



## Richard Cragun

Richard Cragun, who has died aged 67, was one of the most eminent ballet stars of his era, forming with the Brazilian ballerina Marcia Haydée a 30-year partnership that was Europe's riposte to Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev.

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Cragun and Haydée were muses to the Royal Ballet choreographer John Cranko, who in the 1960s turned the Stuttgart Ballet into a centre to rival Covent Garden — younger, and more cosmopolitan and contemporary. The chemistry between the tall, affable Cragun and the small, passionate Haydée inspired an upsurge in ballet costume dramas

. The couple's onstage understanding was underpinned for 16 years by their relationship as lovers, until Cragun came out as homosexual.

Afterwards Haydée and Cragun remained close friends, however, and continued their dancing partnership. It was due to her influence that he eventually moved to Rio de Janeiro to establish a daring social experiment to bring dance to slum children.

Haydée and Cragun had more ballets created for them even than Fonteyn and Nureyev. Firmly identified with Cranko's robust romances *Romeo and Juliet*, *Onegin* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, the pair also premiered important works by the Royal Ballet's

Kenneth MacMillan; John Neumeier's *Lady of the Camellias* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*; William Forsythe's only narrative ballet, *Orpheus*; and pieces by Glen Tetley, Jiri Kylian and Maurice Béjart.

While dancemakers were mainly magnetised by Haydée's extraordinary dramatic power, Cragun was an attractive foil for her. With his deft classical facility — refined at the Royal Ballet School — he was the prince of spins: he could turn three times in the air, which challenged choreographers to create flamboyant solos for him.

Although frequently cited as one of the greatest male dancers of his time, Cragun was sometimes found lightweight in comparison with Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Anthony Dowell. This was partly because the Stuttgart style was considered by some British and American critics as more about show than substance.

Kenneth MacMillan, however, made four of his finest works for Haydée and Cragun as individuals or together: *Las Hermanas* (1963), a tense Lorca tragedy; the masterwork *Song of the Earth* (1965), set to Mahler's song cycle; *Requiem*, a 1976 tribute on Cranko's early death; and *My Brother, My Sisters* (1978), a claustrophobic piece about fatal sibling rivalry in which Cragun played the brother, charismatic and sinister.

Richard Alan Cragun was born in Sacramento, California, on October 5 1944, the second of three sons. His father was chief librarian at Sacramento City College. Richard studied tap dance before moving to ballet class, and when the Royal Ballet performed in Sacramento he was an extra on stage — it was Margot Fonteyn who suggested he try for the Royal Ballet School.

On a year's scholarship there, aged 15, he was picked out by MacMillan for a graduation ballet, but as a non-Commonwealth foreigner he could not join the Royal Ballet itself. The company's recently departed choreographer John Cranko, Stuttgart Ballet's new director, recruited him, and within three years he was promoted to principal rank.

Marcia Haydée, who was five years older and had also trained in London, was the star ballerina, and she and Cragun began what became a 30-year partnership .

The pair's gifts for romantic expression were accompanied by a potential for comedy. In *The Taming of the Shrew* (1969) Cranko created slapstick balletic battles for the warring Petruchio and Katharina; and in *Brouillards* (1970) Cragun danced a comic number, "Homage to *S Pickwick Esq*", in a black hat and carrying a black umbrella.

In 1970 Cragun showed his strengths as a classical performer when he partnered Fonteyn, who went to Stuttgart to dance *Swan Lake* and Cranko's new work for her, *Poème de l'extase* .

Among the many ballets created for Cragun and Haydée at Stuttgart Ballet were Cranko's *Opus 1* and *R.B.M.E.*; Peter Wright's *The Mirror Walkers* and *Namouna*; Glen Tetley's *Voluntaries* and *Daphnis and Chloe*; and, in the 1980s, Jiri Kylian's *Forgotten Land* and Maurice Béjart's *La Danse* and *Opérette*.

In his forties Cragun was acclaimed for his charisma in character roles such as the witch Carabosse in *The Sleeping Beauty* and Quasimodo in Roland Petit's *Notre Dame de Paris*. In 1990 he returned to his first love, tap-dancing, to star in Stuttgart Ballet's

staging of the musical *On Your Toes*.

After retiring from the stage in 1996, he spent three years as ballet director in Berlin's Deutsche Oper, but tired of the pro-opera bias of Berlin and a losing battle with the Stuttgart and Hamburg ballet companies for status and funds.

In 2000 he moved with his lover, the Brazilian choreographer Roberto de Oliveira, to Rio de Janeiro, where they launched a contemporary ballet project with the city's black slum youngsters. DeAnima Ballet Contemporâneo aimed to counter street violence and gangsterism by persuading 200 children to come to dance classes. They formed a performance company, but Cragun protested angrily that, due to civic apathy, he was forced to use his illustrious former Stuttgart Ballet colleagues to fund it with German sponsorship.

He was also outspoken about what he saw as ingrained racism in Brazil, and caused controversy during his three years as ballet director at Rio's Teatro Municipal when he cast a black male dancer in *Giselle*.

Cragun lived for many years with Aids, but a stroke in 2005 ended his working career.

Both Roberto de Oliveira and Marcia Haydée survive him.

**Richard Cragun, born October 5 1944, died August 6 2012**



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