

## FOOTNOTES

MARCH 2006

VictoriaDanceSeries.com

BY FASTRAC

#13

The prolific German composer George Frideric Handel was born in 1685, the son of a butcher/surgeon (ouch). During the 74 years of his life, Handel would write operas, orchestral music, oratorios, cantatas, duets, church music, and chamber music – but the one enduring work that has been performed almost continuously since his death is *Messiah*.

# A DANCING SINGING MESSIAH

Tara Birwhistle & Jaime Vargas in *The Messiah* Photographer: David Cooper

Handel's father opposed his son's desire to pursue a career in music, although he did agree to his receiving some instruction as a youth. To appease his father, Handel studied law at 18, but after his father's death, he turned his full attention to music. He arrived in Hamburg in 1703 where he secured a position playing second violin in the opera orchestra. When that orchestra's music director tired of the libretto he was using to write an opera, Handel finished it for him and it was produced in 1705.

But it was in 1706 when a 21-year-old Handel traveled to Italy as part of the

Prince's retinue that his life was changed. In Italy, Handel met several opera composers and was exposed first-hand to the developing Italian style. At the time, Venice was the centre of opera, but a newer style was emerging in Naples where composers were concerned with musical elegance rather than emphasizing the drama in a given story. These Neapolitan operas had shorter recitatives and featured what would become the "de capo aria", arias that incorporate two contrasting sentiments based on the same theme.

Handel remained in Italy for a few years,

writing at least two operas that were produced. He was hailed as a genius by his contemporaries by the time he was in his mid-twenties.

Shortly afterwards, he settled in England where he lived for 35 years. He was provided a king's pension in 1712 and spent the ensuing years composing all forms of music. Handel wrote many operas between 1720 and 1740, but by the mid-eighteenth century, the popularity of Italian-style opera was in decline.

In 1737, Handel suffered a stroke and he turned his attention to the creation of a

**continues >**

## PRE-SHOW CHATS

These informal conversations occur in the lobby of the Royal Theatre beginning at 7:20pm before both evening performances. There is no pre-show chat prior to the matinee.

First Soloists Sarah Murphy-Dyson and her husband Johnny Wright will talk about their experiences working with RWB and reflect on their future as Sarah prepares to retire from dance.

The **Victoria Dance Series Society** is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to dance presentation and education.

Our **mission** is: to enhance the appreciation of dance in the Capital Region by presenting and developing professional dance and engaging the community in outreach programs.

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**Footnotes** is prepared by Stephen White and proofed by Anne Moon.

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### > continued

series of oratorios. An oratorio is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “a musical composition for voices and orchestra, telling a sacred story without costumes, scenery or dramatic action.”

*Messiah*, a favourite of Handel's, would emerge as the most popular and enduring of these works. Charles Jennens (librettist for *Messiah*) had recently compiled some works based on scripture and convinced Handel to score the work. Handel was at a low point in his career at the time, having recently abandoned the Royal College of Music where he had been one of the principal directors.

*Messiah* was composed over 24 days in 1741 (August 22 to September 14). The work is divided into three parts: Christ's birth, death and resurrection. Each part includes a series of arias supported by choruses using scripture as the basis. The work premiered in Dublin in 1742, and for many years, Handel traveled England and Ireland with the oratorio, modifying the score to accommodate various singers or the composition of specific choirs.

In the years after his death, *Messiah* was adapted many times, most famously by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1788. Mozart shortened phrase lengths and added new parts for wind instruments. The wind instrumentation was meant to complement the organ or in some cases, where there was no organ available, substitute for the organ.

In nineteenth century England, oratoria became the vogue musical form and *Messiah* was at the forefront of this trend, performed by increasingly large choirs. In 1834, 644 choisters performed the Mozart version at Westminster Abbey.

When Handel died in 1759 he was a celebrated musician who had enjoyed the favour of royalty and his contemporaries. *Messiah* was already a popular work that only gained in status over the following 250 years. **FN**

PLEASE NOTE: The *Messiah* runs 80 minutes without intermission.



