

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 22, 2009
Contact: Jessica Brown
Communications Manager
Phone 504.522.0996 ext. 204
E-mail: jbrown@nobadance.com

NOBA
BRINGING DANCE TO LIFE

New Orleans Ballet Association | One Lee Circle | New Orleans, LA 70130

NOBA Follows TPA Homecoming with Most Lavish Production in 20 Years

Houston Ballet brings brand new

full-length ballet inspired by the life of the notorious Marie Antoinette!

Production Tours to New Orleans after Premiering in Houston

After a successful reopening performance at the Mahalia Jackson Theater, the New Orleans Ballet Association returns to its home venue with the most lavish production presented in more than 20 years. On March 27 and 28, the Houston Ballet brings rumor, scandal, and intrigue to New Orleans with *Marie*, a new three-act ballet inspired by the life of the legendary French queen Marie Antoinette.

Choreographed by acclaimed artistic director Stanton Welch, the world premiere ballet features more than 70 dancers and recounts the life and times of history's favorite villainess. Famously known as the eighteenth-century teen queen whose excesses have become legend, Marie Antoinette was both idealized and vilified for her decadent yet turbulent lifestyle. Born an Austrian arch duchess in 1755, she married the future French King Louis XVI at the age of fifteen, and was executed by guillotine in 1793 after being blamed for instigating the French Revolution.

"I was intrigued to learn that Marie Antoinette wasn't as superficial as she is often portrayed and found a true character arc in her transition from young princess to spoiled queen to mother to Revolutionary victim," said Welch. "That gives me a lot of material to work with. Cinderella was the last adventure I had in storytelling, and it was a romantic comedy. I wanted to do something a little darker. I also was intrigued by the way all the intense gossip and scrutiny of the queen's life mirrors our society: how we become fixated on some pretty girl and how through gossip and tabloids, we create a distorted image of someone."

The recent reopening of the Mahalia Jackson Theater of the Performing Arts allows NOBA to once again bring in large scale productions, such as *Marie*, for the first time since Hurricane Katrina. "In the fall of 2006, Houston Ballet created a specific program with 22 dancers for our stage at Tulane's Dixon Hall. Normally they travel with over 50 dancers, so their concessions made it possible for us to maintain the quality of dance presented, even on the smaller stage," said Jenny Hamilton, Executive Director for NOBA. "We're excited to bring them back, not only because of the superiority of their work, but also because of how generously they gave of their time and resources after the storm."

The production also features elaborate costumes and sets by London-based designer, Kandis Cook, who will create over 150 costumes for the ballet based on the style and designs from 1770-1795 Austria and France with powdered wigs and perukes, corsets, panniers, silks, lace, jewels, braided waistcoats and jackets, jabeux, the strict formal dress of

the ancient regime of France, and the rags of the public. The designs for the ballet were inspired by a visit to Versailles as well as portraits from the era painted by Jean-Baptiste Charpentier and Joseph Ducreux, among others. The score for *Marie*, arranged by Houston Ballet Music Director Ermanno Florio, features music by Dmitri Shostakovich and is set to be performed by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra.

As one of the most sought after choreographers of his generation, Stanton Welch has created ballets for such prestigious international companies as San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet in the United Kingdom, and Royal Danish Ballet. His new work for Houston Ballet will be his thirteenth ballet for the company. *Marie* is the second original evening-length work Mr. Welch has created for Houston Ballet, after *Tales of Texas* in March 2004. Mr. Welch has staged a number of full-length story ballets including *Swan Lake* (2006) for Houston Ballet; *The Sleeping Beauty* (2005), *Cinderella* (1997), and *Madame Butterfly* (1995) for The Australian Ballet.

In celebration of the brand new ballet, the New Orleans Ballet Association and BRAVO (Ballet Resource And Volunteer Organization) will also host The Marie Antoinette Ball. Chaired by Charlotte Bollinger, the gala will be held on Saturday, March 21, 2009, at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Muriel's on Jackson Square will host a Benefactor Party on Wednesday, March 18. Proceeds from the evening will support NOBA and the return to the newly renovated Mahalia Jackson Theater of the Performing Arts.

Houston Ballet recommends this performance for children ages 12 and older. Both performances will begin at 8pm; ticket prices range from \$10 to \$100. Students and seniors (65 and older) receive a \$7 discount off the regular ticket prices of \$35 and higher. Group discounts also are available. For tickets or information, call the New Orleans Ballet Association Box Office at (504) 522-0996. Tickets may be purchased online through www.nobadance.com, or via Ticketmaster at (504) 522-5555 or www.ticketmaster.com.

This event is sponsored by the Betty S. and James A. Noe Jr. Foundation, and Superior Energy Services.

