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Dancing Shakespeare in Australia

“I think it’s brave of anyone to make a ballet out of a Shakespeare play” (Buckle 163).¹ So wrote Richard Buckle, one of the greatest dance critics of the twentieth century, in the *Sunday Times* for St Valentine’s Day 1965—appropriately, for he was reviewing Fonteyn and Nureyev in Kenneth MacMillan’s *Romeo and Juliet*, and the quotation began with his declaring “It was jolly brave of Kenneth MacMillan to tackle Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* after the overwhelming Lavrovsky version [which he had reviewed on 21 July 1963]” and continued “—but then I think it’s brave of anyone to make a ballet out of a Shakespeare play”. Leonid Lavrovsky’s was the first Soviet version of Prokofiev’s ballet, given its premiere by the Kirov Ballet in January 1940 with Galina Ulanova and Konstantin Sergeev. Lavrovsky’s and MacMillan’s versions are just two of the many, for more dance works are related to *Romeo and Juliet* than to any other Shakespeare play. Eusebio Luzzi’s, seen in Venice in 1785, was one of the earliest of all Shakespearian ballets. The most recent is probably being choreographed somewhere in the world right now, even if only a pas de deux, and a new version by François Klaus was presented by the Queensland Ballet in December 2007.

It was with a pas de deux from MacMillan’s ballet, danced by guest stars Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev, that *Romeo and Juliet* first entered the Australian Ballet’s repertoire, while the company was on tour in Nice in August 1965. Nine years later, it gave the Australian premiere of John Cranko’s full-length version of 1958. The company has successfully revived it several times, most recently in 2003. Reviewing a performance by the Stuttgart Ballet for the *New Yorker* in 1973, Andrew Porter commented that where Lavrovsky’s and MacMillan’s versions had a sense of “words just below the surface of the dance [Cranko’s was] more generalized, less intense in its close-ups ... less literary” (Balanchine and Mason 503).² Often, however, Cranko expresses the spirit of the words rather than giving a line for line translation into movement. This seems to me to be the case with a trio for Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio, full of teenage exuberance, with rippling arms, plenty of jumps, shoulder bumping and spins, which equates with the wit combat of 2.3.32-80. Productions allow, of course, for individual interpretations of character, and both MacMillan and Cranko give opportunity for the dancer of Lady Capulet to do more than merely hint at her

¹ Richard Buckle, *Buckle at the Ballet* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 163.

² George Balanchine and Francis Mason, *Balanchine’s Festival of Ballet* (London: W.H. Allen, 1978), 503.

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erotic attraction to her cousin Tybalt. In 2003 the Australian Ballet's Lynette Wills virtually threw herself onto her dead kinsman's bier, lengthwise, as it was carried out—a gesture also in the Lavrovsky version.

And while Shakespeare is closely followed in all of the big three, he is also extended—they all include Rosaline, for instance, and MacMillan adds further complication by making her the object of Tybalt's affections as well as Romeo's. Lavrovsky, however, is the only one of the four to bring the Montagues and the Capulets together in reconciliation at the end—for the others, the end comes when the lovers die, Juliet reaching out for Romeo.

Prokofiev's score, magnificent as it is, poses problems which few if any choreographers have successfully overcome in that there are passages for ensembles which are too long, and the narrative tension drops. This is certainly the case with the Cranko and even the MacMillan versions. But not all choreographers have used Prokofiev's score, which closely follows the play's narrative, while introducing a number of diversions. Antony Tudor used music by the English composer Frederick Delius for his compressed one-act version for American Ballet Theatre in 1943, and 42 years later Barry Moreland made a selection of Renaissance music for his choreography for the West Australian Ballet. These versions mostly followed Shakespeare's narrative closely, as did Harold Collins's for the Queensland Ballet in 1982 and Ted Brandsen's for the West Australian Ballet in 2000, though Brandsen greatly increased the importance of Lady Capulet, who at times seemed more like a vindictive and manipulative Lady Macbeth.