Tara Birtwhistle & Jaime Vargas in *The Messiah* Photographer: David Cooper

## Dancing Messiah

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's version of *Messiah* was first created by Argentinean choreographer Mauricio Wainrot for the Royal Ballet of Flanders in 1997. A longer version was subsequently created for the National Chilean Ballet. The work was then restaged for Wainrot's own Buenos Aires company, Ballet Contemporáneo de Teatro San Martín. The Ballet Opera of Bordeaux and the Ballet Opera of Nice have also produced this work.

Wainrot says "To create my ballet I selected 31 parts [the original has 53 parts] and for the end I used the well known Hallelujah. Although my work is inspired by Handel's magnificent oratory, it's not based really on the texts, as my piece does not follow any kind of story. It's been conceived in a more abstract way. Through the movements, situations and scenes, it shows mysticism, the religiosity, the emotion and the joy this music has."

The RWB production includes a live orchestra, choir and soloists. In Victoria, the 32-member choir will be split into four sections and situated on stage, in the orchestra pit and in the two loges on the right and left inside the audience chamber. The four soloists will sing from the pit. The result should be a glorious "surround sound" experience for the audience.

## Choreographer Mauricio Wainrot

Mauricio Wainrot is currently Artistic Director of Ballet Contemporáneo de Teatro San Martín of Buenos Aires and Permanent Guest Choreographer of The Royal Ballet of Flanders, Belgium. Since 1992, he has created 10 ballets for the Royal Ballet of Flanders including *Carmina Burana*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Messiah*, and *Firebird*.

Wainrot is a former Artistic Director of Les Ballets Jazz de Montréal in Canada, and Grupo de Danza Contemporánea de Teatro San Martín of Buenos Aires, Argentina. He danced as principal guest dancer with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Teatro Municipal Ballet of Rio de Janeiro, and the Ballet Contemporáneo of Buenos Aires among others.

Wainrot left Argentina in 1986, invited by Ulf Gaad, Artistic Director of the Göteborg Opera Ballet of Sweden, to stage *Anne Frank*, *Symphony of Psalms* and *Three Argentine Dances*. The success of this program, brought invitations to set his works and to create new ones for companies in Europe and America.

More than 35 companies have premiered Wainrot's works in the last 14 years. He has been nominated for the International Dance Award, Benois de la Danse 2003 for *Distant Light*, in Moscow at the Bolshoi Theatre. As well he was awarded the 1993 and 1998 Choo-San Go Choreographic Award for *Perpetual Motion*, which he created for the Hubbard Street Dance in Chicago, and for *Now and Then* for the Richmond Ballet. In 1991, 1994, 1998 and 1999 the Chilean Critics Association awarded him with the APES Prize, for Best Production of the year for *Anne Frank*, *4 Janis For Joplin*, *Libertango* and *Messiah*, respectively.

Wainrot's work has received strong recognition including the Konex Platinum Prize in Argentina as Best Choreographer of the

Decade (1999) as well as Argentina Premio Teatros del Mundo for *Messiah*.

## Singing Messiah

The 32-member University of Victoria Chamber Singers under the musical direction of Bruce More has been engaged to sing *Messiah*. The choir is comprised of UVic Students. Forty percent are voice majors, 40 instrumental performance majors and the remaining 20 from other (mostly) music programs. More auditions singers for the choir each year.

Typical repertoire is "art music" from the middle ages to the 21st century. More has been director for 33 years and has accompanied the choir on tours around the world that have taken the singers to 132 cities in 31 countries. The choir performs four programs a year in Victoria.

## Featured Soloists

*Messiah* features four soloists. Three of these singers are currently completing degrees at University of British Columbia including Vancouver soprano Jennifer Farrell, Iranian born mezzo-soprano Shirin Eskandani and Matthew Stephanson (tenor). The fourth soloist is Steven Price (bass) who lives with his wife and four children in Victoria. He teaches Music and French at Oak Bay High School. All four soloists have considerable performance and recording experience. **FN**

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# WHAT PRICE BEAUTY? WEN WEI DANCE IN VICTORIA

By Robin J. Miller

When he was a young boy in Xian, China, dancer/choreographer Wen Wei Wang (pronounced Wong) watched his grandmother take the wrappings off her feet, and ran away in horror. He never forgot what he saw.

