

## **Interview with Mara Galeazzi, Cavaliere del Lavoro, Principal, Royal Ballet on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2013 at the Civil Service Club, London, SW1**

Allison Potts, who had previously interviewed Mara for the London Ballet Circle in October 2009, welcomed her back, this time accompanied by her baby daughter, Maia.

Mara had announced earlier in the year that she would be leaving the Royal Ballet at the end of the 2012-13 season to enable her to join her husband who was working in Oman. So before she left London, LBC had invited her to talk to members about her career and plans for the future.

Unlike many ballet dancers, Mara comes from an artistic family. She was born in Brescia, in Northern Italy. Her uncle is a painter, her father a gun engraver and her mother had been a singer.

Mara's mother had sent her to a private ballet school when she was six years old, and Mara also went to singing classes and played a lot of sport. A family friend saw an advertisement for the ballet school at La Scala and Mara passed the entrance exams and moved to Milan to attend. At that stage, she enjoyed dancing but was not passionate about it, and had not seen a ballet. She was 13 years old when she watched a video of Romeo and Juliet and some other American Ballet Theatre videos, and that was when she became really keen and committed and began to work very hard. At that time she suffered from some physical limitations so struggled in her early years at the ballet school. However, one of her teachers had great confidence in her artistic ability, and in her fourth year at the school she didn't take a summer holiday but spent the summer break doing gymnastics and stretching everyday. Thereafter, she became the best in her class. She was not taught how to act at the La Scala School, which she regrets. She believes it is very important that students are told how to move around and be natural on stage.

Mara had hoped to join the American Ballet Theatre when she finished at the La Scala Ballet School, as she'd watched so many of their videos and had not thought about joining the Royal Ballet. She had been invited to join the La Scala ballet company and dance in the Neumeier version of *The Nutcracker*. World-renowned international ballet master Mikhail Messerer had seen her at the La Scala School, when he rehearsed his *Class Ballet* there, and it was he who suggested that she had the right qualities to audition for the Royal Ballet. She auditioned three months before she graduated from the La Scala School, and Monica Mason asked her to join straight away. She completed her ballet schooling and returned to London for another audition. She joined the Royal Ballet on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1992. The director of La Scala was annoyed at the time at Mara's decision, but had since welcomed her to the company.

When she moved to London, Mara spoke no English. She lodged with a British lady who helped her learn English, and she carried a dictionary with her everywhere she went!

Mara's first role at Covent Garden was in *Swan Lake* and she could not understand the instructions the other dancers were giving to her. In her first season with the Royal

Ballet, she also danced in Ashton's *Dream* and soon adapted to the English style and fast footwork. She also danced in *La Ronde* and Mary Vetsera in *Mayerling* on tour in Italy and Istanbul. There were only ten rehearsals for Mary Vetsera, five in London and then five in Istanbul without the benefit of proper ballet studios. She first performed this role in Istanbul and is still dancing it 20 years later. She believes that as Mary is only 17 years old, and Mara was 19 when she first danced this part, it was the perfect time to start dancing and creating the character of this crazy teenager who only lives for love. Over the years, she has danced Mary with many Rudolfs, but she said that dancing with Edward Watson is very special, as they are good friends and are very similar in outlook and approach. She is delighted that the current performances of *Mayerling* have received such good reviews.

Mara's favourite roles include *Anastasia*, and she thinks that it would be wonderful to dance this now that she is a mother. She would have been very happy if she could have ended her career at Covent Garden by dancing this part as well as Mary Vetsera. She had also loved dancing in *Onegin*, *The Judas Tree*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Manon* and the *Rite of Spring*. In the course of her career, she has danced in more than 70 ballets.

Allison asked what ballets she would present if she was asked to design a season, and Mara suggested MacMillan's dark ballets, some of the old Ashton ballets such as *The Invitation*, some Cranko and some new works by Neumeier and Kylian. She would also ask Ashley Page to create a new ballet. She believes that Neumeier is very important and that the Royal Ballet would benefit from performing some of his works.

Mara would dance her final *Mayerling* at Covent Garden on 13<sup>th</sup> June, and *Manon* on 29<sup>th</sup> June, when the Royal Ballet appear in Monte Carlo. Thereafter, a small group from the company would perform in Verona on 23<sup>rd</sup> July. She would teach at a summer school in Lecce and follow that with a holiday in Tuscany with her parents. Her whole family would be watching her final performance.

She hoped to return to the Linbury Theatre to work on a new project, and was also hoping she might be granted permission to build a small dance company and school in Oman where there was a beautiful opera house opened in 2011. The Sultan of Oman had studied in the UK, and was therefore familiar with the arts in this country. Mara hoped to start a small dance company with ten dancers, and to invite a choreographer to create new work for her company.

Mara's baby daughter Maia was now a year old. Mara had continued to attend class until late in her pregnancy and she returned to the Royal Ballet to dance in *The Firebird*. She had an old back injury which had got worse due to her pregnancy which prevented her from dancing in *Infra*, as planned. She undertook two hours of gym training and Pilates every day to help her recover. She is thinner after her pregnancy, and very fit due to all the gym training.

Allison asked how she managed to combine dancing and motherhood. Mara explained that some of the Principals at the Royal Ballet who had had children used to tell her that they came to work for a rest and she had not believed them at the time. Now she does! Even when she is very tired, and her baby does not sleep well, she still manages to cook, do the washing and feed the baby. The hardest thing is the lack of sleep – her baby wakes several times each night. However, she believes motherhood has made

her more relaxed. She had decided to retire this year so that she could finish whilst at the top of her profession. She also wanted to be with her husband, who had been working in Oman for a couple of years – as she and her daughter were only able to spend time with him as a family every couple of months.

Mara would also like to devote more time to the charity she founded in 2007, when she went to Africa and ran workshops in schools and orphanages there and would like to visit them again.

Returning to discussing roles she had performed, she thought Princess Aurora and *Giselle* had been the hardest parts to dance. Both parts were very technically demanding. She enjoyed dancing *The Nutcracker* and she thought Monica Mason was a superb coach.

Allison concluded the interview by quoting from a review of Mara's recent performance in *Mayerling* by Sarah Compton, Dance Critic for the Daily Telegraph:

*“Above all, in the encounters between Mara Galeazzi's Mary and Rudolf, the dance itself dissolves into images of desire and desperation, as two tortured souls meet. Galeazzi's frenzied embrace of a man she finds in a heroin-induced torpor is terrifying in its intensity; her final glazed-eyed crawl across the stage to her doom, memorably crazed. Galeazzi leaves the Royal at the end of the season, and there could be no better way to remember her than this performance.*

*I doubt any company in the world could have performed Mayerling with such conviction. It was the Royal Ballet at its absolute best. Sensational.*

On behalf of members, Allison thanked Mara for all the thrilling performances and the enjoyment she had given over the last 21 years and wished Mara, Maia and Jurgen every happiness together in Oman.

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