The first Australian ballet derived from the play, however, took a different tack, and with great success. In 1951, Paul Grinwis, a Belgian dancer who had been recruited as a principal by Edouard Borovansky, created his first ballet, *Les Amants Eternels (The Eternal Lovers)* to Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*. The Borovansky company took classical ballet to Australian audiences intermittently from 1944 to 1960, and was the precursor of the Australian Ballet which was founded in 1961. Grinwis conceived his one-act work as a continuation of the story of two lovers, when they awake in an after-life—"we shall call them Romeo and Juliet", he wrote in a program note, "because we always think of theirs as one of the greatest of all loves". Its focal point was a struggle for the Lovers' souls between the spirits of Love and Death, Love, not unexpectedly, being finally victorious. The composer's musical depiction of the conflict between the two families now supported the fight between Love and Death and their followers. William Constable's surrealistic décor of an endless plain merging into a sky of flared clouds diminishing to a central point was an excellent foil for the cast's Renaissance costumes—Juliet in simple white embroidered with silver, Romeo in cream and blue jerkin and blue tights, Death in purple and silver with a dark cloak and helmet, his servants in black, with black gauntlets, Love in cerise and her retinue in blue, with elbow-length cream gloves. Grinwis devised a number of unusual lifts in this work—at the beginning, for example, to give a feeling of weightlessness as the Lovers awake in the spirit world—and two arched rostrums midway on either side were significant for the action. To effect the final reunion of the Lovers, Juliet, outstretched as though in flight, was taken from



Figure 1: The choreographer, Paul Grinwis, and Kathleen Gorham as Romeo and Juliet in *Les Amants Eternels (The Eternal Lovers)*. Borovansky Ballet, 1951. (Photo author's collection.)

stage to rostrum level by a series of lifts by Death's minions. *The Eternal Lovers* was the most artistically successful ballet created for the Borovansky company and the only original work produced in 1951 to be included in subsequent seasons. It had its last performance in 1960.

During subsequent years Australian choreographers who produced a number of *Romeo and Juliet* pas de deux included Mischa Slavensky in Hobart in 1960, Charles Lisner for the Queensland Ballet two years later and Rex Reid for the West Australian Ballet in 1973, but it was not until 1999 that another interpretive rather than narrative work was created. This was Natalie Weir's *Dry Sorrow* for the West Australian Ballet (a company which seems drawn to the play). A one-act ballet danced to Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead*, the work was Weir's response to the final tomb scene, with the lovers and a chorus of eight dancers. The tomb also became the lovers' bed, as it may well have done on the Elizabethan stage. When Shakespeare's beleaguered Juliet is being coerced into marriage with Paris, she begs her mother to postpone the marriage, or if not to "make the bridal bed/ In that dim monument where Tybalt lies" (3.5.200-1), and Elizabethan four-posters looked the same as many elaborate tombs of the same period.

After *Romeo and Juliet*, the overwhelming favourite for choreographers is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and we can go back to Henry Purcell's operatic transformation of 1691, *The Fairy Queen*, for the beginning of a tradition of the

play as an entertainment with a cut text, songs and dances, which lasted well into the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, Mendelssohn's music, composed in 1843, had much to do with this. First used by Ludwig Tieck at Potsdam in the same year, "and from Charles Kean's production in 1856 until the production at the Old Vic in 1954 ... 'the music customarily used' for performances on the English-speaking stage" (Foakes, ed. 15).³ Mendelssohn's score was used for the first ballet from the play, choreographed in one act by Marius Petipa for the Hermitage Theatre in St Petersburg in 1876 and revised by Michel Fokine in 1906 for a student performance. In 1962 George Balanchine chose the play for his first wholly original full-length ballet, adding more of Mendelssohn to the overture and incidental music to provide for two acts. The first is a witty and often dazzling portrayal of the lovers' trials and Oberon's trick played on Titania, the second purportedly the wedding celebrations, but in fact an extended display of Balanchine's neo-classical choreography. For the Shakespeare quatercentenary two years later Frederick Ashton created a one-act masterpiece, *The Dream*, for the Royal Ballet, a work that dance critic Lee Christofis considers "one of the most successful ballet's [he's] ever seen from the point of view of narrative" (Christofis *Interview*),⁴ and which entered the Australian Ballet's repertoire in 1969.

