

= Kenneth MacMillan =

Sir Kenneth MacMillan ( 11 December 1929 ? 29 October 1992 ) was a British ballet dancer and choreographer who was artistic director of the Royal Ballet in London between 1970 and 1977 , and its principal choreographer from 1977 until his death . Earlier he had served as director of ballet for the Deutsche Oper in Berlin . He was also associate director of the American Ballet Theatre from 1984 to 1989 , and artistic associate of the Houston Ballet from 1989 to 1992 .

From a family with no background of ballet or music , MacMillan was determined from an early age to become a dancer . The director of Sadler 's Wells Ballet , Ninette de Valois , accepted him as a student and then a member of her company . In the late 1940s , MacMillan built a successful career as a dancer , but , plagued by stage fright , he abandoned it while still in his twenties . After this he worked entirely as a choreographer ; he created ten full @-@ length ballets and more than fifty one @-@ act pieces . In addition to his work for ballet companies he was active in television , musicals , non @-@ musical drama , and opera .

Although he is mainly associated with the Royal Ballet , MacMillan frequently considered himself an outsider there and felt driven to work with other companies throughout his career as choreographer . His creations for the Stuttgart Ballet and the Deutsche Opera ballet include some of his most frequently revived works .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early years = = =

MacMillan was born in Dunfermline , Scotland , the youngest of four surviving children of William MacMillan ( 1891 ? 1946 ) , who was a labourer and , from time to time , cook , and his wife , Edith ( 1888 ? 1942 ) née Shreeve . His father had served in the army in the First World War , and suffered permanent physical and mental damage . In search of work he moved with his family to his wife 's home town , Great Yarmouth in Norfolk . After attending a local primary school , Kenneth studied from 1940 at Great Yarmouth Grammar School , to which he won a scholarship . As Great Yarmouth was a target for German air raids in the Second World War , the school was evacuated to Retford in Nottinghamshire .

In Retford , MacMillan was introduced to ballet by a local dance teacher , Jean Thomas . He had already had lessons in Scottish dancing in Dunfermline and tap dancing in Great Yarmouth , and he took to ballet immediately . In 1942 his mother died , which caused him acute and lasting distress . His father was a distant figure , and the boy 's only close family relationship was with an elder sister . His obituarist in The Times suggests that the feeling of being an outsider , displayed in many of MacMillan 's ballets , had its roots in his childhood .

When the grammar school returned to Great Yarmouth in 1944 MacMillan found a new ballet teacher , Phyllis Adams . With her help , MacMillan , aged fifteen , secured admission to the Sadler 's Wells Ballet School ( later the Royal Ballet School ) . He saw his first performances of ballets , given by Ninette de Valois ' Sadler 's Wells company , at the New Theatre in London .

= = = Dancer = = =

When David Webster was appointed chief executive of the Royal Opera House , Covent Garden at the end of the war , his assignment was to establish permanent opera and ballet companies for the house . He set about building the opera company from scratch but persuaded de Valois to make Covent Garden the main base for her ballet company . In 1946 , while still a student , MacMillan appeared in the production of The Sleeping Beauty with which Webster and de Valois reopened the opera house . At first he was a non @-@ dancing extra , and later he was promoted to a small dancing role . With the main company now resident at Covent Garden , de Valois established a smaller ensemble to perform at Sadler 's Wells and act as a training ground for young dancers and

choreographers . In April 1946 MacMillan was a founder member , and quickly made progress . He was cast by Frederick Ashton , de Valois ' principal choreographer , in a leading role in a new ballet , *Valses nobles et sentimentales* , in October 1946 . The success of the piece encouraged Ashton to revive his 1933 *Les Rendezvous* . Although initially only in the corps de ballet for this work , MacMillan was unexpectedly promoted to the male lead because of injuries to all the eligible company principals . His biographer Jann Parry comments that he was able to take over without notice because he had a rare ability to remember and reproduce the steps of every dancer in any piece in which he appeared . He was promoted to the senior Covent Garden company at the start of the 1948 ? 49 season , touring in Europe and dancing Florestan in the third act pas de trois of *The Sleeping Beauty* in the company 's opening gala in New York in October 1949 . The first new role he created was *The Great Admirer of Mademoiselle Piquant* in John Cranko 's ballet *Children 's Corner* ( 1948 ) , followed by both *Sherlock Holmes* and *Professor Moriarty* in Margaret Dale 's *The Great Detective* ( 1953 ) , and *Moondog* in Cranko 's *The Lady and the Fool* ( 1954 ) .

