

Tobacco sponsor's \$400,000 to ballet

By JILL SYKES

Benson and Hedges has given the Australian Ballet \$400,000 to spend on special activities during its 21st year, which began last month.

The cheque was handed over yesterday, when some of the 21st anniversary year events were announced.

These include two free outdoor performances — one in Sydney's Domain on March 12, 1983, and the other on March 4 at the Myer Music Bowl, Melbourne.

In Sydney, a retrospective program has been planned for the new Entertainment Centre in May, with an Anniversary Ball at the Town Hall the same month.

In July, the Australian Ballet will take Anna Karenina to London, presenting it at Covent Garden with Marilyn Rowe Maver in the title role. This performance may be relayed by satellite to Australia.

The Display will be revived in April for the company's Sydney season by its choreographer, Sir Robert Helpmann. Sir Sidney Nolan's original set design will be teamed with new costume designs by Adele Weiss.

Yesterday the winning entry in the 21st anniversary poster design contest was announced. It was a combined effort by Maureen McGrath and Jim Brownett, who were awarded \$500 each.

Their poster, a simple design of a pair of point shoes and a rose, will be used on 21st anniversary printed material and has already been remade into a rather clumsy logo.

It has also been used as the basis of a large coloured poster which records the Benson and Hedges sponsorship. The sense of movement in the shoes — gold, naturally — as portrayed on this commercial poster makes them look cigarette shaped at first glance.

The Benson and Hedges Company — a division of Amatil — is best known for its sponsorship of cricket. A figure of \$5 million over three years has been put forward for its financial involvement in cricket. Yesterday the company confirmed its policy of neither confirming nor denying this estimate.

The company's sponsorships of the arts have included War and Peace for the Australian Opera (which it has not supported in such a big way since the mid-seventies), the 1977 tour of London Festival Ballet, Stars of World Ballet in 1978, the Tchaikovsky Ballet 1979, the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company the same year, and Evita.

Its Australian Ballet sponsorship is one of its biggest. It comes at a time when the protests of the anti-smoking lobby are becoming more voluble in both sport and the arts.

In Sydney six weeks ago, anti-smoking protesters confronted the first night audience arriving for the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, whose tour was partly sponsored by Benson and Hedges.

RICHARD MCGREGOR writes:

The sponsorship of the Australian Ballet by the Benson and Hedges company is the latest of the many cultural and sporting sponsorships embarked on by the tobacco companies.

The Peter Stuyvesant Cultural Foundation started in Australia in 1964, and the Philip Morris company began sponsoring the arts in the late sixties.