

Dancing into the limelight

For the first time, a Cypriot dance company hopes to transform the local scene. Beverly Davies followed them in their first steps

DANCECYPRUS burst into life this year with vibrant energy and polished performances from its pan-European cast. Their first show in January premiered the first two ballets to be created especially for the new Cypriot company – *A Pair of Wings Please?*, choreographed by Limassol-born dancer Carolina Constantinou and *Sirens* by acclaimed Italian choreographer Antonio Colandrea, who is the Artistic Director of Dancecyprus. Both are modern, relevant works of art which explore the roles of women in a changing Mediterranean world.

Two months of rehearsals in the normally quiet setting of Lofou village paid off with impressive performances from the company of young, exceptional dancers.

Constantinou's *A Pair of Wings Please?* has the theme of unwritten social laws and personal freedom. This short work set the tone of the evening with its impeccable professionalism. The dancers captured the mood of suspicion and even menace, stepping in and out of ever-moving spotlights. Performed by six of the Dancecyprus company, *A Pair of Wings Please?* featured touching performances from Grazia Striano and Simona Iavazzo as women coming to terms with mixed emotions.

In contrast, the longer ballet *Sirens* begins quietly with the sound of the sea and reveals a scene of fishermen and the enigmatic

Sirens who hold such allure for the men. The simple, evocative set and costumes by Andy Bargilly ornament a series of beautifully-crafted dances illustrating the multi-faceted personality of the Mediterranean woman. Colandrea presents this woman to us with all her paradoxes – sweet yet bitter, pragmatic yet frivolous, religious yet sometimes blasphemous...

The ballet was made for all twelve of the Dancecyprus company, including a featured part for the choreographer of *A Pair of Wings Please?*, Carolina Constantinou. Her *pas de deux* with Bledi Bejleri, himself a powerful, subtle performer, was beautifully danced.

Among the ensemble is the Cypriot Galatia Savva (21), who began her ballet training on the island as a three-year-old. In *Sirens*, Savva demonstrated her distinctive stage personality and ability to communicate with the audience. Savva has performed in many theatres including London's Covent Garden, but she feels there is nothing quite as sweet as the pleasure and pride of being able to perform at home in this company, saying: "It has been truly liberating dancing at home and contributing to this amazing project. There is so much talent and ambition in our country that it feels cruel and unfair for dance not to receive adequate support to progress at the pace of sport, for example."

A supremely sensual *pas de deux* between lovers played by Simona Iavazzo and Sergio Giacomelli was the memorable pinnacle of Antonio Colandrea's choreographic innovation and

demonstrated his ability to elicit excellent acting as well as movement from the dancers.

Live music performed by Ayse Karaoglan, Nenad Bogdanovic and soprano Margarita Makridou was skilfully integrated into the score, which was compiled by Silvio Brambilla.

The audience reaction was enthusiastic and almost disbelieving. A ballet teacher from Nicosia summed up, "This company already has a Cypriot identity".

Inspired by the warm reception from audiences in Nicosia and Limassol, Dancecyprus is now preparing the new programmes that will be performed in 2007 and beyond. The plans include creating more works by Cyprus-based choreographers and musicians and also providing programmes that are suitably prestigious to allow Cypriot artists currently dancing abroad to visit the island, as guests from the leading ballet companies in the rest of Europe.

If you have not seen the *Sirens* programme yet, a film of the two ballets will be screened soon at various venues.

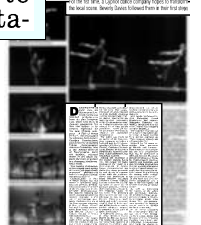
As well as harnessing the talents of the gifted and passionate individuals needed to create an impressive evening of theatre, Dancecyprus made time during the pre-performance schedule to organise several events to involve the local community.

At an event organised for young people from village youth clubs, teenagers from Lania, Doros and Monagri were welcomed by Carolina Constantinou into a rehearsal. A competition gave them the chance to win a pair of complimenta-

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ry tickets for the show. The winner, Nicoletta Nicolaou from Doros, was thrilled to see a complete, live ballet performance, a totally new experience for her. Indeed, for all the young participants, it was "something special to see dancers not much older than themselves working with such dedication and professionalism", as a youth club organiser confirmed.

Another initiative, arranged under the auspices of the British Council, allowed talented local dance students to join the company in Lofou. They watched a