Despite his rise within the company , MacMillan became unhappy as a performer . He suffered from severe stage fright , and his leading roles became an ordeal for him . De Valois gave him three months ' leave of absence , during which he spent some time dancing with his friend John Cranko 's small group in the little Kenton Theatre , away from the spotlight , in Henley @-@ on @-@ Thames . Cranko , himself a former dancer who had moved to choreography , concluded that MacMillan might well follow the same course . When MacMillan returned to work , his confidence as a dancer somewhat restored , he took part in de Valois ' new *Choreographers Group* , set up in response to Marie Rambert 's " *Ballet Workshops* " . For this group , MacMillan choreographed his first ballet , *Somnambulism* , which was first given on 1 February 1953 . It was well received , and the next year he followed with another small @-@ scale work , *Laidereffe* . This introduced the " outsider " character that became a hallmark of his ballets , in this case a female clown who attends a ball at which her host falls in love with her until she loses the mask that has made her attractive . MacMillan 's eclectic choice of music was evidenced in these two early works ; the first was danced to jazz composed by Stan Kenton , and the second was to the harpsichord music of Frank Martin .

On the strength of the workshop successes , de Valois commissioned the 25 @-@ year @-@ old MacMillan to create a ballet for performance at Sadler 's Wells . *Dances concertantes* , to music by Stravinsky , was first produced in January 1955 , with designs by Nicholas Georgiadis , with whom MacMillan collaborated extensively over the next years . Parry counts among MacMillan 's early influences the modernism of choreographers such as Roland Petit , Jerome Robbins and Antony Tudor , and the craftsmanship of Ashton , from whom MacMillan said he learned how a ballet was made . The Times commented that with this piece it was clear that a powerful choreographic talent had arrived . The critic Clement Crisp has described the piece as " a bravura display using a witty , allusive classical vocabulary , remade by a creator who knew the cinema and spoke the movement language of his generation " . With the success of *Dances concertantes* MacMillan concluded that his future lay in choreography rather than dancing . After a fierce argument with de Valois , who wanted him to continue in both capacities , he got his way , and from 1955 his contract with the company ( on a slightly reduced salary ) was purely as a choreographer . His only Covent Garden appearances as a dancer after that were two performances as an Ugly Step @-@ sister in *Cinderella* alongside Ashton in 1956 .

= = = Choreographer = = =

MacMillan next produced a series of one @-@ act ballets . For the junior company he choreographed *House of Birds* ( 1955 ) , based on the Grimm brothers ' *Jorinde and Joringel* , and for Covent Garden he created *Noctambules* ( 1956 ) about a Svengali @-@ like hypnotist . He also worked in television , with *Punch and the Child* ( 1954 ) , *The Dreamers* , a television adaptation of *Somnambulism* , and *Turned Out Proud* ( 1955 ) . In 1956 he took leave of absence to spend five months in New York , working with American Ballet Theatre , choreographing *Winter 's Eve* and *Journey* for the dramatic ballerina Nora Kaye . For the Covent Garden opera company he staged the *Venusberg* ballet in Tannhäuser , regarded by some critics as the best part of a disappointing

production .

MacMillan was the first of his generation of choreographers to have an entire evening of his works presented by the Sadler 's Wells Ballet . In June 1956 his new " divertissement ballet " Solitaire was given in a quadruple bill with Somnambulism , House of Birds and Danses concertantes . His 1958 work , The Burrow , with its menacing echoes of war , oppression and concealment , won praise for venturing into territory seldom explored in ballet . The critic in The Times admitted that its dramatic impact was strong enough " to make one glad when it ends " . The work marked the beginning of MacMillan 's association with Lynn Seymour , who was his muse for many subsequent ballets . The company had by now been granted a royal charter and was known as the Royal Ballet , with the smaller company based at Sadler 's Wells called the Royal Ballet Touring Company .

In the late 1950s MacMillan choreographed two musicals : one for the stage ( The World of Paul Slickey , 1958 ) and one for the cinema ( Espresso Bongo , 1959 ) . The Invitation , first shown at the Royal Opera House on 30 December 1960 , is probably MacMillan 's most controversial ballet . This one @-@ act work about rape was interpreted by Lynn Seymour and Desmond Doyle and provoked , at the time , mixed reactions in the press and the audience . Among MacMillan 's works for the Royal Ballet in the early 1960s was The Rite of Spring ( 1962 ) ; he selected an unknown junior dancer , Monica Mason , to dance the lead role of the chosen maiden who dances herself to death in a primitive ritual . Dance and Dancers described it as " a singular and signal triumph " ; Mason 's performance was judged " brilliantly done ... one of British ballet 's most memorable performances " . In The Times John Percival commented that ever since Nijinsky 's original attempt in 1913 The Rite had been waiting for a choreographer who could make it work on stage , and MacMillan 's was the most successful version to date .

