

Jennifer Jordan

JENNIFER BULLICK - HALL WINS AWARD FOR SERVICE

Congratulations to Jennifer Bullick-Hall, winner of the Arts Category in Lisburn Borough Council's 1997 "Making A Difference Awards". A panel of Judges led by Dr Mary Peters acknowledged Jennifer's tireless promotion of ballet in the Lisburn area for more than 20 years. She was presented with an engraved ceramic figure designed by Louise O'Boyle at a dinner last autumn.

DANCE TEACHER GOES BACK TO SCHOOL

Anthea McWilliams has been invited to work as a dancer in residence during February, following on in the footsteps of Mags Byrne. The adviser for the North Eastern Education and Library Board, Noleen McConnell, is delighted that Anthea can work with the selected primary schools and special need schools in the area.

Pupils will work intensively with Anthea before presenting short performances at the end of each of the 5 weeks. Schools involved in the project are: Kiltonnan Special School, Magherafelt Primary, Holy Family Primary, Rainey Preparatory,

Glengormley Primary, Carnmoney Primary and St Mac Nissis Primary School and Ballycastle schools.

This project is supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Further details can be obtained from Noleen McConnell on 01266 662393.

PETER DARRELL TRUST AWARDS

The Peter Darrell Trust is commemorating the late Peter Darrell CBE, founder Director of the **Scottish Ballet**, with an Award in his name which will be a platform for emerging choreographers. Applications are invited from choreographers working in different dance disciplines from both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The selection panel will commission three choreographers who will be invited to create their work with 18 dancers from **Scottish Ballet** for three weeks in September 1998.

The works will be shown in Glasgow on Saturday 3rd October 1998 and the Award winner will receive a prize of £5,000. On Sunday 4th October there will be an open discussion between judges and choreographers. The deadline for applications is April 30th 1998. If you would like further information or an application form contact: Judy Spence Administrator The Peter Darrell Trust, 33 Ulundi Rd, Blackheath, London SE3 7UQ.

