



Cathy Marston.

Cathy Marston explains: "I was always drawn to choreography. I danced around as a child and made up dances." She studied at the King Slocombe School of Dance in Cambridge and joined the Royal Ballet Upper School at 16, attending choreography classes taught by Norman Morrice and David Drew. Involvement in Christopher Hampson's creations also inspired her: "Ballet can be like that!" When she graduated in 1994 she won first and second prize at the Ursula Moreton Choreographic Competition. This included "the porn duet – as it was nick-named by Edward Watson". The material grew from her own enjoyment of athletic, intricate partner work, "I was a bit of a daredevil", and gave immediate indication of the unusual, off kilter work that is now typical.

She joined Zurich Ballet and performed a varied repertoire including Balanchine, Mats Ek, van Manen and Ed Wubbe. There were dancers from all over the world, "it was so different... I really didn't know what had hit me". In 1996 she joined Richard Wherlock's Luzern Ballet. Choreographers need a range of skills and she admires Wherlock's ability to direct rehearsals. She continued choreographing and he generously allowed her leave of absence to make work for the Royal Ballet. In 1997 she created *Figure in Progress*, "a study in extreme definition" inspired by the sculptures of Giacometti, for their Dance Bites Tour. Dance Bites provided opportunities away from the pressure of the Royal Opera House giving

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By Lorna Sanders

invaluable learning experiences to many, such as Ashley Page, Tom Sapsford, Matthew Hart, William Tackett and Christopher Wheeldon.

Words Apart for Dance Bites 1998, although abstract, invested in emotion as a theme. A programme note draws attention to distance and separation in relationships; "wondering how thoughts and feelings can be so fluid and clear while speech and gestures often seem so restricted – confined to language, to social etiquette. Caught in patterns". Structure was thus used as a device for emphasising emotional undercurrents. "A clever and shimmering construction ... sharp-cut classical language [and] deliciously unhurried pas de deux ... in which the duo are pulled apart even as they are drawn together, gives full rein to the erotic power of body language". The pas de deux was revived for a Sadler's Wells performance with Deborah Bull and Jonathan Cope.

Personal relationships also featured in *Tidelines* for Dance Bites 1999. A programme note refers to "an endless state of flux ... [and asked] are we not often drawn to our 'opposites', seeking in another elements that we lack". An abstract treatment and risk-taking partnering again emerged. Debra Craine states that "the choreography reflects opposing dynamics – fluid and brittle, flowing and static ... the six dancers are both drawn to each other and resolutely separate ... a staggeringly beautiful and sensually pungent pas de deux ... [where]

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Galeazzi wraps herself around ... Cope like cling film, as if seeking to absorb him".

In 2000 she joined Bern Ballet, working with 11 different choreographers

including Robert North, Pierre Wyss, and David Parsons. There was no time for her own choreography. She courageously gave up job security and moved back to London, immediately starting work with Bruce Sansom and Jenny Tattersall for a gala at the Exeter Festival. Commissions soon arrived, the National Youth Dance Company, for example. For London Children's Ballet she made her first full-length ballet, *Ballet Shoes* (2001), based on Noel Streatfield's novel. She began to write informative diary entries for the ballet.co.uk website and broadened her experience of dancing, becoming a company member of the Henri Ogunke Dance Company.

She made *Traces* (2001) as part of the Royal Opera House Artists' Development Initiative (ADI), sharing the Cohabitants Programme at the Clore



Northern Ballet Theatre perform *Dividing Silence*. Photograph by Brian Slater.

Studio with Tom Sapsford. *Traces* "explores time and relationships... as shifting dimensions of a multiple reality". Marston's intellectually serious approach is evident and music by Yann Tierson indicates a typical use of contemporary composers (including Philip Chambon, Dylan Newcomb, Peter Sculthorpe, and John Adams). The mix of abstract and narrative treatment divided critics: the piece was "let down by Marston's reliance on extraneous emoting – sad looks and pouting shrugs – rather than registering feeling through the dynamics of the dance"; "the mixture of emotional and kinetic interest maintains a shifting but continuous balance". Marston has now made six pieces for the ADI. It provides studio space, theatre and lighting, assists with publicity and ticket sales, while Marston has to organise the flyers and find dancers (who give their spare time for free), sponsorship and other collaborators. A useful learning experience, it also enables Marston to experiment and take risks.