The first Australian work derived from the play, however, used not Mendelssohn but Chopin. This was *Bewitched Night*, a one-act piece choreographed in 1950 by Joan Burnett, a teacher in Launceston in Tasmania, and performed by her students. In 1963 Miss Burnett produced a three-act ballet, reverting to Mendelssohn and giving it the same name as the play, and in the same year, Algeranoff choreographed *Such Stuff as Dreams are Made Of* (sic) for the North West Victorian Ballet Society. In 1964 Maxwell Collis produced a short work, *Bottom's Dream*, for the Victorian Ballet Guild, but the first professional production of a ballet from the *Dream* was choreographed in 1990 for the Queensland Ballet by its then director, Harold Collins and danced to Mendelssohn. The darker aspects of the play were scarcely present – one critic describing it as "all lightness and froth", while also commenting on "a change to serious lyricism" with Oberon and Titania (Koch 53).⁵ There was a lively lot of fairies and especially athletic movement for Puck, who became the centre of attention whenever he appeared. François Klaus, who became director in 1997, set his 2001 version to an eclectic mix of music, including Mendelssohn, Charles Ives and Steve Reich. The critical reception was cool. While praising the treatment of the lovers, and some of the performers, the *Dance Australia* critic found it too long, and lacking coherence.

The West Australian Ballet has also produced two *Dreams*. In 1991 the then artistic director, Barry Moreland, took the theme of transformation and

³ Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. R.A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 15.

⁴ Christofis, Lee, interview with author, 5 March 2005.

⁵ Peta Koch, "Shakespeare Double", *Dance Australia*, 50 (1990), 53.



*Figure 2: Lissome fairies in Harold Collins's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Queensland Ballet, 1990. (Photo Chris Ellis: courtesy Queensland Ballet.)*

Theseus and the Minotaur for a dance of bull-headed men and caryatid maidens as a prelude but it gave the ballet a slow start. The dramatic conflict of the scene at court got the narrative moving, and once in the forest, with Oberon in charge, the choreography flowed. The first act ended with Bottom horrified on catching sight of himself in a stream—a clear borrowing from Max Reinhardt's 1935 Hollywood film—and rejecting Titania. Bottom changed his mind after interval, and the narrative followed Shakespeare, except that Oberon and Titania agreed to share the changeling boy. Pyramus and Thisbe worked well, without becoming farcical, but some of the most successful choreography was for Puck, Oberon and Titania. Puck and his master had a couple of duets made exciting through high lifts, fast turns and big leaps, and in the final scene, a trio for these two and Titania mirrored the mysteries and entanglements of the plot through entwining, interchanges, and supported jumps. Moreland drew his music from Ravel, and Charles Blackman designed a beautiful and brilliant set which made imaginative use of seven periaktoi—a nice link with ancient Greek theatre.

Blackman's décor was again used when Chrissie Parrott choreographed her version for the company in 2006, which returned to Mendelssohn, but dispensed with the Athenian scenes by having their narrative content projected in a few sentences on a scrim as a prelude. With only 16 dancers available, Parrott reduced the mechanicals to three, Bottom becoming Mr Derriere, a travelling

choreographer, and his two dancers, so instead of presenting Pyramus and Thisbe at the wedding, they dance for the guests. While concentrating on the lovers and Oberon and Titania, Parrott made the Puck the main protagonist, seeing him as a cross between Tolkien's Gollum and Shakespeare's Robin Goodfellow, with highly physical movement. Titania was a feisty lady, and when Oberon wakes her after her amorous enchantment, she fights him for the changeling boy, whom he has stolen while she is engaged with Bottom. But they make up, and in a modern touch, the three go off together as a family. Parrott's greatest innovation was to introduce a cast of small digital fairies, who flitted and fluttered about the set and among the human cast.

Harold Collins chose *The Taming of the Shrew* as his third Shakespeare ballet for the Queensland Ballet, which premiered it in March 1992. Critical reception was less than enthusiastic, but there was praise for the final duet in which, according to one review, Collins wove "almost every conceivable emotion into the soaring lifts, darting leaps and tender caresses [as Katherine and Petruchio appeared] to reach a kind of mutually respectful understanding" (Gagliardi 49-50).⁶ Collins used an arrangement of music by Scarlatti, following John Cranko, whose 1969 *Taming of the Shrew* was first performed, to great acclaim, by the Australian Ballet in 1986. Both these versions stuck closely to the story.