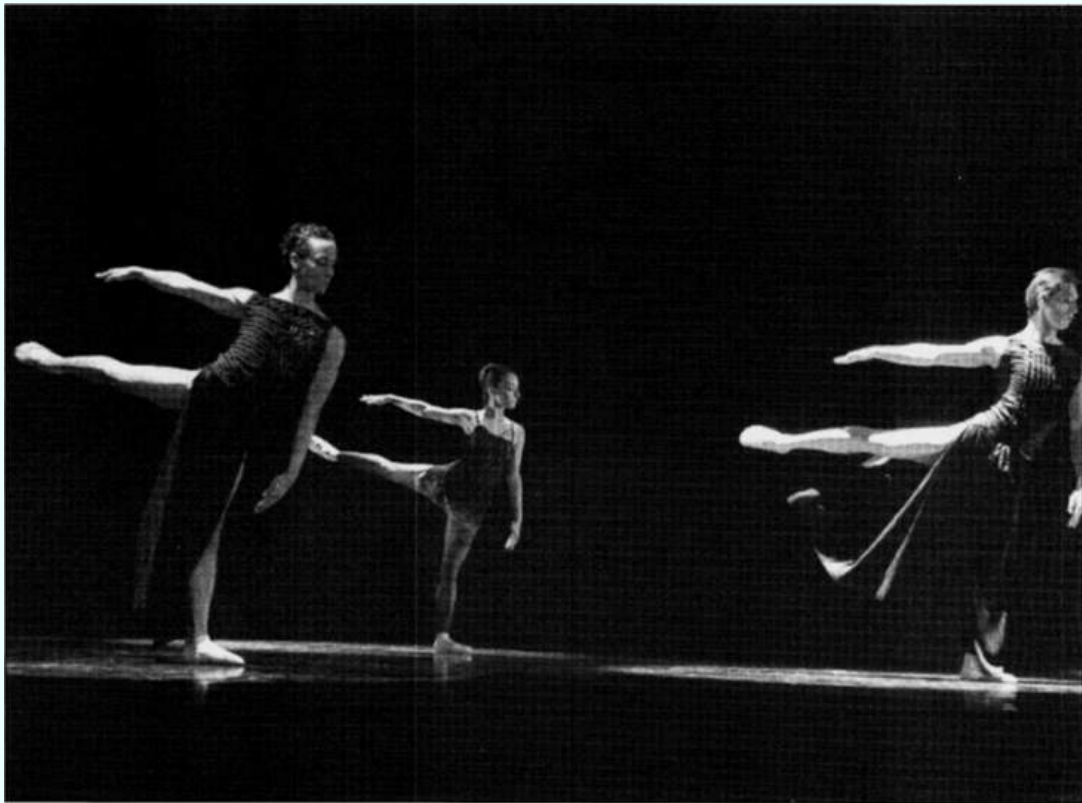
class and a rehearsal, as well as receiving a Masterclass from Artistic Director Antonio Colandrea. Three of the students, Darcia Economidou, Rachael Peters and Emily Loumba, were chosen to become the company's first Junior Associates. They now will be able to work with the professional dancers in certain classes and performances.

The company has established a subscription scheme called 'Friends of Dancecyprus'. This is open to all who wish to become more closely involved in the life of the ballet company. A

'Friends Morning' enabled members to come to Lofou studios, meet the dancers and watch them at work. The experience was fascinating and eye-opening. "It was surprising how difficult, tough and tiring a classical ballet class is," commented one of the guests.

■ *More information on Dancecyprus and how you can support it is on the website www.dancecyprus.org.*

Beverley Davies is a freelance Arts writer.



Gianluca Battaglia, Luana Immacolata Damiano and Sergio Giacomelli in *A Pair Of Wings Please?* (Photos: Peter Figetakis)

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Sergio Giacomelli in *A Pair Of Wings Please?*



Sergio Giacomelli and Grazia Striano in *A Pair Of Wings Please?*

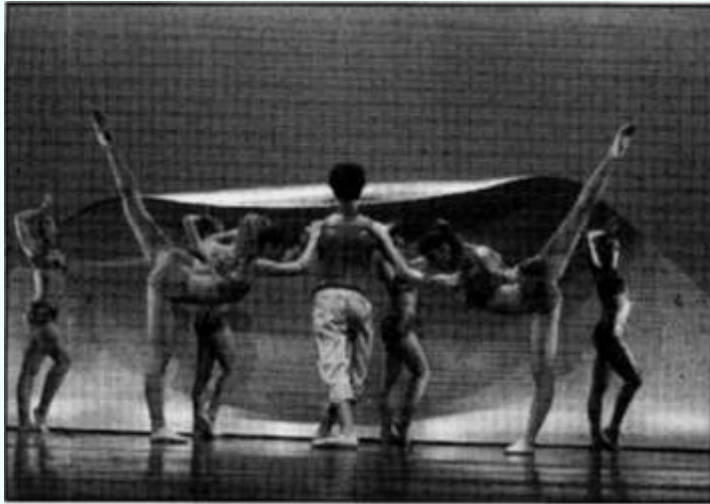
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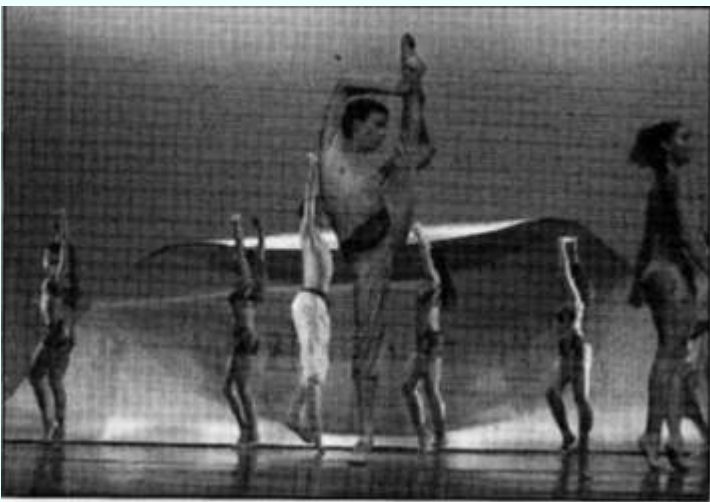




Carolina Constantinou in *Sirens*



Galatia Sava, Gianluca Battaglia and Grazia Striano in *Sirens*



Scene from *Sirens*

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