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China's turn to shine

By LOUISE NUNN

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ONE of China's leading dancers will make her Australian debut in a new performance opening in Adelaide on Friday.

National Ballet of China principal soloist Hou Honglan will appear in *Chinese Whispers*, a music and dance work that will also travel to Hobart and Canberra before heading to China in April for performances in Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing.

Featuring piano music by contemporary Chinese and Australian composers, at the Australian end, the other artists are all from Adelaide, including choreographer Amanda Phillips, whose short dance film, *When There's Only*, will also feature.

Adelaide pianist Gabriella Smart will play the music live. Dancer Anastasia Humeniuk will perform with Hou Honglan, who has more than a passing association with Adelaide.

The Chinese prima ballerina is about to marry her Australian fiance, who works in the wine industry in China but is originally from Naracoorte in the South-East.

The couple met at a friend's house in Beijing about three years ago.

Hou Honglan heard about the *Chinese Whispers* performance through Barry Plews, an Adelaide producer now living in Shanghai, and asked to be involved.

"I'm always interested in doing different things, and this is an interesting project and quite a challenge for me as well," she says.

"It's also good to get to know artists in different places."

Originally from Sichuan, Hou Honglan trained at the Sichuan Dance Academy and Beijing Dance Academy before joining the National Ballet of China in 1995.

Within a year she was promoted to principal soloist, and is one of only two principal soloists in the company of 70 dancers.

She has danced classical and contemporary roles, including the First Wife in Chinese director Zhang Yimou's ballet version of his internationally acclaimed film *Raise the Red Lantern*, which toured to London and Paris last year.

The company has given her leave to perform in *Chinese Whispers*, her second overseas engagement following a year spent with French company Ballet du Rhin.

Barry Plews says *Chinese Whispers* is a cultural exchange to introduce the art and artists of Australia and China to audiences in both countries.

The theme derives from the old expression drawn from China's last dowager empress, who secretly took advice from assistants hidden from view behind screens.

Plews also selected the music, which includes a piece by the venerated octogenarian Chinese composer Zhu Jian'er, resident composer with the Shanghai Symphony.

The other Chinese composers are Qin Yi, Huang Anlun and Jia Daqun, while Australia will

be represented with music by Constantine Koukias and Carl Vine.

The performance is being presented in association with the Golden Grove Arts Centre, which came on board with a venue and support for the event, along with government and industry groups, including the SA Government and industry group the China Cluster, the SA Department of Trade and Economic Development, and Asialink.

- *Chinese Whispers* will be at Golden Grove Arts Centre, at 8pm, on Friday and Saturday.

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