An increasing use of literary sources is evident (interestingly both her parents are English teachers). *Rosemary for Remembrance* (2001), for Images of Dance, is based on the characters of Ophelia and Hamlet. An increasing experience with contemporary dance might also be feeding her approach; "whilst keeping a classical base to the vocabulary ... I'm also emphasising activation of the body; trying to be clear about where movement is initiated from – how the strong use of a particular set of

muscles or the release of another set affects the quality... I'm starting to define my style with increasing detail". This style has also become increasingly narrative and has led to specific choreographic problems for her to solve. She does not like mime, "it just seems to break up all the momentum and atmosphere you get going with the actual dance".

In 2001 making *Adventurer Blush* with Northern Youth Dance Company she noted, "these students are used to being given 'tasks'... I have rarely worked in this way; occasionally I use improvisation as a creative device, but more often than not I bring the initial vocabulary". However she is interested in new ways of working. She attended the PAL Dance Lab in Kent working with improvisation, text and video. She made a short film with David Hinton (film director) that whetted her appetite and "experimented with

Selected Choreochronicle

Figure in Progress 1997 Royal Ballet Dance Bites Tour
[m] Shostakovich, Fabienne Audeoud; [d] Tayana Van Walsum

Words Apart 1998 Royal Ballet Dance Bites Tour
[m] Dylan Newcomb; [d] Paul Andrews. Extract (duet) performed 1997, charity gala in aid of RAD and Benesh Institute

Tidelines 1999 Royal Ballet Dance Bites Tour
[m] Port Essington by Peter Sculthorpe; [d] Tayana Van Walsum

Traces 2001 Clore Studio, Cohabitants Programme (Royal Ballet)
[m] Yann Tierson; [c] Ben Mayer; [l] Simon Bennison

Unstrung Tension 2002 Clore Studio, Outside In Programme (Royal Ballet)
[m] Inner World by Carl Vine; [c] Cathy Marston

Facing Viv 2002 English National Ballet, also restaged for Tour de Force 2003
[m] Gnarly Buttons by John Adams; [d] Anthony Lambie.

Between Shadows 2002 Clore Studio, Cohabitants (2) Programme (Royal Ballet)
[m] Philip Chambon; [d] Elizabeth McGorian; [l] Simon Bennison

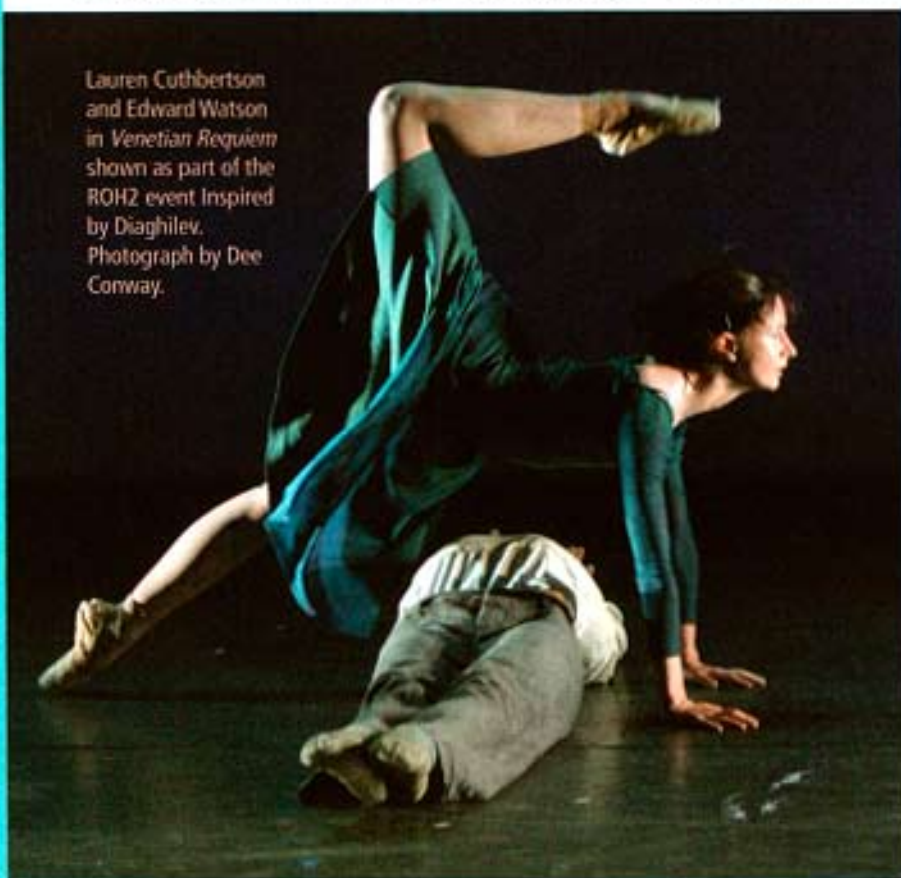
Sophie 2003 Linbury Studio (Royal Ballet)
[m] Jules Maxwell; [d] Jon Bauser; [l] Simon Bennison, [f] Terry Braun

