



BEHIND THE SCENES

Music for Dancing

Terry Davies provides the words to Matthew Bourne's wordless creations.

By Ernio Hernandez

MATTHEW BOURNE SEEMS equally at home choreographing for Broadway-style musicals (*Mary Poppins*, *My Fair Lady*) as he does creating dance pieces from classic ballets (*Swan Lake*, *Cinderella*), films (*Edward Scissorhands*) and novels (*Dorian Gray*). Perhaps more importantly, in the world of dance — where music serves as the written word — he seems as comfortable working with such “writers” as Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev as he does with contemporary composers.

Chief among the latter in the last decade has been Terry Davies. “The prime task is to make the music illuminate the story,” says Davies of his work with Bourne. “Matthew

says it is the unheard ‘text’ of the dance pieces.”

Davies — an accomplished composer-conductor with credits at the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and numerous feature films and television series — first collaborated with Bourne over a decade ago on *The Car Man*. The dance production features original music by Davies as well as his arrangements of Rodion Shchedrin's *Carmen Suite*, which itself, of course, is based on Bizet's *Carmen*. (*The Car Man*'s plot diverges from the opera, however, taking its cue more from the novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and the films based on that book.)

Since then, Davies has created entirely original scores for such Bourne works as *Play Without Words* and *Dorian Gray*. But those had a different musical topography from *The Car Man*, he explains: “If the score is to be wholly my own, I need to understand the demands of the story and what Matthew needs. In *The Car Man*'s case, it is vital to be able to respect the original material and treat it accordingly. The main difference is that the sound world is already laid out when using an existing piece as part of the score.”

Did reverence for a well-known masterwork factor into the decision-making process? “I have adored *Carmen* ever since I first performed it as

a student. I would not take liberties with Bizet's music,” replies Davies. “We talked through *The Car Man* scene by scene, seeing where the Bizet/Shchedrin score would work, then which pieces from *Carmen* could be adapted for the story. There's so much astonishing music in the opera that we didn't lack material. The adaptation also had to work idiomatically for the string and percussion orchestra that was used in the Shchedrin version, which Matthew wanted to form much of the score.”

Brett Morris, music director and principal conductor of Bourne's contemporary dance/theater touring company, New Adventures, concurs with Davies' reverence for that and other historical works. “One of the things we have prided ourselves on at New Adventures is trying to be faithful to the classical scores we play, including strict observation of metronome marks and tempo indications as written by the composer. This is unusual in the dance world, and many people are surprised by some of our tempi — in *Swan Lake*'s White Swan *pas de deux*, for example. We revere these wonderful pieces that we are privileged to perform by trying to remain faithful to what the composer wrote.”

Morris sees no difference, musically, between existing and new scores. “The



Not a stretch. Matthew Bourne is equally at ease working with classical and contemporary composers.

approach is essentially the same: to get into the mind of the composer and try to deliver what they have written as honestly as possible, and then to make that feel intrinsically part of the overall production." Morris's duty in creating these dance works, as he sees it, is "to create the best synthesis between the music and the choreography that is possible. Ideally, they should feel inseparable. If the whole event feels natural and cohesive, then I am happy."

Morris began work with New Adventures in 1999 on the touring production of *Swan Lake*, in which Bourne employed Tchaikovsky's music but famously transformed the tale into an all-male fantasy that shifted the focus to the prince.

Bourne, who also dove into the works of Tchaikovsky for his production of *Nutcracker!*, will tackle the composer's canon a third time later this year with his reimagining of *Sleeping Beauty*. Resetting the classic Charles Perrault fairy tale, this production brings the story's heroine, Aurora, to the Edwardian era. Years later, awakening from a century-long slumber, Aurora finds herself in the modern day.

"Matt's starting point is always with the score," says Morris, who is working with Bourne on adapting the music. "The most exciting thing is working on a new production, taking part in that collaborative creative experience. I also greatly enjoy the live performance aspect of the work. We have a very strong team of orchestral players, a few of whom have been

with the company from the start."

For Davies, the world premiere in October will spark a bit of musical nostalgia; one of his earliest introductions to the world of classical music came at the hand of Tchaikovsky. "My Auntie Winnie's wind-up gramophone played 78 rpm records of Tchaikovsky's ballet music," says Davies. "It excited me then and still does. So I'm looking forward to recording *Sleeping Beauty* this summer." Davies will produce the music recording of the production, as he did with Bourne's *Cinderella*, first staged in London's West End in 1997. Set in London during World War II, *Cinderella* featured the Prokofiev score [see "When the Shoe Fits" on page 79] with some revisions — implemented with the blessing of visual artist Oleg Prokofiev, son of the composer, who had visited rehearsals to sketch the dancers at work.

Bourne's great appreciation of music is reflected in his works, as is his passion for dance and drama. What, if any of these, comes first? Davies ventures that he and Bourne "are both theater people, and so everything has to serve the drama. It's not something we've ever needed to discuss, although we discuss the details in each case, of course."

Morris suggests a wider view, saying, "I think the major thing which drives the work with Matthew's company is the shared love of dance, music, drama. It is a collaborative process." ■

Beyond Bourne: Classical Music on Broadway

Matthew Bourne's all-male version of *Swan Lake* played Broadway in 1998–99. But it wasn't the first or last Broadway show to feature classical music. Here are some other notable examples:

Amadeus (1999) This revival of Peter Shaffer's play hit the Broadway boards the same year as *Swan Lake*. Original director Peter Hall brought back the fictionalized drama centering on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Antonio Salieri. Michael Sheen starred in this staging of the 1979 play (also a 1984 film) that features the overtures of Mozart's operas *The Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro*.

La Bohème (2002) Film director Baz Luhrmann (*William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*) gave Broadway its seventh revival (the first in more than fifty years) of the Puccini opera. The opera also served as the basis for the Jonathan Larson musical *Rent*.

Coram Boy (2007) Helen Edmundson's play, which featured a sixteen-member onstage choir and seven-piece chamber orchestra, came to Broadway after two runs at London's National Theatre. The work features parts of George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* and *Theodora*.

33 Variations (2009) Playwright Moisés Kaufman spun the tale of a musicologist (played by Jane Fonda in her return to the Broadway stage) who becomes obsessed with Beethoven's own obsession with a one-minute waltz composed by his contemporary Anton Diabelli. The otherwise unnotable waltz formed the basis of Beethoven's great *Diabelli Variations*.