

French Academy grants highest honour to a Czech artist in 180 years!

*It's not an architect, filmmaker, graphic artist, musician, painter or sculptor, but **Jiří Kylián**, a world-renowned choreographer. Thanks to the extraordinary importance of his work, the Academy has also proposed a new category – choreography.*

The Académie française is a famous institution, to which the Académie des Beaux-Arts, founded in 1816, inherently belongs. Becoming a member of the Académie means for all intents and purposes "immortality". The acceptance of a foreigner as a member, i.e. a *membre associé étranger*, is a rare occurrence, and only a few foreign-born performing and fine artists have received the honour. One of them was a musician of Czech origin in 1835, Anton Reicha. This Prague native was the director of the Paris Conservatory, a teacher of such giants as Berlioz, Liszt, César Franck and Charles Gounod.

On **25 April 2018** the Académie des Beaux-Arts elected the second Czech in its history as a member. Jiří Kylián's membership was then approved by the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and on **25 May 2018** the official communiqué confirming this extraordinary honour was issued. Congratulations!

What is being said abroad about the life journey of Jiří Kylián?

Jiří Kylián's path led from acrobatics through the ballet school of the National Theatre to the Prague Dance Conservatory. A scholarship at the Royal Ballet School in London led to a key meeting with choreographer John Crank, who offered him an engagement at the Stuttgart Ballet. In 1975, he accepted an offer from the NDT (Nederlands Dans Theater) in The Hague. In 1978, after the unprecedented success of his ballet *Sinfonietta*, he was appointed Artistic Director of the NDT. *Symphony of Psalms*, his second masterpiece of this era, assured him international fame. After a period in the 1980s in which he inclined towards greater abstraction, his work was heavily influenced by his encounters with aborigines in Australia. Kylián quit as artistic director of the NDT in 1999, but was still the resident choreographer of the ensemble. Since the 1970s, Kylián has created hundreds of dance pieces, of which three quarters were for the Nederlands Dans Theater. He holds a number of awards, including the Vaslav Nijinsky Prize awarded in Monte Carlo, and the Legion of Honour in France.

Let us add that the Prague Academy of Performing Arts awarded him the title Doctor honoris causa. In one of his greatest performances, *Arcimboldo*,



which he created for the 35th anniversary of the NDT, he combined all stages of his dance career from the ages of 17 to 70. Czech audiences also had the opportunity to see it. His great inspiration was also Zora Šemberová, the first dancer in the world to perform Juliet in Prokofiev's ballet.

"Up until now, there were seven categories of membership in the Academy of Fine Arts: Architecture, Film and Photography, Graphics, Music, Painting, Sculpture, and the Independent Membership Category. On April 25, when I was voted a member of the Academy, choreography became its new category. This makes me happy and I suppose other practitioners of our craft will be happy too," Jiří Kylián explains, adding:

"You will surely be interested to know that my only predecessors to become members of this institution were Marcel Marceau and Maurice Béjart. They were admitted as independent members, because the choreography category had not yet been established. I admired both of these artists. They opened the doors to magic, innovation, beauty and fantasy, and they were the greatest heroes of my youth. To this day I realize how important their performances were to me and later I even had the opportunity to meet them."

"The TANEC PRAHA Festival is happy to join the endless parade of congratulators," said Yvona Kreuzmannová, director of the festival: "The honour for us is all the greater that Jiří Kylián himself will kick off the 30th anniversary year of the festival with East Shadow on 1 – 3 June in the PONEC Theatre."

An extraordinary opportunity to get acquainted with his life and work will be provided by the retrospective multimedia exhibition **Celebrating Kylián!**, which will open next week in close cooperation with the National Theatre Ballet and the Kylian Foundation. It will run from 5 to 10 June 2018 in building B of the National Theatre in Václav Havel Square. More at: www.tanecpraha.org

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Biography of Jiří Kylián

From a young age, Jiří Kylián was fascinated by the circus. He took part in acrobatics as a child and at the age of nine he began to attend the ballet school of the National Theatre in Prague. Six years later, he was admitted to the Prague Dance Conservatory and in 1967 he received a scholarship to the Royal Ballet School in London. There he met a prominent figure of the dance world, choreographer John Crank, who offered him an engagement in the Stuttgart Ballet.

He left Germany in 1975 and became the artistic co-director of the Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT) in The Hague. In 1978, after the success of *Sinfonietta*, which he set to the music of his compatriot, Leoš Janáček, at the Festival of the Two Worlds in Charleston, South Carolina, he was named the sole artistic director of the NDT. His second great masterpiece of this period was *Symphony of Psalms*, which brought him international renown.

In the mid-1980s, Kylián's style becomes more abstract. Typical examples are works from the *Black and White* series. Meetings with Australian aborigines influence his further direction. He perceives dance as a building block of social structure and as a key component of humanity's cultural heritage.

To celebrate the 35th anniversary of the NDT in 1994, he creates another masterpiece, *Arcimboldo*, featuring all three NDT ensembles. It is a unique concept that covers all stages of a dancer's career, from the ages of 17 to 70. In 1999, Kylián leaves the position of artistic director of NDT, but remains as a resident choreographer of the ensemble.

Since the beginning of the 70s, Kylián has created hundreds of dance pieces, of which three quarters were for the Nederlands Dans Theater. He holds a number of awards, including the Vaslav Nijinsky Prize awarded in Monte Carlo, and the Legion of Honour in France. In 2006, he co-directed the film *CAR-MEN*, whose choreography and filming took place in the devastated landscape of open-air brown coal mines in the Czech Republic.

The Prague Academy of Performing Arts awarded him the title Doctor honoris causa. His great inspiration was also Zora Šemberová, the first dancer in the world to perform Juliet in Prokofiev's ballet.



This extraordinary honour was prepared by five Dutch partners of Jiří Kylián for his 70th birthday in 2017. The Nederlands Dance Theater, the Holland Dance Festival, the Korzo Theatre, the Kylián Foundation and the Zuiderstrand Theatre all joined forces. The year-round celebrations under the name Celebrating Kylián! were connected with a multimedia exhibition of the same name.

Prague has the honour of presenting this project for the first time outside The Hague. In close cooperation with the National Theatre Ballet, the TANEC PRAHA Festival and the Kylián Foundation in Prague with the support of NDT and Kylián Productions, the **Celebrating Kylián!** Exhibition will first open to the public from 5 to 10 June 2018 in building B of the National Theatre in Václav Havel Square. The second extended phase of this exhibition will take place on the occasion of the premiere of the feature show *Kylián – Bridges of Time* by the National Theatre Ballet, from 11 to 25 October 2018.