

MEDIA RELEASE – 28/1/2008

MELBOURNE'S THIRTY YEARS OF RENAISSANCE DANCING

For three decades, Melbourne has been one of the world's leading centres for the research, teaching and performance of dances that go back to Elizabeth 1, Henry VIII and the Italian court choreographers of the late 17th century.

The story began in 1978 with the formation of the Rippon Lea Renaissance Dancers at the National Trust estate of that name in Elsternwick.

With their frequent performances based on research from rare books and manuscripts and highlighted by spectacular as-original period garments, the dancers quickly attracted widespread attention both here and abroad.

From the outset, Renaissance Dance courses based on the Melbourne model were required in New Zealand. By 1980 the group's director, Helga Hill, was teaching early dance in Europe each northern summer.

Her first engagements were in Austria and parallel programs soon followed in Sweden. She later directed early dance studies at the famous Dartington International Summer School in the England.

Helga held this position for twelve years and, at times, other members of the Melbourne team joined her there to assist in the task of exporting part of Europe's cultural heritage back to the continent – as one writer commented!

In Melbourne the endless round of dance classes and performances continues apace. On February 13 the 2008 classes will get underway in East Kew.

Since the 90's, actors and singers have joined the dancers and the Early Music Consort of Melbourne in spectacular old-world theatrical productions devoted to Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Sir Walter Raleigh and other notables.

Helga Hill wrote courses in early dance for the VCE syllabus and, with her team, provided dance workshops for many secondary school Renaissance Day projects.

In addition to marking three decades of Renaissance Dancing in Melbourne, 2008 will also be the tenth year of Renaissance Dance classes under Helga Hill's direction at the University of Melbourne. Few universities elsewhere offer students such an opportunity to experience history through dance.

The Rippon Lea Renaissance Dancers will mark 30 years of dancing with a performance at the National Gallery of Victoria at 2 p.m. on Sunday, June 15.

For details of Renaissance Dance classes and performances phone 9699 8417

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