Stateless 2003 Linbury Studio (Royal Ballet)
[m] Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Rachmaninoff; [d] Jon Bauser; [l] Simon Bennison

games to do with identity and possession with Wendy Houston. I was amazed that work seemed to appear from out of nowhere".

The relationship with the ADI continued. *Between Shadows* (2002) was based on *The Go-Between*, a novel by L. P. Hartley. Marston wanted a vocabulary to "encompass the storytelling aspect, hint at the period of 1900, and yet remain within my style

Lauren Cuthbertson and Edward Watson in *Venetian Requiem* shown as part of the ROH2 event Inspired by Diaghilev. Photograph by Dee Conway.



of work"¹¹. *Unstrung Tension* (2002) was more abstract. When questioned about the significance of the two approaches she explains: "Narrative is the main love. I use lots of literature as starting points, but music is often a stimulus, too. With *Unstrung Tension* the rhythm of the music was the main point but everyone read things into it. I do not have an abstract passion though I am still interested in it, but not as a preoccupation with the form of dance for its own sake, structure is a means to an end for me." She is surprised when other people see evidence of Ashton or MacMillan in her work, not feeling embedded within this tradition. What does she admire about it? "I was awestruck by *Judas Tree*, it really made an impression, I hadn't seen much work. Many pieces I've seen only once, so nothing strongly influenced me. I was interested more in what ballet can do, how it can speak emotionally. In pas de deux work I wanted to skew-whiff everything. Being back in the UK for longer I have been able to see more work. I enjoyed *Marguerite and Armand* and *A Month in the Country* but physically my influence is more European."

In 2002 Marston created *Facing Viv* for English National Ballet based on T.S. Eliot's relationship with his first wife, Vivienne. Again structural devices emphasise the narrative; "a duet of sexual tension is followed by a more watchfully grim encounter... each section overlaps, so that we feel the different personae within the marriage scrutinising each other. The ballet

closes with the six dancers jerking in and out of... unison, the two Eliots yearning for their fractured selves to mend"¹². For some critics the abstract treatment was problematic. For Jann Parry "by emphasising the content of the piece, Marston sets up expectations she cannot fulfil. She has us looking for cues and quotes"¹³. The commission clashed with the Henri Oguuke schedule and she had to leave that

company, although she does not want to give up performing yet. Working with others has been important and emotion is at the root of her vocabulary; "although I put myself into Viv's moment, a bit like an actor, a certain movement style comes from my own body - I have worked with lots of choreographers for not many times, so lots of little pathways in the muscles are from many people". *Facing Viv* was revived for the 2003 spring tour.

In November 2002 she joined Kim Bandstrup's company, Arc, and toured in his *Hamlet*. "Kim's work is all about telling narrative through contemporary dance. I hope to learn a lot from him"¹⁴. A natural choice, the connection to her own thematic interests is clear. She also states that "Kim is like a teacher/mentor" who has influenced her working methods. "It was lovely to re-teach [*Facing Viv*]. I tried the

Kim-thing and asked them what they knew about Tom and Viv so I was less the dictator. Kim didn't reveal motivation of character whereas I had bombarded my dancers with information. It was nice to be given the space to find the story myself. He doesn't show steps, is precise in the musicality and rhythm and you fill this in with vocabulary; whereas I show a lot, I think I get quite controlling". This however may be partly due to time constraints. *Facing Viv* had a mere two-week creation period. "I had to work out the solo vocabulary on myself first then work out the structure."