In the same year, however, Kai Tai Chan made something more from the play for his One Extra Company in *The Shrew*, an absorbing production set in late nineteenth-century China, but with modern scenes suggesting that the male dominance of that time and place is still present in contemporary Australia. The performers danced, acted, sang and played percussion instruments, and the text included passages from the play. A traditional woman warrior dance, representing a challenge to patriarchy, and a drum dance powerfully underlining male bonding, were choreographed by Wang Siqui, from Peking. Graeme Watson created the non-Chinese movement, including the continuing and confrontational battles between Katherine and Petruchio. Pointe shoes were tellingly used to indicate bound feet, docile Bianca learning to use them, rebellious Kate throwing hers off and proudly dancing barefoot. Although there were laughs enough, this *Shrew* did not finish as Shakespeare's does. Reviewing it in England, the London *Daily Telegraph* critic Fernau Hall wrote, "The ending is superb. Kai Tai Chan translates Kate's final speech of submission (in the Shakespeare play) into suicide by poison, but then there is a transformation, with the grandmother [who has been dominant in the Chinese household] tearing off her robes and mask to emerge as the Kate of today, and the Chinese Kate resuming her martial robes as do many heroines of Peking operas, transforming themselves into generals to lead armies" (Hall *Daily Telegraph*).⁷ In *The Times*, the doyen of English critics, John Percival, found Kai Tai Chan's version to be "original, vivid and refreshing", and went on, he "freely translates the essence of Shakespeare's play into two unexpected but

⁶ Gagliardi, Jason, "Shrew Falls a Bit Flat", *Dance Australia*, 60 (1992), 49-50.

⁷ Hall, Fernau, "East meets West", *The Daily Telegraph* (London), 1 June, 1987.

⁸ Percival, John, "Chinese Surprise", *The Times*, 27 May 1987.

surprisingly apt contexts: 19th-century China and present-day Australia. Cutting from one setting to the other, or even overlapping them, enables him to take an ironic viewpoint which heightens both the comedy and the underlying tragedy” (Percival *The Times*).⁸ *The Shrew* was important particularly for this marrying of



Figure 3: Warrior Woman Kate in Kai Tai Chan's The Shrew. One Extra Company, 1986.

Shakespeare with an historical Chinese ethos and modern Australia, in particular the blokishness of the Australian male at the expense of male-female relationships.

The Tempest is the other comedy which has attracted choreographers. Commenting on the version he created for Ballet Rambert in 1979, Glen Tetley wrote, "The atmosphere of *The Tempest* is magical and the language is metaphor, just as the language of dance is metaphor. ... The sleeping, awakening dream flux, the sea-changes, the tempest that resides within, the very structure of Shakespeare's world speaks as powerfully as his words" (Pritchard 87).⁹

Where Tetley's full-length ballet follows Shakespeare's narrative, in 1991 Stephen Page, an Aboriginal member of the Sydney Dance Company, took *The Tempest* as inspiration for a concentrated 18-minute work, *Mooggrah*, a word for the smell of a storm. In the beginning, which is introduced by "Full fathom five", Ariel, a tall hooded figure in soft pink, stands with sand steadily streaming from her cupped hands. Then a business-suited but shirtless Prospero demonstrates his power over half a dozen spirits, similarly but fully dressed, until a suitcase appears and Caliban, originally danced by the choreographer, emerges, challenges and eventually overcomes him. During the struggle, which is good natured rather than vicious on Caliban's part, he divests Prospero of his jacket, emphasizing the magus's white skin in contrast to his own. The second part, set in a desert landscape, begins with "Come unto these yellow sands", as Prospero, now in baggy pale yellow pants, is ushered in by two spirits, virtually naked, with suggested ceremonial body painting. Their movement is sometimes Aboriginal in its look, and a didgeridoo enter the score, mingling with electronic and acoustic sound. The spirits restore the desperate Prospero, giving him food and water and then Ariel reappears, dances an extended duet with him and leaves. Sand has been steadily streaming from above on to a corner of the stage, and when he follows her he stops, turns and accepts the sand, allowing it to fall on his head and forehead. The post-colonial content of *Mooggrah* is clear enough, and was presented with humour as well as seriousness and a good deal of beauty in the last duet. In his program note, Stephen Page wrote, "I have fused the essence of traditional Aboriginal dance with contemporary movement, particularly in the desert scene, where Ariel takes Prospero on a journey of temptation and survival". Some reviewers saw it rather differently. One commented that *Mooggrah* took "the characters of *The Tempest* as catalysts for a corporate leader taken on a devilish binge, left to fend for himself and then guided to a new way of life based on spiritual values" (Sykes *Sydney Morning Herald*),¹⁰ while another, agreeing that Prospero seemed to have become an Australian businessman, saw him as being rescued from economic rationalism by Ariel, now liberated and in womanly form, with the help of local bush sprites" (Hoad 86).¹¹ Whatever the interpretations

⁹ Tetley, Glen, cited, Pritchard, Jane, cmplr. *Rambert: A Celebration* (London: Rambert Dance Company, 1996), 87.