In the mid @-@ 1960s two of his ballets , though both immensely successful , strained relations between MacMillan and the Royal Opera House management . In 1964 Webster and the Covent Garden board turned down MacMillan 's proposal to create a ballet using the music of Mahler 's Das Lied von der Erde English : The Song of the Earth ; the decision was made on the grounds that the score was unsuitable for use as a ballet . Cranko , by now in charge of the Stuttgart Ballet , invited MacMillan to create the work there in 1965 . It was a huge success , and within six months the Royal Ballet had taken the piece up . MacMillan 's first full @-@ length , three @-@ act ballet , Romeo and Juliet ( 1965 ) , to Prokofiev 's score , was choreographed for Seymour and Christopher Gable , but at Webster 's insistence the gala premiere was danced by Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev . The decision was made for commercial rather than artistic reasons : Fonteyn and Nureyev were internationally known stars and guaranteed a full house at premium prices , as well as huge publicity . In Parry 's words , MacMillan and his two chosen dancers felt betrayed .

= = = Berlin , 1966 ? 69 = = =

Disillusioned with Covent Garden , MacMillan accepted an invitation from the Deutsche Oper in Berlin to run its ballet company . Parry describes this as an unhappy experience . Though at Covent Garden Webster may sometimes have been suspected of favouring the opera at the expense of the ballet , MacMillan discovered that at the Berlin house there was no doubt that the ballet was given distinctly lower priority . He did not speak German , which reduced his enjoyment from watching films ( of which he was a great devotee ) and theatre and limited him generally in everyday life . Although he had taken several colleagues with him , including Seymour , many moved away over the course of his nearly four years in charge , and MacMillan became increasingly isolated . It was the first time he had been in a managerial as well as a creative role , and the strain affected his physical and mental health . He smoked and drank heavily and suffered a minor stroke .

For the Berlin company , MacMillan created seven ballets : Valses nobles et sentimentales , Concerto , Anastasia ( one act version ) , The Sleeping Beauty , Olympiad , Cain and Abel and Swan Lake . The critic Jane Simpson considers that some of MacMillan 's finest work was done for Berlin and Stuttgart .

= = = Royal Ballet : director 1970 ? 77 = = =

In 1970 Ashton , who had been artistic director of the Royal Ballet since de Valois stepped down in 1963 , retired , somewhat reluctantly . Webster retired in the same year and wanted a wholesale change of management to coincide with his own departure . For the opera he arranged the joint directorship of Colin Davis and Peter Hall , and for the ballet he secured MacMillan and John Field as co @-@ directors . Neither of the joint directorships succeeded . Hall did not take up his post , instead moving to run the National Theatre , and Field , who had run the junior Royal Ballet company under de Valois and Ashton , found the split directorship untenable and left within months to become director of ballet at La Scala , Milan .

MacMillan was in an awkward position . It was widely known that Ashton had been forced out , and many resented it . Company morale was lowered by an announcement , to which MacMillan and Field were party , that the two ballet companies would merge , with numerous job losses . The managerial side of the post was no more congenial to MacMillan than it had been in Berlin , and some felt that his creative work suffered during his seven @-@ year term . His expansion of *Anastasia* into a three @-@ act version ( 1971 ) and the other full @-@ length work from this period , *Manon* ( 1974 ) , divided opinion , receiving fiercely adverse reviews as well as laudatory ones . His Joplin ballet *Elite Syncopations* ( 1974 ) and *Requiem* ( 1976 ) were immediately successful and have been regularly revived . The latter was dedicated to the memory of Cranko , who had died suddenly in 1973 . It was premiered at Stuttgart , because as with *Song of the Earth* the Royal Opera House board thought the chosen music ? Fauré 's *Requiem* ? inappropriate for a ballet . The work was not given at Covent Garden until 1983 .

At the age of 42 MacMillan , hitherto unmarried and enigmatic about his personal life , married the 26 @-@ year @-@ old Australian painter Deborah Williams . The writer John Percival comments that MacMillan 's marriage " saved him , both physically and mentally [ and ] gave him stability in his private life and seems to have resolved his confused sexuality " . There was one daughter of the marriage .