In November 2002 Marston was also made the first Associate Artist of the Royal Opera House allowing her to work regularly in the studio theatres (including the more spacious Linbury) and collaborate with various departments. She began work on William Styron's novel, *Sophie's Choice*, creating two new pieces (the first full evening of her work) for January 2003. She was able to further her interest in film. *Sophie*, her most ambitious project to date because of the number of collaborators, aimed to incorporate different layers to build a character study of Sophie rather than simply retell her story: "We're using film [projections by Terry Braun]... with live action; dancers will move with ghosts of themselves, remember events from their past and dream about their future"¹⁵. Critics were positive: "absorbing, total



Dylan Elmore and Jenny Tattersall in *After the Storm*. Photograph by Laurie Lewis.

In February 2004 the Linbury saw companion pieces to the new opera, *The Tempest* (Thomas Adès). Contrasting duets, *Before the Tempest*, *After the Storm* and a longer piece, *Asyla*, focused on Sycorax, Caliban, Prospero and Ariel. Marston

theatre, the components reverberating off one another while meshing perfectly. It conveys with great delicacy... the notion of Sophie's past... invading and interfering with the present". *Stateless* was a more abstract piece consisting of 22 variations in solos and duets. It "emphasises pattern and steps, with six... dancers forming couples who pick up threads of movement from each other or gel into brief unison... the choreography rushes and rolls... the spectacular lifts, with splayed limbs, are frozen moments of frenzy. The emotional subtext is evident".

2003 continued to be busy. Touring with Bandstrup's Art Dance Company in the spring she also worked on an evening of dance and organ music for ENB at Westminster Abbey and a Royal Ballet School commission (*A Summer's Day*) for performance in July, her main ROH stage debut. Here she states "everyone is pitching in, offering ideas and trying to accomplish the impossible 'visions' I describe" indicating perhaps the use of slightly looser working methods". Summer was spent dancing in *West Side Story* (Richard Wherlock) at the Bregenz Festival in Austria. October saw more work for the Linbury. *Broken Fiction* was a new duet with music by Dave Maric, Matthew Barley's *Between the Notes* providing live music. She was also revisiting previous work. Re-choreographing or redoing? "I'm not sure. [Traces] worked partly because of the naivety. If you change one thing this might affect it. I have to decide how much to tamper. *Unstrung Tension* stays pretty much the same". She also made a duet, *Non Excutit*, based on Lady Macbeth and Ophelia, for Moten Zamora and Oxana Panchenko of George Piper Dances.

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found "the ugly or sad characters of more interest". In June, *Vivettian Requiem*, for the Linbury's Diaghilev anniversary had a commissioned score by Judith Bingham, "the duet could be extended if anyone is interested. Although death by water is a theme, Edward Watson is not Diaghilev." While narrative remains uppermost, she also likes a challenge. Early summer also saw an abstract ballet, *Dividing Science* for NBT, with twelve dancers on pointe and in leotards.

Other influences continue to refresh. She has had two retreats at Scotland's Cove Park. Director Katie Mitchell suggested working with someone to write her ballets (she usually wrote her own): "Three weeks to live, sleep and talk about a Clara Schumann idea with John Bauser [designer], Martin Ward [music] and Jane Galloway [author]. Time to think and make good treatment. You can't dance there – just go and bounce ideas off people." For an avowed control freak this was an interesting step. This summer she spent time there with Margaret Williams, who directed the film *Asyla* and *The Tempest* shown on BBC4, to come up with ideas for Channel 4. Watch this space! She also went to the USA to visit seven different companies and introduce herself to them.

This autumn saw her dancing with Brandstrup again in *The Art of the Story Teller* and new work is planned for the ROH2 and the Basle Ballet next spring. Still only in her twenties, Marston has had to "tailor ideas a lot to the opportunities that are there, some ideas I am saving up for when I can do them well. I am ambitious".

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