¹⁰ Sykes, Jill, "New choreographers were the bards of the boards", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1991.

¹¹ Hoad, Brian, "Love's fine wit", *The Bulletin*, 23 July 1991, 86.



*Figure 4: Prospero saved by native spirits in Stephen Page's *Moograh*. Sydney Dance Company, 1991. (Photo courtesy Sydney Dance Company.)*

placed upon it, *Mooggrah* was a remarkably assured and imaginative first work by Page.

When Jacqui Carroll came to create *The Tempest* for the Queensland Ballet in 1993 she incorporated words, giving the dancer and actor John Nobbs some of Prospero's lines. Carroll kept close to the narrative of the play, and included all the main characters except Gonzalo. Her choreography bridged the gap between the classical and modern—Miranda, for example, danced in pointe shoes—and the score was commissioned from Carl Vine.

For the Queensland Ballet's season in July 1990, Jacqui Carroll had choreographed a 45-minute *Othello* using classical choreography with a contemporary edge. Music was chosen from Tchaikowsky, the narrative followed Shakespeare closely and the cast included Cassio but omitted Bianca. Another version, by François Klaus, with music by Samuel Barber, Arvo Pärt, Henry Purcell and others, which had premiered in Switzerland in 1993, was revived for the Queensland Ballet in February 1999. Klaus, who had been appointed director of the Queensland Ballet twelve months earlier, trimmed the cast to the five main characters, but also seems to have made Emilia less sympathetic; one reviewer remarked that the dancers of Iago and Emilia "made the perfect poisonous pair. Their malevolence and deception sowed the seeds of distrust in Othello, by making ... Cassio ... look like a hapless joker" (Johnston 57).¹²

In April 1989 Kai Tai Chan had choreographed a short *Othello* dance work for the New Zealand company Limbs to music from Verdi's opera, then developed it for longer performance with his own One Extra Company in the following September. The cast included Bianca, Cassio and an Aboriginal Spirit as well as the principals. In an introduction to the work, the choreographer wrote, "Othello's achievement is that, as a black Moor, his highly respected position is doubly impressive in the Venetian white man's society, an achievement that is still quite hard to imagine in today's Australia (for example, an Aboriginal in the position of a State Premier—rather than head of Aboriginal Affairs)" (Chan 1989).¹³ His Aboriginal Othello, dressed in a smart Italian suit, was a man caught between two cultures. In a position of authority in white society, he was shadowed by a spirit figure who encouraged him to keep his Aboriginality as well, with face painting and corroboree dancing; but the spirit also tried to discourage him when his jealous madness began to take over. Writing in the *Sydney Review*, Jeremy Eccles commented "There was some wonderful choreography as he hit the ground full on in his jealous rage, matched by European imagery as Iago climbed on his back and peered over like some gargoyled devil, to exert evil influence" (Eccles 1989).¹⁴ While over-melodramatic at times—two pistol shots from

¹² Johnston, Dale, "Queensland Ballet: Othello and Unicorn", *Dance Australia* [101] (1999), 57.

¹³ Chan, Kai Tai, "A starting point for Othello ...", Program, *Othello*, Belvoir Street Theatre [Sydney], 2-17 Sept., 1989.

¹⁴ Eccles, Jeremy, "Othello in ochre", *The Sydney Review*, October 1989.

A CARNIVALE SEASON
THE ONE EXTRA COMPANY
 IN KAI TAI CHAN'S

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Figure 5: Poster for Kai Tai Chan's *Othello*. One Extra Company, 1989.

