

# OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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## OBT'S FRENCH PROGRAM TO FEATURE FOUR PREMIERES INCLUDING AN ALL-NEW *BOLERO*

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Portland, Ore... **Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2007-08 Grand Tour season** continues **February 23 – March 1** with four ballets **set entirely to the music of French composers**. Each of the works receives its Portland premiere, and two have been newly created for these performances.

At the heart of the program are two duets: **Jerome Robbins' iconic *Afternoon of a Faun***, and ***Pas de Deux Parisien*, a new ballet from Christopher Stowell** in the grand style of the 19th-Century Paris Opera. Bookending those works is a pair of big, company-sized ballets: Stowell's **Versailles-inspired *Zais***, and a **world-premiere interpretation of Ravel's fiery *Bolero* by the electrifying Nicolò Fonte**.

The full **OBT Orchestra** conducted by Music Director **Niel DePonte** accompanies the program, performing scores by **Claude Debussy, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Léo Delibes** and **Maurice Ravel**. **Soprano Lisa Mooyman** also appears as a guest artist, along with the **Portland State University Chamber Choir** directed by **Dr. Stephen Coker**.

**OBT's French Program** is performed in conjunction with the **Portland Art Museum** exhibition, ***The Dancer***, which features masterpieces by Degas, Forain and Toulouse-Lautrec. For a full listing of educational events co-sponsored by both organizations, visit **[www.thedancerpdx.org](http://www.thedancerpdx.org)**.

**Performances** of the French program take place at **Keller Auditorium**, SW Third at Clay.

Evenings: February 23 and 29 and March 1 at 7:30 p.m. / Matinee: February 24 at 2 p.m.

**Tickets start at \$14**, with special rates for groups and organizations.

**Online:** [www.obt.org](http://www.obt.org) / [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

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

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**In Person:** OBT Box Office, 818 SE Sixth Ave., M-F 9am-5pm / Ticketmaster Outlets

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The French Program is sponsored by **The Boeing Company**. The 2007-08 season is sponsored by **American Airlines, Gerding Edlen Development, The Oregonian**.

Audience enrichment events for the program include **Dance Talks**, Sunday, **February 17, 2007, 2 p.m., in the Portland Art Museum's Sunken Ballroom**. This **free** forum gives audiences a chance to hear directly from the artists and critics who have significantly shaped the aesthetic, contemporary and historic evolution of ballet and the creative process. Moderated by Christopher Stowell, the 75-minute program makes extensive use of historical video footage and photography to assist audience members in contextualizing the work(s) under discussion. Introduced as part of Stowell's initial year as artistic director, The Dance Talks series is unique among Portland's artistic opportunities and was an instant success with the city's dance-going community. Nearly 500 patrons, dance lovers, students of dance and academics attended the forums in the first year.

**Christopher Stowell** is joined on this Dance Talks program by choreographer **Nicolo Fonte** to discuss the creation of their respective new works. In addition, OBT dance historian **Linda Besant** and historian emeritus **Carol Shults** will explore the connection between ballet in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Paris and the works of art on display in Portland Art Museum's *The Dancer* exhibition.

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. Or contact the Portland Art Museum at 503.276.4318.

In addition, **Performance Perspectives**, providing context for the entire program and led by **Linda Besant**, takes place in the orchestra level seating area of Keller Auditorium, **one hour prior to each performance**. 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 the February 24<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup> performances.

### **Oregon Ballet Theatre's French Program**

#### ***Zais* (2003) – Company Premiere**

Music: Jean-Philippe Rameau - music from *Zais* and *Nais*

Choreography: Christopher Stowell

Costume Design: Mark Zappone

Lighting & Scenic Design: Randall G. Chiarelli

Lighting Recreation: Michael Mazzola

Soprano Soloist: Lisa Mooyman

PSU Chamber Choir: Dr. Stephen Coker, Director

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Christopher Stowell created *Zais* for Pacific Northwest Ballet in 2003. The work calls for three principal couples and another eight in the *corps de ballet* - 22 dancers in all. Critic Martha Ullman West wrote in Dance Magazine that Stowell's "emotion-laden, spiraling choreography" for *Zais* shows "acute musical sense, a sure hand with large groups of dancers, and a keen respect for the history of his art." It is a measure of OBT's development in recent years that the company has grown to the point where it is now able to perform a work of this size on a mixed repertory program.

*Zais* takes its name from its musical score, excerpted from an opera by Jean-Philippe Rameau composed in 1748 for the court of Louis XV of France. The ballet also uses excerpts from Rameau's *Nais*. Though Rameau began composing for the theater late in life, dancers revered his work for its fine sense of rhythm. Stowell first discovered the music while browsing in the gift shop at Versailles. Upon first hearing the overture to *Zais*, he said he found it "contemporary and shocking, even a little bit menacing," which is understandable given that the composer intended it to be evocative of the chaos that existed at the creation of the universe.

The OBT Orchestra is joined for the performances of *Zais* by the Portland State University Chamber Choir and soprano Lisa Mooyman. Ms. Mooyman is a former Fulbright Scholar at the Royal Conservatory of Music in the Netherlands, as well as the Oregon winner and regional finalist at the Metropolitan Opera Auditions.