= = = Royal Ballet : principal choreographer 1977 ? 92 = = =

After seven years as director of the Royal Ballet , MacMillan resigned in 1977 , wishing to concentrate on choreography . He was succeeded as artistic director by Norman Morrice , whose background was the more avant garde Ballet Rambert . MacMillan took up the post of principal choreographer . His fourth full @-@ length ballet , *Mayerling* ( 1978 ) , was a dark work , portraying the suicides of the Austrian Crown Prince Rudolf and his young mistress . Parry comments that some scenarios for his new one @-@ act ballets featured similarly dark themes : " a disturbed family in *My Brother* , *My Sisters* , a lunatic asylum in *Playground* ; *Valley of Shadows* ... included scenes in a Nazi concentration camp . " *Different Drummer* ( 1984 ) was a balletic version of Georg Büchner 's *Woyzeck* , familiar to Covent Garden audiences from Berg 's 1925 opera *Wozzeck* : all three depict the brutal fate of the downtrodden . Even the lighter of MacMillan 's ballets could have their serious side : *La fin du jour* ( 1979 ) , to Ravel 's *Piano Concerto in G* , depicts a way of life of the 1930s soon to be shattered by the Second World War , and is described by Crisp as " a requiem for the *douceur de vivre* of an era " .

In the 1980s MacMillan ventured into non @-@ balletic theatre , directing productions of Strindberg 's *The Dance of Death* ( Royal Exchange Theatre , Manchester , 1983 ) and Tennessee Williams 's *Kingdom of Earth* ( Hampstead Theatre , 1984 ) . Parry , writing in *The Observer* , thought that the drama in the first play failed to spring fully to life ; Michael Billington of *The Guardian* praised MacMillan 's " immensely detailed , atmospheric production " of the second piece . From 1984 to 1989 , while remaining chief choreographer of the Royal Ballet , MacMillan was associate director of the American Ballet Theatre . For that company he staged new works , *Wild Boy* and *Requiem* ( this time to Andrew Lloyd Webber 's music rather than Fauré 's ) , restaged his *Romeo and Juliet* , and created a new production of *The Sleeping Beauty* .

Despite a serious heart attack in 1988 MacMillan continued to work intensely . In 1989 he made his first new ballet for Covent Garden for five years , a new version of Britten 's *The Prince of the*

Pagodas . The company had never found the original 1956 Cranko version satisfactory , and it was neglected during the composer 's lifetime . MacMillan thought the piece could be successfully reworked with some cuts to the score , but the Britten estate refused to allow any alterations . MacMillan reverted to classical ballet for the piece , creating a fairy @-@ tale work far from his accustomed style . The result was not judged among his best works , but it marked the emergence of the 19 @-@ year @-@ old Darcey Bussell , whom he picked to dance the young heroine . Along with the former Bolshoi principal dancer Irek Mukhamedov , who joined the Royal Ballet in 1991 , Bussell was MacMillan 's final important muse . For the two of them he created Winter Dreams ( 1991 ) , inspired by Chekhov 's Three Sisters . Mukhamedov was the brutish male leading character in MacMillan 's last ballet , The Judas Tree ( 1992 ) .

MacMillan died from a heart attack backstage at the Royal Opera House during a performance of Mayerling . Jeremy Isaacs , the general director of the Royal Opera House , announced the death from the stage after the performance and asked the audience to rise and bow their heads and leave the theatre in silence . On the same night the junior company was presenting MacMillan 's Romeo and Juliet in Birmingham . MacMillan had nearly finished work on the dances for a new production of Carousel by the National Theatre , which opened at the Lyttelton Theatre six weeks later , with his family and many of his friends in the audience .

= = Honours and awards = =

MacMillan was knighted in 1983 , and he received honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh ( 1976 ) and the Royal College of Art ( 1992 ) . His awards include the Evening Standard Ballet Award ( 1979 ) ; Society of West End Theatre Managers Ballet Award , 1980 and 1983 ; and , posthumously , the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Dance Production in 1993 for The Judas Tree ; the Society of London Theatre Special Award in 1993 ; and the Tony Award for Best Choreography in 1994 for Carousel .

= = Choreography = =

= = = Full @-@ length ballets = = =

= = = Shorter works = = =

Sources : Royal Opera House performance database , Parry , and Kenneth MacMillan website .