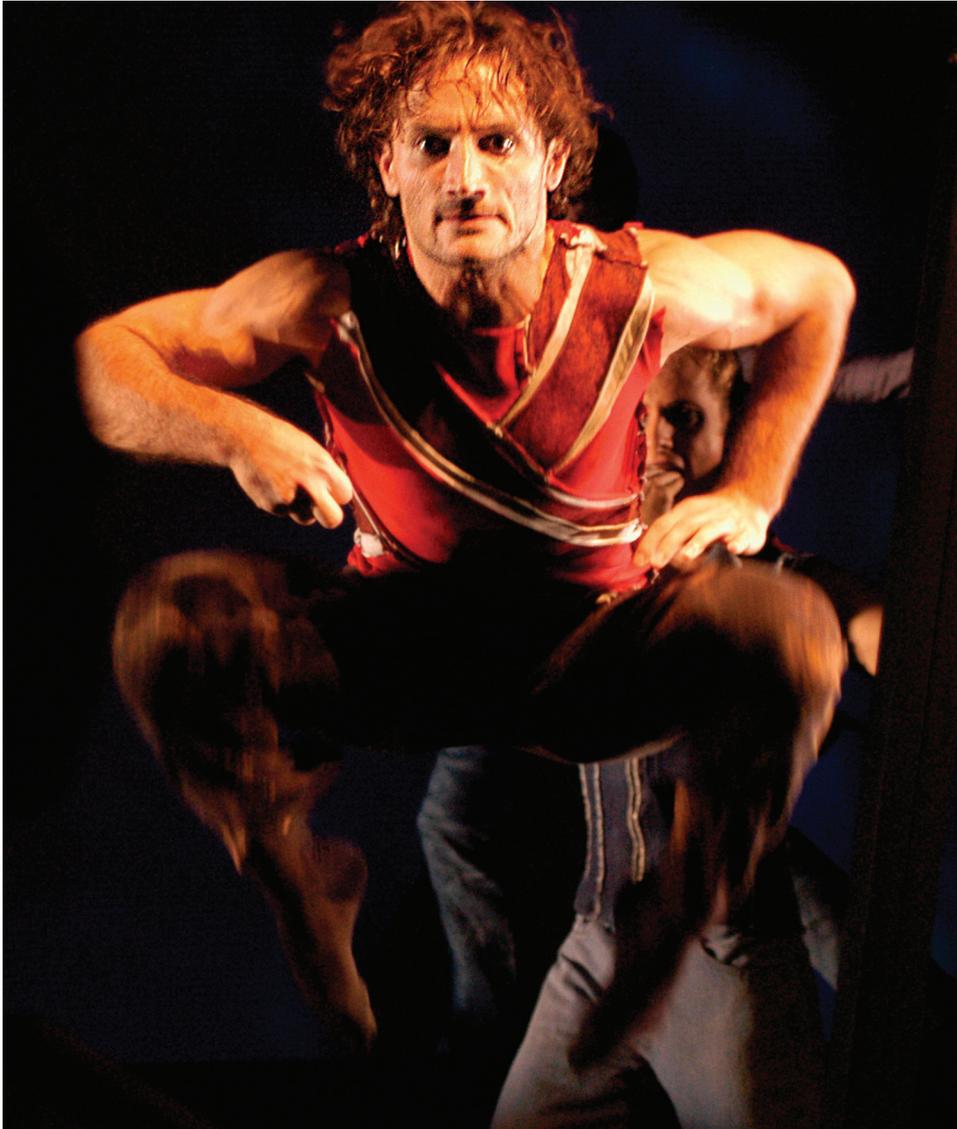
Othello to kill Iago, for instance—the work succeeded both artistically and as an interpretation of Shakespeare relating to a particular Australian situation.

As early as 1968 Garth Welch, a former principal with Borovansky and the Australian Ballet companies and artistic director of the West Australian Ballet, had created a short work based on the play, and a very interesting one. Its genesis was Welch's desire to show schoolchildren how dance could be used for drama. He had recently seen the film *Planet of the Apes*, and, though surprised, the composer, Jerry Goldsmith, enthusiastically agreed to give him the music when he saw what Welch had in mind. The first cast was just three—Othello, Desdemona and Iago—but when he revised the work for the Australian Ballet in 1971, Welch added Emilia, and six couples to comment on the action, like a chorus in Greek tragedy, but in dance instead of words. The cast was barefoot and the men wore tanktops and tights, the women long dresses; Othello wore purple, Iago red, Desdemona white, Emilia magenta, the chorus black. They danced against black drapes, and the lighting was significant, with, for example, two diagonals crossing the floor at times, mild strobe lighting reinforcing Desdemona's agitation when she is accused by Othello, and spotlighting for Iago's poisoning of Othello's mind and producing the treacherous handkerchief.

The action was pared down to personality and emotion, and the movement was modern and flexible, influenced by Martha Graham. It remains a powerful work, different from, but equally as compelling as, the most famous *Othello* ballet, José Limón's *The Moor's Pavane* (1949).

