

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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OREGON BALLET THEATRE TO PERFORM PREMIERES BY THREE OF AMERICA'S MOST DISTINGUISHED CHOREOGRAPHERS

***Blue Rose* (Company Premiere) - Helgi Tomasson, San Francisco Ballet**

"...Coy, seductive, charming." – Arts SF, San Francisco

***Ash* (Company Premiere) - Peter Martins, New York City Ballet**

"...A study in speed-demon virtuosity." – Dance Magazine

***Through Eden's Gates* (World Premiere) - Kent Stowell, Pacific Northwest Ballet**

"[Stowell's] strength as a choreographer [is] his gift for revealing character and the intimate nuance of relationship." – The Seattle Times

Portland, Ore... March 3-10, Oregon Ballet Theatre's *All Premieres* program brings together works never before seen in Portland by three of the country's most distinguished choreographers. Each man has had a profound impact on ballet in the United States and on the life of OBT Artistic Director Christopher Stowell.

Helgi Tomasson of San Francisco Ballet was Stowell's artistic director for 16 years and during that time created numerous roles for him. Peter Martins of New York City Ballet directs the School of American Ballet where Stowell trained as a young dancer. And Kent Stowell was artistic director at Pacific Northwest Ballet for 27 years and is Christopher Stowell's father.

Through these three relationships, OBT traces a deep lineage in American ballet, and this program is designed to give the audience an understanding of the traditions and history that have helped shape and highlight OBT's place upon the national dance scene. Martin's *Ash* is a challenging, athletic work that measures a company's skill and conditioning; Tomasson's sultry *Blue Rose* was choreographed in 2006 for San Francisco Ballet and has never been performed outside of San Francisco; and Kent Stowell's *Through Eden's Gates* is a world premiere work created for OBT. Each of the three ballets features the music of current, actively composing artists who are all playing very important roles in contemporary music development.

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Performances take place **March 3-10, 2007**, at **Keller Auditorium**, SW Third at Clay. Evenings: March 3, 9 and 10 at 7:30 p.m. / Matinée: March 4 at 2 p.m.

Tickets start at \$10, with special rates for students, seniors, groups and organizations.

Online: www.obt.org / www.ticketmaster.com

By Phone: 503-2-BALLET (503-222-5538) or 888-9-BALLET (888-922-5538)

In Person: OBT Box Office, 818 SE Sixth Ave., M-F 9am-6pm / Ticketmaster Outlets

OREGON BALLET THEATRE's *All Premieres* Program is sponsored by **Umpqua Bank**.

Audience enrichment for OBT's *All Premieres* Program includes Dance Talks, Monday, February 26, 2006, 7 p.m., at Keller Auditorium, 1111 SW Third at Clay. The topic for this Dance Talks is "The Creative Spark!" The choreographers and composers in OBT's winter performance are all generating work in our time. Christopher and Kent Stowell, with additional guests, will discuss the mercurial relationships that can evolve when a choreographer and composer collaborate. This event is **free** and open to the public. Reservations are requested, as seating is limited. To reserve, send name and number of seats requested to: outreach@obt.org or phone (503)227-0977, ext.213.

In addition, Performance Perspectives, providing context for the entire program and led by dance historian **Linda Besant**, takes place 45 minutes before each performance on the Keller Auditorium's first balcony level. Audience members are also invited to a Question and Answer session with Christopher Stowell and company dancers at the front of the auditorium immediately following every performance, with the exception of opening night.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's *All Premieres* Program

***Blue Rose* (2006) – OBT Company Premiere**

Music: Elena Kats-Chernin

Choreography: Helgi Tomasson

Costume Design: Judanna Lynn

Lighting Design: Lisa J. Pinkham

Lighting Execution: Michael Mazzola

Piano: Carol Rich

Violin: Margaret Bichteler

When *Blue Rose* premiered at San Francisco Ballet on February 14, 2006, it was greeted by the San Francisco Chronicle as "a lighthearted but intensely crafty Valentine made up of an international patchwork of alluring rags, a tango and a waltz." The ballet takes its inspiration from a recording of compositions by Elena Kats-Chernin, entitled *Ragtime and Blues*, that choreographer Helgi Tomasson discovered while on a country retreat to find music for new works. Kats-Chernin's style in these pieces has been called "Slavic Scott Joplin" (Voice of Dance), and Tomasson responds with choreography that

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integrates ballet movement vocabulary with social dancing to produce “great entertainment when buffed up to a high gloss by ballet technique” (Critical Dance). *Blue Rose*’s many *pas de deux* embellish ballroom dancing with elaborate and decorative lifts. “Brothers,” the duet for two men that comes near the end of the ballet, crosses into friendly competition. The Chronicle called it “a funny challenge dance full of dueling feet and derring-do, and the simple joy of trying to out-dance each other.” *Blue Rose* is the second of Tomasson’s works added to the Oregon Ballet Theatre repertoire by Christopher Stowell. *Twilight* was performed in 2003 as part of Stowell’s debut program as artistic director.

