

JIŘÍ KYLIÁN CHOREOGRAPHER

“The task of the choreographer,” affirms Jiří Kylián, *“is to plumb the depths of the human soul.”*

Since the beginning of the 1970s, this celebrated Czech choreographer (born in Prague in 1947) has created more than 100 works, three-quarters of which for the Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT). Kylián has truly invented a new choreographic vocabulary that is based on the classical, but enriched with other influences (Czech folk dancing, circus, theatre, Limon or Graham techniques), and with emphasis on expressive and physical strength.

Fascinated by the magic of the circus, the young Kylián cut his teeth in acrobatics before pursuing dance training at the age of nine at the National Theatre ballet school in Prague. Six years later, in 1962, he was admitted to the Prague Conservatory and obtained a scholarship to continue his training at The Royal Ballet in London in 1967-68. There, he met a key figure, choreographer John Cranko, who invited him to join the Stuttgart Ballet in Germany and encouraged him to embark on a career as a choreographer.

In 1975, Kylián left Germany to become artistic co-director of the Nederlands Dans Theater, a company for which he had already created several pieces: *Viewers* in 1973, followed by *Stoolgame* in 1974, and *Submerged Cathedral* and *Return to a Strange Land* in 1975.

Three years later, in 1978, following the success of *Sinfonietta*—a ballet danced to the music of his countryman, composer Leoš Janáček, and performed at the Festival of Two Worlds in Charleston, South Carolina—Kylián became full artistic director at the NDT. He created *Symphony of Psalms* (1978), a work that played a key role in the evolution of his company and contributed to its international renown, followed by *Forgotten Land* (1981), *Svadebka* (1982), *Stamping Ground* (1983), *The Child and the Spells* (1984), *Six Dances* (1986), *Bella Figura* (1995)... “For me, an ideal world would be the union of humanity and intellectuality. This is choreography’s highest attainment.”

Gradimir Pankov and Jiří Kylián have had a close relationship since 1980, thanks to the many affinities that drew them together. Both were born into Slavic cultures, both were trained in Russian-inspired classical ballet, and both had to prove themselves at Western schools. These two men stand at the crossroads of learning and form. After meeting in Germany in 1980, Kylián asked Pankov to join the Nederlands Dans Theater at La Haye, where he had just been named Director. Pankov would become a teacher there and eventually take the role of Artistic Director for NDT II. Once named the Artistic Director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Gradimir Pankov would stage *Symphony of Psalms*, *Bella Figura*, *Six Dances* and *Forgotten Land*, all of which were applauded by Montréal audiences.

In the mid-1980s, after making his mark with lyrical ballets, Kylián turned to creating

more abstract pieces, often surrealist, of which the ballets in the *Black and White* series are an example. At the same time, his encounter with Australian Aboriginals began to exert a strong influence on his ideas about dance, a cornerstone of our social structure and an essential component of humanity's cultural heritage. On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the Nederlands Dans Theater, he created *Arcimboldo* (1994), a work showcasing the dancers of the NDT I, NDT II and NDT III. This unique three-dimensional structure employed dancers between the ages of 17 and 70, "tracing the three ages of a dancer's life." In August 1999, Jiří Kylián resigned as artistic director of the Nederlands Dans Theater, but continued to play an important role as a choreographer in residence until 2009. In November 2008, he created his 100th choreography, entitled *Gods and Dogs*, for NDTII.

Widely admired for his choreographies created for dancers of all ages, Kylián has received numerous awards and honours, notably the Nijinsky Prize in Monaco and the French Legion of Honour, as well as the much-coveted Knight Officer of the Order of Orange Nassau, awarded by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. In 2006, he co-created the film *Car-Men*, shot in the desolate landscape of an open-pit coal mine in the Czech Republic.