

The Australian Ballet secures a rare opportunity to perform the iconic *Nijinsky* for the first time. A portrait of a ballet legend, it opens in Melbourne on 7 September before touring to Adelaide and Sydney.



The Australian Ballet's Principal Artist Kevin Jackson. Photo: Justin Ridler

The Australian Ballet is thrilled to unveil its premiere production of **John Neumeier's** acclaimed *Nijinsky*. Rarely seen outside Europe and performed by The Australian Ballet for the first time, *Nijinsky* takes audiences inside the mind of a ballet legend. The work runs in **Melbourne** from **7 – 17 September**, before touring to **Adelaide** from **14 – 19 October**, and to **Sydney** from **11 – 28 November**.

This is the story of ballet icon Vaslav Nijinsky, as told by **one of the greatest living choreographers** and the master of the modern story ballet, **John Neumeier**. Celebrity, visionary, muse: Nijinsky changed dance forever with his explosive leap and his shockingly sensual choreography, before a dark descent into madness ended his career. A masterful portrait of a groundbreaking artist, the ballet was created in 2000 on the 50th anniversary of the dancer's death.

Nijinsky's transcendent performances made him the talk of Paris in the early 20th century. His unconventional and sensuous choreography sparked outrage and acclaim in equal measures. *The Rite of Spring*, a collaboration with composer Igor Stravinsky, famously incited a riot at its premiere in Paris. His distinct style and fearless experimentation brought ballet into the modern era.

The Australian Ballet's Artistic Director, David McAllister, said, "When I first saw this production in 2001, I instantly knew it was a masterpiece and one of the most important ballets of our time. This work is rarely performed outside Europe and we have been working with John Neumeier for 15 years to bring it to the Australian stage. For me it is one of the most exciting productions ever undertaken by The Australian Ballet."

John Neumeier has granted The Australian Ballet the rare opportunity to present this special work. *Nijinsky* is a tour de force for the whole company, but especially for the male dancers, who will take centre stage. Over two acts, seven male dancers portray the many facets of the Russian-Polish dancer. Their performances are set amidst the exotic glamour of the Ballets Russes period. The Russian company's elaborate sets and costumes were renowned internationally and influenced by collaborations with talents such as Léon Bakst, Pablo Picasso and Coco Chanel.

Born in Kiev in 1890 to two celebrated dancers, Nijinsky's introduction to ballet began at an early age. At nine he was accepted by the Imperial Ballet School in Russia, the world's leading dance school at that time. In 1909 he joined the Ballets Russes, a new company started by Sergei Diaghilev. The impresario took his productions around the world and Nijinsky became the company's star male dancer. He used the opportunity to experiment with choreography and he lifted the profile of the male dancer. He performed with the Ballets Russes until 1917. The dancer was forced to leave the company by his mentor and lover Diaghilev who was outraged by Nijinsky's decision to marry Romola de Pulszky. Nijinsky worked alone for several years before a tragic breakdown cut short his extraordinary career at a young age. At just 29 years old, Nijinsky suffered a nervous breakdown. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, he retired from the stage and would not perform again. He was institutionalised on and off until his death in 1950.

The ballet *Nijinsky* opens with the artist's last public performance, in the ballroom of a Swiss hotel, in 1919. As Nijinsky dances, his memories and hallucinations come to life onstage, interwoven with recollections of his greatest performances. The stage is filled with his closest friends – the larger-than-life impresario of the Ballets Russes Sergei Diaghilev; his wife, whom he met on a sea voyage to South America; and his family members. Nijinsky's memories of childhood and schooling are interspersed with nightmarish visions of infidelity, death, and the horrors of World War I. As the solipsism of Nijinsky's illness takes over, the world seems to be going mad around him. Moving between extremes of ecstasy and anguish, *Nijinsky* is both a moving tribute and a spectacular piece of theatre.

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JOHN NEUMEIER BIOGRAPHY:

John Neumeier was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He joined Stuttgart Ballet in 1963. He was subsequently named Director of Ballet Frankfurt, and then Director and Chief Choreographer of the Hamburg Ballet, where he founded the Hamburg Ballet Festival and the School of the Hamburg Ballet.

Neumeier has worked as guest choreographer with companies across Europe, in Japan and the USA. His awards include the Dance Magazine Award, the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, the French Order of Arts and Letters and the Legion of Honour, the Nijinsky Award for Lifetime Achievement, Herbert von Karajan Musikpreis, Deutscher Jubiläums Tanzpreis, the Order of Friendship of the Russian Federation, and the Inamori Foundation Kyoto Prize for his contributions to the Arts and Philosophy.

In 2007, he was made an honorary citizen of the city of Hamburg. Neumeier established the John Neumeier Foundation in 2006 with the aim of preserving and eventually making available to the public his collection of dance and ballet-related objects. In 2011, Neumeier founded Germany's National Youth Ballet.

DATES**Melbourne****7 – 17 September (11 performances)**

Arts Centre Melbourne, State Theatre with Orchestra Victoria

Adelaide**14 – 19 October (6 performances)**

Adelaide Festival Centre, Festival Theatre with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

Sydney**11 – 28 November (19 performances)**

Sydney Opera House, Joan Sutherland Theatre with Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra

BOOKINGSaustralianballet.com.au/nijinsky
or call 1300 369 741**WHAT THE CRITICS SAID:**

“a stunning homage to a great experimentalist and a compelling theatrical achievement in its own right” – *Chicago Tribune*

“Neumeier has created a ballet for the ages” – *The Globe and Mail*

SPECIAL EVENTS**Boys' Day**

Take a boys-only class taught by a male dancer of The Australian Ballet, then watch the daily ritual of company class.

Melbourne Saturday 10 September**Adelaide** Saturday 15 October**Sydney** Saturday 12 November

10am – 12.30pm

Tickets \$29

McAllister in Conversation

Artistic Director David McAllister hosts an intimate talk with a luminary from the ballet world. Price includes a glass of sparkling wine or soft drink.

Melbourne Saturday 10 September**Sydney** Saturday 12 November

5pm – 5.45pm

Tickets \$25

Q&A

Nijinsky audiences are invited to stay behind after the show for a special Q&A with Artistic Director David McAllister and a panel of artistic staff and dancers.

Melbourne Monday 12 September**Adelaide** Monday 17 October**Sydney** Monday 21 November

FREE

Behind the Scenes

A unique behind-the-scenes look at the life of a dancer. Watch the company take their daily morning class, and then see two lead dancers in a private coaching session as they prepare for an upcoming performance.

Melbourne Tuesday 13 September**Adelaide** Tuesday 18 October**Sydney** Tuesday 22 November

11.30am – 12.30pm

Tickets \$19 – \$29

The Australian Ballet's video clips for *Nijinsky*:*Nijinsky*In the Mind of *Nijinsky*