

A connection with passion and brilliance

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"It was a life I couldn't say no to. The passion I felt for dance goes beyond anything else I know."

Veronica Tennant is speaking about her love affair with dance.

"The strange thing is when I chose to stop I was completely happy with that decision. Perhaps because I made the choice myself," Tennant says. "Perhaps because I felt I had accomplished what I needed to."

When Veronica Tennant comes to Hamilton June 6 and 13 to speak about her life in ballet, she will tell how it felt to be committed to such a demanding art form.

"There won't be any private revelations," she laughs. "I could never write one of those books that reveals that part of my life. What ought to matter is what I have done professionally," she says.

For all that, Tennant is willing to talk about what it felt like to give up her dance career after 25 years with the National Ballet of Canada.

"Was there pain? Of course. A little," she says. "But there was exhilaration too. I was filled with the desire to take things on, to unleash my creative wings. There was no sadness. That's the wonderful thing. And now, when I look back, it is only the impetus to move forward that causes me to think about the past."

Speaking about how it felt to leave dance 25 years ago is about as personal as Veronica Tennant gets. Sharing thoughts on her amazing career is a pleasant memory. Dancing across North America with the tempestuous Rudolf Nureyev she became a revered dance star.

"I loved him dearly," she says, referring to Nureyev, "But he should have stopped before he did."

Remembering the night at Ontario Place, when she danced La Sylphide with newly defected Mikhail Baryshnikov, she says, "It was special and always will be."

Thinking of the incredible world she inhabited isn't a longing for the past. That world led to her brilliant new career in film production and television that gives her so much present satisfaction.



Tennant. Veronica Tennant in The National Ballet of Canada's production of Onegin. David Street/Hamilton Spectator file photo Source: Hamilton Spectator file photo

Tennant is anything but nostalgic. She is in fact a survivor. Capable of moving from one creative plain to another, she's an artist with the spirit and soul of a genius. To have watched her dance Juliet in Cranko's thrilling ballet Romeo and Juliet was to have experienced greatness. With the soul of a dance actress, Tennant explored the deep terrain that separates unspeakable happiness from the sort of sorrow that can burn the heart like the slice of a knife.

Watching her dance Aurora in Sleeping Beauty was to understand the exquisite nature of classical ballet and the way it can transcend the real world of ordinary mortals.

Watching her consumed by fires of longing that swept John Cranko's Tatiana in Onegin into the darkness of the abyss is to know what great acting is, silent or spoken.

"I never cried when I gave it up," Tennant says. "There were no regrets, perhaps because I completed the circle. There was only a contentment that carried me forward to the next creative phase of my life."

Today Tennant is a producer and creative force making films that celebrate dance artistry. Her Veronica Tennant Productions Ltd. has given audiences such thrilling creations as A Pairing of Swans, a film capturing the genius of Evelyn Hart and Rex Harrington. Tennant held these amazing artists on celluloid at the very apex of their careers.

Her film on the impact of Celia Franca, founder of The National Ballet of Canada, provides a revealing portrait of one of the great forces in Canadian ballet.

"I found a new world to explore," Tennant says, as she is about to rush off to yet another film shoot.

"What I love most is it's almost like writing a book. You create page by page, step by step. It's such a collaboration, a collective of artists. That's one of the huge skills I learned as a dancer, to surround myself with premium people. "

"The image must be very clear in your head, but the best part is when we surprise each other. I don't believe in accidents. It's divine spontaneity," she laughs. "That means being so well prepared you can open up to the moment. That's when combustion takes place. Ballet gave me the matches to strike sparks. Now it's all about being free enough to discover and explore."

Tennant is looking forward to her two evenings in Hamilton in support of the Canadian Ballet Youth Ensemble.

"I believe in what Belma Diamanti is doing," she says, referring to the inspiration for Hamilton's young people's dance company.

"She believes in art from the truest point of view. Even though she didn't dance herself she has the soul of a dancer. I want to share what went into that. That's why I'm coming to Hamilton to talk about my work. Connections between people of creative spirit are so important, especially today."

Gary Smith has written on theatre and dance for The Hamilton Spectator for more than 30 years. He has watched Veronica Tennant dance since the very beginning.