Binding the feet of girls as young as three or four years old began, so at least one legend has it, during the Song Dynasty (AD 960 – 1280) when a prince's concubine walked so delicately and gracefully it seemed as if she was skimming across lily pads. For centuries thereafter, the Chinese ideal was a three inch foot called *san zun jin luan*, or golden lily.

“Our ideals of beauty have changed,” says Wen Wei, “but women still wear high heels, don't they? When I saw the shoes the Beijing Opera brought to Vancouver for a workshop last year, I knew I had to use them.”

The shoes are embroidered red silk, about four inches high in the back, and shaped to mimic a bound foot: tiny and pointed and very restricting. The women wearing them look spectacular, their legs incredibly long and lean. But like a ballet pointe shoe, the opera shoes limit their movement. They can move slowly in a straight line, forward or back, without help; for anything more complex, they must depend on a partner.

With these shoes as a starting point for Wen Wei's latest full-length work, you could be forgiven for expecting a pretty heavy and didactic piece — a lesson on the painful price women pay for beauty, or on men's need to dominate women, for example. But as the audience for the as-yet-untitled piece learned this past January, “I am not trying to teach anyone anything. People know the history of bound feet, and they can read it more clearly than I can tell it on a stage. I'm just fascinated by the shoes and how the women look in them, how the shoes change their technique and movement — and how powerful the women are without them.”

In the second Victoria Dance Series creative residency (battery opera held the first last year), Wen Wei and the five other dancers who make up Vancouver-based Wen Wei Dance lived and worked here for three weeks this winter. Wen Wei used the time — after teaching a class for local dancers in the morning — simply to see where the shoes would take him. “The residency gave me the space and time to experiment with the shoes and my ideas,

how I dance and how I see dance.”

The residency also gave Wen Wei the chance to present and explain his new work to a select audience at the end of the residency, on January 27th, that included five dance presenters from across the country: Brian Webb (Canada Dance Festival, Ottawa); Robin Poitras (New Dance Horizons, Regina); Gay Hauser (Live Art, Halifax); Bobbie Todd (Dancers' Studio West, Calgary); and Paul Gravett (ArtSpring, SaltSpring Island). The result was universal acclaim, both for the shoes and for the choreography, particularly the high-speed and high-powered group work that reflects Wen Wei's key influences and complex dance vocabulary that reviewer Kaija Pepper, writing in *The Dance Current*, called “a sophisticated fusion of cultural styles.”

Wen Wei started to dance at age six in an after-school program, performing to songs in praise of Chairman Mao. At age 13, the government paid for him to study ballet, Chinese classical and Chinese and international folk dance at Langzhou Regional Dance Company. On graduation in 1982, he joined the company and looked set for a stellar career as both dancer and award-winning choreographer in his home country — except that he caught a glimpse of something he wanted even more in Canada in 1986.

“We started to see films of Graham, Balanchine in the early 1980s so I knew there were other forms of dance out there,” Wen Wei says, “then I came to Vancouver on a cultural exchange to perform and teach classical Chinese dance and I saw the kind of



dance going on here in real life and I said ‘wow!’”

Wen Wei came back in 1991 on a student visa to take a summer intensive program at Simon Fraser University, and never left. He first joined Judith Marcuse’s modern dance company and later Ballet British Columbia, with a year away to dance with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in Montreal. At the same time, he continued to develop his own choreographic ideas, creating dances for both traditional Chinese and contemporary companies. The year 2000 was particularly important for him: He both won the Clifford E. Lee Choreography Award and decided to leave the shelter of Ballet BC to launch out on his own.

“When I first came here,” he says, “I wanted to be a western person. I wanted to learn the culture, to be the culture here, and forget where I came from. But later, I grew up. I realized that I can’t change myself. I am still Chinese and I have to find my own language — and the only way I could really find that language was to do my own choreography, with my own dancers. At first, what I did was more like ballet. I just took what I knew and put the steps together, but now I try to find myself in the steps, who I am.”

