

## Selwyn Ballet photos and potted history



**The all-male Selwyn Ballet began as a take-off of popular London musicals in 1928 when the Selwyn College Sunbeams flitted on to the Capping Show stage to the tune of *Take Me Back to Nebraska*.**

One of the “girls” in the original chorus, I.D. Gebbie, used “two saucers held by adhesive strapping” to create a buxom chest. However, in a nod to health and safety, the plates were “abandoned when the strapping failed in the heat and one of them fell and broke”.

In the same year the troupe started practising “assiduously and enthusiastically” and the matrons of Dunedin and their daughters “advised in the matter of costuming”.

Selwyn’s first classical ballet spoof was performed in 1930, when the troupe “arrived (somehow) at the theatre in time to be made-up”.

It was only during World War Two that the ballet didn’t make the stage.

Included in the list of dancers are some now famous names, including Bill Adams, former Dean of the Medical School and Sir Geoffrey Cox, a Rhodes scholar who was knighted for his services to broadcasting in England.

Some, including rugby players Drs Desmond Oliver, Hugh Barry, Mark Irwin and David Kirk and cricketer John Wright, took their light-footedness into the sporting arena.

In the 1970s ballet members drank at the old City Hotel during show intervals, whilst dressed in fluttering tutus and primed with make-up.

Today, while there is much joking and laughter as prospective ballerinas sign up, it soon becomes apparent that being in the troupe is serious stuff, and dancers attend several practices per week for three months before the show.

The ballet’s half-time performances at the Highlanders Super 12 matches at Carisbrook were televised internationally.

Although it may rankle with more professional companies, the Selwyn Ballet is now 89 years old, making it New Zealand’s oldest ballet company – outdoing the Royal New Zealand Ballet by a year.

Below are photos from Selwyn Ballet performances. If you have your own photos, please send them to us at [reunions.alumni@otago.ac.nz](mailto:reunions.alumni@otago.ac.nz) We'll add the photos to this webpage and also display them at Selwyn's upcoming 125th celebrations.

*Sourced from Otago Magazine.*