Helgi Tomasson left his birthplace in Iceland when he was 15 years old to study ballet, moving first to Denmark and then to the United States. During 15 years with New York City Ballet, he was one of the foremost interpreters of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, and both men created several roles expressly for him. Tomasson retired from his brilliant career as a dancer in 1985 to become artistic director of San Francisco Ballet. Under his leadership, SFB has become one of the leading ballet companies in the world, noted for strong and versatile dancers and a diverse repertoire. Tomasson has choreographed more than 40 works ranging from full-length classical ballets such as *Swan Lake* to *Chi-Lin*, which is based on the music of Chinese composer Bright Sheng. Speaking about both training dancers and making choreography, Tomasson says, “Freedom of movement for me, it’s always been very, very important. And, of course, the joy of dance.”

Elena Kats-Chernin began composing when she was eight years old. “My interest in music began when I was about six,” she says. “My mother used to drag me along all the time to operas and to concerts, especially piano concerts.” Now Kats-Chernin composes for concerts, films, ballet and opera, and wrote music for the opening ceremony of the Sydney Summer Olympics in 2000. She moved to Australia with her family from her native Uzbekistan when she was 18, and also studied and worked in Germany for 13 years. Her work is performed by a diverse range of artists, from major symphony orchestras to avant-garde chamber musicians such as the Bang on a Can All-Stars.

***Ash* (1991) – OBT Company Premiere**

Music: Michael Torke
Choreography: Peter Martins
Staging: Russell Kaiser
Costume Design: Steven Rubin
Lighting Design: Mark W. Stanley
Lighting Execution: Michael Mazzola

Unlike most ballets, which are designed to appear effortless, *Ash* intentionally lays bare the physical demands made of its dancers. Peter Martins’ aerobic work takes its structure directly from Michael Torke’s energetic music. The briskly driving score is echoed in

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non-stop movement that requires both speed and endurance from a lead couple and four pairs of demi-soloists. Additionally, *Ash* calls for careful concentration and precision. While the majority of ballet music can be counted in regular measures of three or four beats each, *Ash* has no such predictability. One characteristically atypical phrase, for example, is counted in measures of 12, 8, 9, 15, 8, 8, and 12 beats – making it a work that is as challenging mentally as it is physically.

Peter Martins was born and trained as a dancer in Denmark. He achieved international fame with the Royal Danish Ballet before coming to the United States in 1970 at the invitation of George Balanchine to join New York City Ballet. He was named the company's Ballet Master in Chief in 1990, and still holds that position. He is also the chairman of the faculty of the School of American Ballet. Martins created his first choreography in 1977. Since then he has crafted nearly 80 ballets to music of composers as diverse as Tchaikovsky and Winton Marsalis. *Ash* was his fourth ballet set to the music of Michael Torke. He has also choreographed for Broadway musicals and films.

Michael Torke began piano lessons at age five and started composing soon afterwards. He graduated from the Eastman School of Music with degrees in both piano and composition, and also plays bassoon. His work fuses ideas from classical and contemporary pop music, and has a characteristic personal stamp that combines restless rhythmic energy with ravishingly beautiful melodies. Torke often envisions musical impulses in terms of color. His compositions include *Ecstatic Orange*, *The Yellow Pages*, *Bright Blue Music*, and *Black and White*; and works named for materials with specific colors and textures, such as *Copper* and *Ash*. Several of the world's most respected choreographers have used Torke compositions for dance. Torke's current projects include an opera commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera, and a tap concerto for Savion Glover.