The audience gets a strong hint of exactly who Wen Wei is through his dances. The partly finished piece he showed to the

piece, too.”

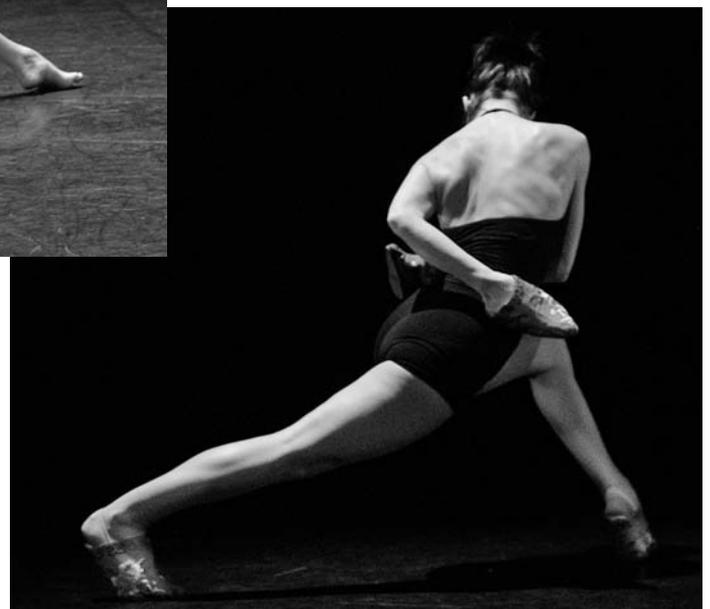
Through February and March, Wen Wei and his dancers – Scott Augustine, Karissa Barry, Alison Denham, Farley Johansson and Shannon Moreno – will continue to work on the piece in Vancouver. They will take a few weeks off in April, then come together again in May to polish the work with the finished score by Giorgio Magnanensi, artistic director of Vancouver New Music. A second creative residency, this time at Banff, will allow Wen Wei the almost-unheard-of luxury of seven days in a theatre to perfect the set, costumes and lighting.

Finally, the work will premiere at the Canada Dance Festival in Ottawa this June. It will also be featured as part of *Dancing on the Edge* in Vancouver in July, and will then go on a cross-Canada tour of at least six cities next fall — including (most importantly) a stop here in Victoria in October.

*NOTE: In January 2006, the Victoria Dance Series hosted a three week creative residency for Wen Wei Dance. Writer Robin J. Miller was asked by the Series to write about the experience. Robin is a Victoria-based writer and editor. She regularly writes feature articles and reviews for a variety of performing arts publications, including The Dance Current and Dance International.*



presenters here in January is not strictly modern, nor quite ballet — though elements of both are there as the dancers move between rooted and earthy power and moments of ethereal grace. There are also elements of Tai Chi in the constantly moving circles and spirals the dancers create with their bodies, and of Beijing Opera in the work’s out-and-out theatricality: “I want to see the emotion through the steps,” says Wen Wei, “to make the steps say a story and make you feel something. I don’t try to tell the big stories, show how intellectual I am. I want people to enjoy watching us, to feel our emotions, our lives and be a part of the



# RETIRING: SARAH MURPHY-DYSON

By Stephen White

At the end of this season, Victoria native and audience favourite Sarah Murphy-Dyson will be hanging up her pointe shoes to pursue a career in acting.

One of our city's finest exports, she began her training with Maureen Eastick at the Pacific Dance Centre and also trained at The National Ballet School, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School and the Vancouver Goh Ballet. Murphy-Dyson was a member of the Banff Festival Ballet for seven summers. She joined Alberta Ballet in 1994 and after three seasons Sarah and her husband Johnny Wright joined the RWB in 1997. Once in the company she quickly danced her way up the ranks and by her fourth season she was promoted to First Soloist.

