

Final Bows

A last curtain call for principal dancers Patricia Barker, Kyra Nichols, and Alessandra Ferri.

Three great ladies of the ballet world have turned in their pointe shoes and taken their last curtain calls. This esteemed and exclusive trio of ballerinas are as famous as the dances they have originated and performed to sold-out theaters throughout the world, and are synonymous with the companies they have danced for over the majority of their careers.

Patricia Barker

Principal Dancer of Pacific Northwest Ballet just celebrated her 26th season with PNB, retiring at the age of 44. Barker has been a principal dancer for two decades, a member of the company for 25 years and was previously a student at its school. Ms. Barker estimates that she has worn approximately 4,680 pairs of pointe shoes during her long and rewarding career.

Born in Richland, Washington, Patricia took her first ballet class at age 7. Her teacher, Lynne Williams, a former soloist with Boston Ballet, sent 15 year-old Barker to New England to study on scholarship at Boston Ballet School. The distance proved too much for her and, by next summer, the teenage Patricia returned to study at PNB. Barker joined the company as an apprentice in 1981, and was promoted to the corps de ballet in 1982 where she landed her first major role as Rose, the lead in the "Waltz of the Flowers" in "Nutcracker." In 1984 she became a soloist, and in 1986 at age 23, a principal dancer.

During the past 26 years, she has performed with PNB on tour throughout Europe, Asia, Australia and North America and has appeared as a guest artist with domestic and foreign ballet companies. For the past 15 years, she has staged, rehearsed and coached ballets for professional companies including the Boston Ballet School and the Slovak National Ballet. She is a faculty member of the Pacific Northwest Ballet School and has been a guest teacher at several noted ballet schools. To help raise awareness of bone and joint health, Ms. Barker became a spokeswoman for the U.S. Bone and Joint Decade.

Ms. Barker's has made numerous national and international guest performances with noted ballet troupes. Her image has graced the covers of many dance magazines. Patricia's career highlights include performing the lead role of Clara in the 1994 film version of PNB's "Nutcracker: The Motion Picture", and in 1999, performed the role of Titania in the BBC film version of PNB's production of Balanchine's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." For over 20 years, Barker has danced the dual role of Odette/Odile in "Swan Lake."

Imbued with the entrepreneurial spirit, in 1999 Ms. Barker became the founder and owner of her own dancewear company, BKWear, where she received a patent for a new contemporary dance shoe. Patricia is also an expert on toe shoes, having collaborated with Freed of London on "[Patricia Barker on Pointe Shoes](#)," an instructional video for new dancers on the selection and wearing of pointe shoes. Barker is on the advisory board for Pointe Magazine, CriticalDance.com, California Ballet, and Minnesota Dance Theater and is a consultant to Bunheads Inc.

Only weeks into her "retirement", Patricia had begun teaching at the PNB School. This summer, she returns to New England to teach at Boston Ballet School. Ms. Barker is married to former PNB dancer Michael Auer.

Kyra Nichols

Principal dancer Kyra Nichols, 48, retired from New York City Ballet this past June after an unprecedented 34 year run, the company record for a female dancer.

Born in California and raised in Berkeley, Nichols' mother and first ballet teacher, Sally Streets, had danced in NYCB's corps de ballet in the 1950s. Ms. Nichols eventually studied at the School of American Ballet summer program, and joined New York City Ballet in 1974. In 1979, she was promoted to principal dancer.

In addition to her longevity record, Nichols also holds the distinction of being among the last dancers who were part of the George Balanchine era. During that time, Balanchine chose to showcase the talents of Suzanne Farrell over Nichols'. Although Kyra had always shared roles with Farrell, it was only after Balanchine's death in 1983 that Nichols began to routinely dance many of the roles Balanchine had originally created for Farrell.

In addition to Balanchine, Nichols originated roles for other noted choreographers including Jacques d'Amboise, Peter Martins, Susan Stroman, and Jerome Robbins, who created numerous roles for her including "I'm Old-Fashioned," "Antique Epigraphs," "The Four Seasons" and "Other Dances."

Choreographers and fellow performers know Kyra as a generous collaborator; the calm, cool, ego-less, Nichols was quickly recognized as a dancer of flawless technical skill—the type who could do anything without any effort.

Nichols has performed more than 40 leading roles at NYCB, and has toured the U.S. and the world with City Ballet, as well as other companies.

In her June 22nd sold-out retirement performance, Nichols danced three of her most notable Balanchine roles: the soulful "Serenade," the poignant "Davidsbundlertanze," and the elegant "Rosenkavalier" segment from "Vienna Waltzes."

Nichols lives in Princeton, NJ with her husband, former NYCB publicist David Gray, and their two young boys. She intends to teach ballet in Princeton and to spend far more time with her family.

Alessandra Ferri

Born in Milan, Italy, Ms. Ferri trained at Teatro alla Scala, Milan until the age of 15, then attended The Royal Ballet School in London. Upon winning one of the three Prix de Lausanne for 1980, young Alessandra was able to continue her studies at The Royal Ballet School on scholarship.

She joined The Royal Ballet in 1980, where famed choreographer Kenneth MacMillan made good use of her passionate qualities. Emigrating once again, this time to America in 1985, Ferri joined American Ballet Theater as a principal dancer where she has remained for the past 22 years. Her roles with the company have included the title role in "Anastasia," Nikiya in "La Bayadère," The Accused in "Fall River Legend," the Glove Seller in "Gaité Parisienne," the title role in "Giselle," the title roles in Kenneth MacMillan's "Manon," Juliet in "Romeo and Juliet," Katherina in "The Taming of the Shrew," among others.

In 1989, Ferri appeared with the Ballet National de Marseille where she danced in Roland Petit's "Le Diable Amoureux," a role Petit created especially for her.

Though small and delicately built, the youthful 44 year-old is known for her onstage fearlessness, and fiery temperament off-stage. The consummate dancer-actress, her wide range has proved invaluable in ballets entrenched in story and character—the type of roles which made her internationally famous.

Ferri concluded her farewell performance at ABT with a role she had been performing since her teens: as Juliet in MacMillan's "Romeo and Juliet." Her final moment of the performance, where the hand of Juliet's dead body had reached out to her dead Romeo, will be eternally burned into the memories of the sold-out, standing room only audience.

Ferri may continue to perform elsewhere, but where is not yet known. She enjoys an international following throughout Europe and Japan, and has been a permanent guest artist at La Scala in Milan.

In a twist of fate, Alessandra Ferri and Kyra Nichols—two dancers as different in style and temperament as possible—gave their farewell performances just one day apart (and within walking distance) from the other: Nichols, with NYCB at the New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, on June 22nd; Ferri with ABT at the Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center, on June 23rd.