***Through Eden's Gates* (2007) – World Premiere**

Choreography: Kent Stowell
Music: William Bolcom
Costume Design: Larae Hascall
Lighting Design: Rico Chiarelli
Piano: Carol Rich and Robert Ashens

Through Eden's Gates is Kent Stowell's first world premiere created for Oregon Ballet Theatre's dancers and his third work in the company's repertoire. It is also his fifth ballet choreographed to the music of William Bolcom. *Duo Fantasy*, an earlier collaboration with the composer, was performed by OBT, along with Helgi Tomasson's *Twilight*, as part of Christopher Stowell's 2003 debut program. *Through Eden's Gates*, like Tomasson's *Blue Rose*, takes its inspiration from ragtime. For the new ballet, Kent Stowell has selected five of Bolcom's dual-piano rags, including *The Poltergeist*, *Graceful Ghost Rag* and *The Serpent's Kiss*. Work began in the studio on February 5th, with a large cast of OBT's dancers.

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Kent Stowell was Artistic Director and Principal Choreographer of Pacific Northwest Ballet from 1977 until his retirement in June, 2005. He trained at the University of Utah, and danced with San Francisco Ballet, New York City Ballet and Munich Opera Ballet, where he also choreographed. In 1973, Mr. Stowell was appointed Ballet Master and Choreographer of Frankfurt Ballet and was named, with Francia Russell, Co-Artistic Director of the company in 1975. In 1977, Stowell and Russell were appointed Artistic Directors of Pacific Northwest Ballet. In addition to creating 30 repertory works for PNB, Stowell choreographed seven full-length ballets, more than any other American artistic director of a major ballet company.

Seattle native **William Bolcom** began studying composition and piano at the University of Washington at age 11. He is one of the country's most versatile composers, often incorporating elements of ragtime and jazz into his work. He has composed chamber music, film scores, piano works, song cycles, opera and symphonies. With his wife Joan Morris, a mezzo-soprano, Bolcom has recorded twenty albums of show tunes and popular songs from the early 20th century. He has also performed with American ragtime composer Eubie Blake. Bolcom's setting of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* won the Pulitzer Prize and three Grammy Awards. He is a professor of music composition at the University of Michigan.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2006 – 2007 Season

“The Four Temperaments”

October 14 – 21, 2006 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra
The Four Temperaments (1946) George Balanchine – **Company premiere**
Adin (2004) Christopher Stowell
The Concert (1956) Jerome Robbins – **Company premiere**

“George Balanchine's The Nutcracker™”

December 8 – 24, 2006 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra

“All Premieres”

March 3 – 10, 2007 • Keller Auditorium
Ash (1991) Peter Martins – **Company premiere**
Blue Rose (2006) Helgi Tomasson – **Company premiere**
Through Eden's Gates (2007) Kent Stowell – **World premiere**

“Eyes on You”

April 27 – May 5, 2007 • Newmark Theatre
Apollo (1928) George Balanchine – **Company premiere**
il nodo (2004) Julia Adam
Eyes on You (2005) Christopher Stowell

“The Sleeping Beauty, Act III”

June 8 – 10, 2007 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra
Firebird (2004) Yuri Possokhov
The Sleeping Beauty, Act III (2007) Christopher Stowell after Marius Petipa – **World premiere**

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The OREGON BALLET THEATRE company: Candace Bouchard•Brennan Boyer•Andrea Cooper•Paul De Strooper•Ansa Deguchi•Daniela Deloe•Alexey Dmitrenko•Damian Drake•Jon Drake•Adrian Frye•Steven Houser•Yuka Iino•Olga Krochik•Gavin Larsen•Mia Leimkuhler•Valerie Limbrunner•Kathi Martuza•Anne Mueller•Alison Roper•Brian Simcoe•Amanda Simnitt•Artur Sultanov•Emily Tedesco•Ronnie Underwood•Holly Zimmerman

With Apprentices: Martina Chavez•Thomas Hirschy•Kate Kearney•Patrick Kilbane•Erika Klein•Deirdre Lyons-Keefe•Megan McConnell•Jennifer McDonald•Ashley Muaugmaithong•Grace Shibley•Lucas Threefoot•Natalie Wilson

Founded in 1989, **OREGON BALLET THEATRE** is a not-for-profit, professional ballet company, with a school, based in Portland, Oregon. On July 1, 2003, **Christopher Stowell** became **OREGON BALLET THEATRE**'s artistic director and **Damara Bennett** joined OBT as school director. **OREGON BALLET THEATRE** offers the highest quality ballet, in a repertoire of classic and contemporary work, to the people of Oregon, the Pacific Northwest and the United States.

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