Houston Ballet Company History

In 1955, the founding members of Houston Ballet Foundation had a vision for dance in Houston: to create a resident ballet company and to start a school which would train its dancers. Houston Ballet Academy was established that same year under the leadership of Tatiana Semenova, a former dancer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. In 1969, the professional company was founded, under the direction of Nina Popova, a former dancer with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and American Ballet Theatre. Houston Ballet Foundation has seen the fulfillment of its goals: an internationally acclaimed ballet company which is now America's fourth largest and an academy which supplies over 40 percent of the company's dancers. *The New York Times* has hailed Houston Ballet as "one of the nation's best ballet companies." The company is comprised of 54 dancers, including artists who have won gold and silver medals at major international ballet competitions.

From 1976-2003, Englishman Ben Stevenson, O.B.E., a former dancer with Britain's Royal Ballet and English National Ballet, served as artistic director of Houston Ballet. He established a core of permanent choreographers whose works have greatly enriched the company's repertory. In 1989, Sir Kenneth MacMillan joined the company as artistic

associate and Christopher Bruce was named resident choreographer. Sir Kenneth worked with the company from 1989 until his death in 1992, setting five of his pieces on Houston Ballet dancers. Mr. Bruce, who currently holds the title of associate choreographer, has set ten works on the company, including four pieces created especially for Houston Ballet. In 1984, a newly renovated dance facility was inaugurated to further the excellence of balletic training and to accommodate the growth of the company and its academy. In July 2003, the acclaimed Australian choreographer Stanton Welch assumed the leadership of Houston Ballet as artistic director. Mr. Welch, who has created ballets for many of the world's leading companies, has choreographed thirteen works especially for Houston Ballet. *The Financial Times of London* has praised his leadership of Houston Ballet, citing "a strong, invigorated company whose male contingent is particularly impressive, a well drilled corps and an enviable selection of soloists and principals."

Through hard work and dedication, Houston Ballet Foundation has ensured Houston Ballet's place as a major cultural asset in the community and as one of the leading ballet companies in the world. The company has toured extensively to critical praise in Europe, the United Kingdom, Asia, Canada, and in cities throughout the United States. In July 1995, Houston Ballet was the first full American ballet company invited by the Chinese government to tour the People's Republic of China. An estimated 500 million people witnessed Houston Ballet's production of *Romeo and Juliet* when the company's opening night performance was telecast live on Chinese television. Over the last ten years, the company has emerged as one the most effective international ambassadors for the City of Houston, performing in London, New York, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Toronto, Montreal, The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow.

Stanton Welch, Artistic Director

In July 2003, the acclaimed Australian choreographer Stanton Welch assumed the leadership of Houston Ballet, America's fourth largest ballet company, as artistic director. Since his arrival, Mr. Welch has transformed Houston Ballet by raising the level of classical technique, infusing the company with new energy, drive and vision; introducing works by distinguished choreographers to the repertoire; and attracting some of the world's best coaches to Houston to work with the dancers. He is also one of the most sought after choreographers of his generation, having created works for such prestigious international companies as Houston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, and Royal Danish Ballet. Mr. Welch was born in Melbourne to Marilyn Jones, O.B.E., and Garth Welch, A.M., two of Australia's most gifted dancers of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1986 he began his training at the late age of seventeen, quickly winning a scholarship to San Francisco Ballet School. In 1989 he was engaged as a dancer with The Australian Ballet, where he rose to the rank of leading soloist, performing such principal roles as Des Grieux in Sir Kenneth MacMillan's **Manon**, Lensky in John Cranko's **Onegin**, Camille in Ronald Hynd's **The Merry Widow**, and Alan Strang in **Equus**. He has also worked with internationally acclaimed choreographers such as Jiří Kylián, Nacho Duato, and Maurice Béjart.

NOBA is the Central Gulf region's premiere presenting and service organization dedicated solely to the art of dance. NOBA's dynamic Main Stage season annually features a diverse array of world-class companies and artists. Each year NOBA provides concerts, classes, workshops and lectures to more than 25,000 area dance enthusiasts of all ages. In addition, NOBA's nationally recognized award-winning education programs provide the youth of our community access to quality arts programs with 2,500 free dance classes and workshops annually at nine sites throughout the Greater New Orleans area. **For more information on the upcoming season or to subscribe, call NOBA at 504-522-0996, Ext. 201 or visit www.nobadance.com.**

This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), which believes that a great nation deserves great art; a grant from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, in cooperation with the Louisiana State Arts Council as administered by the Arts Council of New Orleans (ACNO); a Community Arts Grant made possible through the City of New Orleans as administered by ACNO; a grant from the Louisiana State Arts Council through the Louisiana Division of the Arts and the NEA.

###