Sarah had the lead role of 'Papagena' created on her by celebrated choreographer Mark Godden for his world premiere production of *The Magic Flute*, which toured to impressive reviews. *The Times Colonist* wrote, "Sarah Murphy-Dyson... dances an earthy and erotic Papagena... she is superb in a three-minute solo."

**Recently, I caught up with Sarah while the RWB was on a tour of the US. I asked her what she was going to miss the most when she left the company.**

**SMD:** Definitely the touring (with Johnny especially) and the family dynamic. I know I will remain close with many dancers, they are indeed my family, but the bond that is forged before every opening, every show — I will be an outsider to that and I know that will be a real struggle for me.

**SW:** What have been the highlights in your dancing career?

**SMD:** There are so, so many. Performing in Thessalonika, Greece in the Herodus Atticus Theatre to Beethoven's 7th Symphony at sunset with the moon hovering over the Acropolis. That was too beautiful and moving to even describe. Performing *Carmen* with Alberta Ballet, my first performance as a true professional dancer to some of my favourite music. Dancing Myrtha, Queen of the Willis in *Giselle* (Vancouver). The rush after any show, especially if you have to conquer fear or self-doubt in particularly challenging roles — the afterglow is so sweet. And of course performing on stage with (my husband) Johnny. In particular, *Dracula* at the National Arts Centre in January 2006. It was incredibly intense, almost overwhelmingly so.

**SW:** How are you preparing for life as an actress?

**SMD:** I have been taking classes at the University of Winnipeg (theatre), as well as private film acting instruction. Last summer

when I made the decision this would be my last season I was studying with Shea Hampton in Vancouver. I hope to continue with her. She made me realize that I have something in me that is worth pursuing.

**SW: Finally — fast forward a few years. Where do you see yourself?**

**SMD:** I hope to be working enough as an actor that it is my only source of income. I hope to have experience both on stage and on screen and I hope I am loving it. If not, back to university! I imagine I will be dividing my time between Winnipeg (Johnny will keep dancing indefinitely) and Vancouver, where my agent is. Maybe by then Johnny will have retired and I will have convinced him to pursue acting as well. He is ridiculously talented. Who knows? It is all so exciting. I have overwhelming waves of grief occasionally, but they are very private, and necessary and achingly sweet. And soon, they are replaced by excitement I can hardly contain. So I'm in a really great place. I look forward to being in Victoria soon! **FN**



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## NEWS

### Community Dance update

Paula Jardine, Artistic Director of the Victoria Dance Series' Community Dance Project has been developing a plan that will culminate in a series of Dance Encounters on Summer Solstice, June 21st, featuring local dancers of many disciplines.

Jardine intends downtown Victoria to come alive with Victoria tap dancers of all ages at lunch hour on June 21, and later that day, the public will be invited to stroll through Holland Point Park, off Dallas Road between Battery and Lewis Streets. Here, many dancers will be featured in pockets of landscape. The evening will culminate in a social dance at sunset, with live acoustic music. If you or your group are interested in creating a piece for Dance Encounters, please contact Paula at [mrspaula@telus.net](mailto:mrspaula@telus.net)

There are also opportunities to be involved in someone else's choreography, or to participate in a workshop, or volunteer to help you can register online at: [www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com) or phone 595-1829.

### Every Body Dance

In the fall of 2005, the Victoria Dance Series provided two local choreographers with the resources to explore dancing for and with disabled partners. We are now finalizing plans for another series of spring workshops with dance leader Lori Hamar (co-Artistic Director, Suddenly Dance Theatre), for dancers with physical disabilities. All are invited to participate in a lively series of dance workshops, designed for dancers & non dancers of all ages and abilities. A second series of workshops for the developmentally disabled will be led by Geoff McMurchy, artistic director of Kickstart! disability arts festival. These workshops will include live music, and work with fabric, flags and ribbons! Both workshops will invite the creation of performance pieces for Dance Encounters, June 21st. To learn more, go to:

[www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com](http://www.VictoriaDanceSeries.com)

Tamara Unroe and Sharon Bayly of the Vancouver performance company Mortal Coil have been invited to lead a stilt-dancing workshop in Victoria called Ultimate High with a group of at-risk youth. The Victoria Dance Series is very pleased to have received support from the Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation and Arts Now! to support this week-long intensive program. Youth participants will build their own stilts, learn to walk/dance in them, create characters and costumes, and ultimately perform at Dance Encounters and other community parades and events.