The *Zais* choreography is laced with subtle references to the Baroque origins of its accompanying score. Stowell's aim was to pare away the opulent ornamentation of the period and find the essence of symmetry and grace underneath. What remains are skeletons of Baroque scenery, hints of Baroque costuming, and traces of the geometric patterns of the formal gardens at Versailles, in a work that seems wholly contemporary.

**Christopher Stowell** is Oregon Ballet Theatre's second artistic director. Since his 2003-04 debut season, he has made significant additions to the OBT repertoire, bringing to Portland works from some of the world's most celebrated choreographers. In addition to creating six world premieres for OBT, including the company's first full-length *Swan Lake* in 2006 and an all-new *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2007, Mr. Stowell has also commissioned works by internationally prominent artists James Kudelka, Kent Stowell, Trey McIntyre, Yuri Possokhov and Julia Adam. Mr. Stowell was born in New York City and received his training at Pacific Northwest Ballet School and the School of American Ballet. In 1985 he joined San Francisco Ballet where he danced for sixteen years, appearing in theaters throughout the world including the Paris Opera, New York's Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre. As a principal dancer, Mr. Stowell performed leading roles in the full-length classics *Romeo and Juliet*, *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Othello*, and had roles created for him by Artistic Director Helgi Tomasson and by contemporary choreographers including Mark Morris, William Forsythe and James Kudelka. An established interpreter of the George Balanchine

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repertoire, Mr. Stowell appeared in almost every Balanchine ballet performed by

SFB. Upon his retirement in 2001, he was accorded a gala farewell in the War Memorial Opera House. In recent years, Mr. Stowell has taught and coached in San Francisco, New York, Japan and Europe. He has created new works for San Francisco Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Diablo Ballet and Pacific Northwest Ballet, as well as the New York City Ballet Choreographic Institute. He has also staged the works of George Balanchine and Mark Morris.

### ***Afternoon of a Faun (1953) – Company Premiere***

Music: Claude Debussy - *Prelude a l'Après-midi d'un Faune (1892-94)*

Choreography: Jerome Robbins

Staging: Bart Cook

Costume Design: Irene Sharaff

Lighting & Scenic Design: Jean Rosenthal

Lighting Execution: Michael Mazzola

Dance historian Nancy Reynolds wrote of Jerome Robbins's *Afternoon of a Faun* that "Since its opening (at New York City Ballet), the work has never been out of the repertory . . . 'Hypnotic' and 'atmospheric' were the words most often used in describing its effect, with 'erotic,' 'narcissistic,' and 'sensuous' not far behind. It has also been called 'a perfect work.'" Ballet companies around the world seek permission to perform *Afternoon of a Faun*, and dancers covet the roles.

It takes place in a simple dance studio, with the audience seated where the studio mirror would be. Two young dancers share the space, do the tasks of a dancer's daily life, and have a brief awakening of attraction. It's great challenge lies in characterization. The young woman might be innocent or knowing, humanly realistic or aloof; the young man shy or swaggering. Francisco Moncion, the original boy, said that the whole nature of the piece changes with each interpreter. Whatever the interpretation, the dramatic action and the pure classical movement vocabulary are so direct, so seamless, and so evocative that France's *La Monde* wrote, "Robbins's inspiration seems to have attained truth itself."

*Afternoon of a Faun* is the third Jerome Robbins ballet to enter the OBT repertoire during Christopher Stowell's tenure as artistic director. He added *In the Night* in 2005 and *The Concert* in 2006.

**Jerome Robbins** received world renown as a choreographer of ballets created for New York City Ballet, Ballets: U.S.A., American Ballet Theatre and other international companies. He received equal praise for his work on Broadway in commercial theater and as a director of musicals, plays, movies and television programs. This dual interest produced a staggering number of ballets and musical stagings notable for their diversity, brilliance, lyric beauty, humor and American vitality. A partial list of his fifty-four ballets includes: *Fancy Free* (1944) *Dances at a Gathering* (1969), *The Goldberg Variations*

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(1971), *Watermill* (1972), *I'm Old Fashioned* (1983) and *West Side Story Suite* (1995). During his extraordinary, prolific career, Mr. Robbins held the post of co-Ballet Master in Chief at New York City Ballet and served on the National Council on the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts/Dance Panel. His numerous awards and academic honors included the Handel Medallion of the City of New York, the Kennedy Center Honors, three Honorary Doctorates and an honorary membership in the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1988, he was awarded the National Medal of the Arts. Mr. Robbins died in 1998, at the height of his creative powers.