Stephen Page's *Mooggrah*, based on *The Tempest* and discussed above, was one part of an adventurous program, *The Shakespeare Dances*, devised by Graeme Murphy, director of the Sydney Dance Company. The evening-length performance comprised short works by five choreographers based on Sonnet 147, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Lucrece* as well as *The Tempest*. These were linked by *Bard Bits*, brief choreographies by Murphy to sonnets and songs from the plays set by Johnny Dankworth and sung by Cleo Laine—mainly light and free, quirky and good fun. *Duo of Sonnets* (23 and 24) was a duet for the actor who spoke all the verse for the evening and a dancer on pointe, the actor in this case moving as well, and making a good job of it. Gideon Obarzanek's *Sleep No More* presented the tortured mind of Macbeth through three men and three women and the regicide himself, using very defined, often angular, sometimes acrobatic, movement to ominous, repetitive electronic music. At its best it projected an anguished desperation. The most ambitious was *Lucrece*, which combined the actor speaking parts of Shakespeare's poem, parts of Benjamin Britten's opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*, recorded, and a cast of Lucrece, Tarquin and three other men. The actor at times also participated in the action, while speaking. Successfully choreographed by Alfred Williams (later Taahi), *Lucrece* developed strong emotional power.

With similar daring, in 2000 Maggi Sietsma, director of the Brisbane-based Expressions Dance Company, chose Shakespeare's greatest historical villain and choreographed *Virtually Richard*³, in which the lead dancer, who was on stage for the whole of the work's 75 minutes, and Queen Margaret also



*Figure 6: Dan Christani as Richard in Maggi Siestma's Virtually Richard*³. Expressions Dance Company. (Photo courtesy Expressions Dance Company.)

spoke some of the play's lines. Sietsma selected episodes which focused on the women, Anne, Elizabeth and Margaret, the death of Clarence—in a bath of water, however, not a butt of malmsey—and the final battle, though this Richard dies by suicide. The eight dancers wore jeans and simple tops, Nahum Szumer designed a scaffold frame surrounding a throne, hinting at a spider's web, and Abel Valls' soundtrack growled, thundered, wailed and whispered, superbly complementing Sietsma's flexible, yet often angular, choreography. It is a compelling work which has been justly praised. A Stuttgart critic called it "truly great, alarming and rousing theatre" (Krause),¹⁵ in Mexico City it was greeted as "audacious, original, aurally and visually gripping" (Maxim),¹⁶ while *Dance Australia* considered it "a powerful work" and "a complex piece of dance theatre that resonates on many different levels" (Richardson 50-51).¹⁷

By my count, between 1950 and 2000, 23 brave choreographers resident in Australia produced 32 Shakespearian works. They included fourteen full-length ballets, one of them non-professional, fourteen shorter pieces and four pas de deux. Excluding the pas de deux, eleven were non-narrative, in the sense that they took the Shakespearian work and developed further ideas from it rather than presenting a choreographed version of the story. The earliest professional example of this kind was *The Eternal Lovers*, Paul Grinwis's ballet of 1951 for Borovansky, and the latest Maggi Sietsma's *Virtually Richard*³.

Can it be said that there is anything uniquely Australian in the work of these 23 Australian choreographers? It can, in three cases. The first is *The Shrew*, produced in 1986, in which Kai Tai Chan tellingly compared the domestic male domination of nineteenth-century China with a similar ethos in modern Australian culture. The second is Kai Tai Chan's Aboriginal *Othello* of 1989. The third is *Mooggrah*, the *Tempest*-inspired work by Stephen Page for the Sydney Dance Company's *Shakespeare Dances* in 1991, which begins with confrontation and closes with the merging of the European into native Australia. At the end of 1991 Page became artistic director and chief choreographer of the country's premier indigenous dance company, Bangarra, successfully developing a choreographic style which blends indigenous and western dance movement, and also creating works for the national company, the Australian Ballet, using dancers from both that company and Bangarra.

Other Shakespearian works are characterized not by such specifically Australian elements, but by the individuality of the choreographers themselves. However, the fact that twelve of the works discussed are not strictly narrative is a heartening indication of a willingness, even an eagerness, to use Shakespeare as a springboard for ideas rather than simply as a source for a story.

¹⁵ Krause, Bernd, "An admirable conclusion to the dance series", *CEST*, Ludwigsburg, 30 June 2002.

¹⁶ Maxim, John, "Virtually Richard 3", *El Universal/The Herald*, Mexico City, 4 April 2004.

¹⁷ Richardson, Denise, *Dance Australia*, 111 (2001), 50-1.

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