### Dance Victoria

By now, some of you will have learned that the Victoria Dance Series is in the process of changing its name to Dance Victoria. We will be launching our new name just in time to announce our 10th anniversary season, which we expect will happen in mid-April. Why change our name, you wonder?

There are two principal reasons. The first is that Victoria Dance

Series is an awkward mouthful, and despite a decade of full houses and great workshops, people in the region still say "huh?" every time we say "We are involved in the Victoria Dance Series".

Secondly, over the past two or three seasons, our outreach activity — creative residencies, the number of community workshops, master classes, and lecture demonstrations — has grown so significantly that having "Series" in the name of our organization doesn't make sense any more. The series of dance presentations will continue to be our primary activity, but we wanted a name that encompassed all of our activity and that wasn't limited to just the performances.

### Individual Donor Campaign

It's that time of year again when we ask you to dig into your pocket and make a donation to our charitable non-profit organization. Your donation means we can continue to offer free dance workshops to the developmentally and physically disabled, provide free Nutcracker tickets to the less advantaged, offer rush seats to our performances for \$7.50 to youth in grades eight through twelve, host dance companies who are developing new work, and provide opportunities for our local dance community to take daily class with visiting professionals.

You'll be receiving our donor brochure in the mail. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us at 595-1829 or send an email to [producer@dancevictoria.com](mailto:producer@dancevictoria.com)

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## QUARTER NOTES

### Dancing Ondaatje

The Crimson Coast Dance Society presents *Spoken Dance* at the Port Theatre, Nanaimo, Saturday, May 6 at 7:30 pm. With author Michael Ondaatje (*The English Patient*), dancers Andrea Nann and Gerald Michaud, and cellist Anne Bourne.

The performance is followed by a catered reception and book signing with the artists. Crimson Coast is offering a special price for Victoria Dance Series subscribers:

Performance: \$32

Performance and reception: \$72

(Regular Prices for Performance/Reception: \$35 / \$75)

Information: (250)716-3230

[www.crimsoncoastdance.org](http://www.crimsoncoastdance.org)

Port Theatre Box Office: (250) 754-8550

### Made in BC Dance on Tour

**Problem:** A lot of very good dance is being created in BC, but very little of it tours to the smaller centres in the province. Often, small companies or dance artists will spend months (even a year or two) creating new works that play for a couple of nights to a handful of people in a hard-to-find Vancouver venue.

**Problem:** Many small centres in BC are afraid to program dance in their venues. They have success with music and children's entertainers, maybe even the odd touring theatre production – but when it comes to dance – who understands it? How do you talk about it and where does your audience come from?

**Solution:** *Made in BC Dance on Tour.*

Over the past couple of years I joined my colleagues to develop a project that will send BC dance companies out on the road and provide presenters in small communities with the tools to reach out to their communities and make dance performance an exciting entertainment option. Just a few weeks ago, we launched our project at the Dance Centre in Vancouver and the excitement in the air that evening was palpable. Simply put, at the end of March this year, dance companies will be able to pitch their show to a group of eight regional presenters who will select two productions to tour the province during the 2007/08 season. In the 2006/07 season, Made in BC will put dance artists into the eight presenter communities to lead workshops, offer lecture demonstrations, and reach out to the local studios to prepare each community for the advent of dance performance. It has been a thrilling process and we are indeed very proud of this initiative to bring more dance to more BC residents.

For more information contact

Project Coordinator Robyn Campbell: (604) 893-8830

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We all enjoyed Crystal Pite's innovative choreography when Ballets Jazz de Montreal was in town in November 2005. In this piece with live musician, Pite joins forces with her former Ballett Frankfurt colleague Richard Seigal in a witty, contemporary work that is choreographed and danced by Pite and Seigal.

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