

Andris Toppe

Biography as at 30 November 2010

As a dancer, choreographer and teacher, Andris Toppe has travelled the world in a career encompassing classical ballet, contemporary dance, cabaret, films, opera, puppetry, television, theatre and ice skating.

He began as dancer with Victorian Ballet Guild during its pro-am period in early 1960's, then The Australian Ballet 1964 – 1969. Following this, he lived in Canada and the United States for five years, studying and performing with the American Ballet Theatre School, Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, including three seasons in New York of their hit production of *Tommy*.

On his return to Australia in 1975 Andris joined Ballet Victoria, with which he enjoyed many solo and lead roles, and toured with international guest artists Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov.

Andris has had a lengthy association with former Artistic Directors of Sydney Dance Company, Graeme Murphy and Janet Vernon, firstly as friends and colleagues in The Australian Ballet and later, upon Graeme and Janet's appointment as Artistic Director and Associate Director, as a dancer in inaugural seasons of Sydney Dance Company (then called Dance Company of NSW).

During this time Janet and Graeme also offered Andris his first opportunities to extend himself as a teacher and choreographer with Sydney Dance Company, resulting in the ballets *Toccata* and *Suite For A Lonely Child*. Following this, having received a grant, he took the opportunity for a study period at The Juillard School New York, and upon his return to Australia he began to freelance, working with all the major state dance companies around Australia, plus many commercial stage film and TV situations (see credits page in the website).

Many years later their working association continued when Graeme, having choreographed the first show for the British ice-skaters Torvill and Dean, asked Andris to work with them and their company of skaters as rehearsal director. Until their retirement from performing, Andris was personal coach and rehearsal director for Torvill and Dean, working on all their world tours and shows between 1985 and 1998, choreographing and directing a number of these shows and assisting with their TV and video specials.

Upon returning to Australia, Andris had successful engagements as choreographer of the hit musicals *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum* and *The Merry Widow* for Simon Gallaher and Essgee Entertainment, which toured Australia and New Zealand in 1999.

Andris enjoyed a happy re-acquaintance with Graeme Murphy's work in the world premiere and several return seasons of Graeme's *Nutcracker, the story of Clara* for The Australian Ballet, most recently in 2009 for seasons in Sydney and Melbourne. He renewed artistic collaboration with Janet and Graeme at Sydney Dance Company in 2004, performing the role of the photographer (Andy Warhol) in *Shades of Gray*, and in 2006 as one of the two Victorian ladies in *Glimpses* during seasons at the Sydney Opera House and on tour. These performances were undertaken whilst simultaneously fulfilling his duties as Company Manager/Assistant to Artistic Directors of Sydney Dance Company, a position to which he was appointed in 2000.

Andris was Company Manager of Sydney Dance until December 2008, a position which limited his partaking of choreographic endeavours, however he was able to do some out-of-hours work with several Australian ice-skaters for their amateur competitions and he assisted Sydney Theatre Company's *Wharf Revue* team on one of their annual productions.

During June and July 2009, Andris undertook the position of Company Manager for the Paris Opera Ballet's visit to Australia, and during October 2009 he had similar duties with Melbourne International Arts Festival. Activities in 2010 included being the artist liaison person for Toumani Diabate and his band for their Sydney Festival performances, stage managing PACT House Production's Melbourne season of the play *Proof*, adjudicating dance events at Sydney Eisteddfod, and being Company Manager for the Ballet Nacional de Cuba's visit to Australia.

This was followed by a return to performing again in Graeme Murphy's *Nutcracker, the story of Clara* for The Australian Ballet's tour to Tokyo in October and will be followed in December by Andris' participation with Young Dancers of Central Queensland production of a traditional *Nutcracker* in the role of Drosselmeier.

For further information please visit: www.andristoppe.com