### ***Pas de Deux Parisien* (2008) – World Premiere**

Music: Léo Delibes – music from *Sylvia* in an arrangement by Niel DePonte  
Choreography: Christopher Stowell  
Costume Design: Victoria McFall  
Lighting Design: Michael Mazzola

*Pas de Deux Parisien* is a virtuoso duet for a *ballerina* and a *danseur*, using the terms as they are meant to be used - as titles reserved for dancers of the greatest achievement. The work highlights its two performers, showcasing their talents and their artistry. In addition, it honors the music of Léo Delibes, who was revered at the Paris Opera during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Delibes composed at a time when *ballerinas* were adored throughout Europe for their portrayal of ethereal and unattainable femininity, as well as for their technical skill in fiery *tarantellas* or *cachuchas*. Ironically, as Delibes was writing his best-known ballets, *Coppélia* and *Sylvia*, the Paris Opera was entering a period of decline. The great *ballerinas* of the Romantic era had retired, and the public was clambering for the next generation of stars; but conditions could not support a flourishing Opera. Politically, France careened back and forth between republic and royalist rule. The loss of the Franco-Prussian War and the chaos during the Paris Commune were devastating.

Under these difficult conditions, Giuseppina Bozzacchi, one of the greatest of the upcoming stars and a potential *ballerina* of her generation, died a tragic death. She made a brilliant debut as Swanhilda in Delibes' *Coppélia* in 1870, and then a year later on her seventeenth birthday died of malnutrition and illness during the deprivations of the Commune.

Christopher Stowell imbued his new ballet with awareness of this history. The costume design is inspired by Bozzacchi's costume from *Coppélia* and the sparkling score is from Delibes' *Sylvia*. The music is quintessentially French, inviting choreography that emphasizes *plastique*, that quality of dancing with a chic and graceful presence that is central to the French style. Stowell responds with beautiful balances, lifts and turns, and a finale marked by dazzling solos that are passed back and forth between the two dancers. Ballet lovers will recognize in the work a *grand pas de deux* structure that is also present in the climactic moments of *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*.

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## ***Bolero (2008) – World Premiere***

Music: Maurice Ravel – *Bolero*

Choreography: Nicolo Fonte

Costume Design: Mark Zappone

Lighting and Scenic Design: Michael Mazzola

Sound Design: Duane Rodakowski

Since Nicolo Fonte retired from performing in 2000 to devote himself full-time to choreography, he has been invited to make ballets on major companies across Europe and North America. He is praised as a choreographer “who creates the new rather than reinvent the old” (The Seattle Post-Intelligencer), and who “renders his competence in surprising, stimulating dance.” (*Basellandschaftliche Zeitung*). *Bolero* is his first work for Oregon Ballet Theatre.

Ravel composed the music to *Bolero* for the Ida Rubenstein Ballet in 1928. Over a relentlessly repeated snare drum rhythm, he placed a plaintive melody. “Don’t you think this theme has an insistent quality?” wrote the composer. “I’m going to try and repeat it a number of times without any development, gradually increasing the orchestra as best I can.”

The result is *Bolero*’s long and gradual crescendo, achieved through masterful orchestration. “The music is so unremitting that it could be restrictive,” said Fonte, “but it doesn’t have to be. I can follow the music rhythmically, or I can break it up as much as I want. Either way, the continuity of the music doesn’t change. That makes for very interesting dynamics on stage.”

When Ravel envisioned a ballet to *Bolero*, he imagined a factory-like stage setting in keeping with the repetitive nature of the music. Fonte and designer Michael Mazzola abstracted that idea for this production. Corrugated metal panels, suspended in the stage space and hit with angular light, echo the mechanical character of the music. “The panels are metaphorical for me,” Fonte said, “like having our guards up. As the music gets richer and stronger, we become more open. The panels fly out, the dancing becomes freer, we reveal more of who we are as people. How interesting that I’m using a very mechanical piece of music to explore something basic about what it is to be human: Can we let our guards down? And what might happen if we do?”

Born in Brooklyn, **Nicolo Fonte** began dancing at age 14. He studied at the Joffrey Ballet School in New York, San Francisco Ballet School and the School of American Ballet while completing a BFA at SUNY Purchase. Upon graduation he danced with Peridance in NYC and later joined Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in Montreal, where he danced a wide variety of roles. Mr. Fonte subsequently joined Nacho Duato's Compañía Nacional de Danza and forged a strong identity in the Spanish company for seven years - for both his dancing and his choreography. His work, *En los Segundos Ocultos (In Hidden*

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*Seconds*), one of three for the company, established his presence on the European dance scene.

In 2000 Mr. Fonte retired from performing to devote himself full-time to his choreographic career. Since then, he has created and staged ballets for The Dutch National Ballet, The Royal Danish Ballet, The Royal Ballet of Flanders, Stuttgart Ballet, Cedar Lake and Tulsa Ballet, among others. Mr. Fonte's 2002 collaboration with Pacific Northwest Ballet, *Almost Tango*, received a Choo San Goh award and was voted as one of Dance Europe's "Best Premieres" when it was re-staged for The Australian Ballet in 2004.

From 2002 to 2006 Mr. Fonte enjoyed a creative partnership with The Göteborg Ballet in Sweden, creating and staging numerous works that helped establish the company's distinct profile. While there, he created his first full-length ballet, *Re: Tchaikovsky*, which was widely acclaimed in the international press and appeared on the "Best of 2005" lists of both Ballet International and Dance Europe.

### **Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2007 – 2008 Season**

#### **"The Germanic Lands"**

October 13-20, 2007 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra

*The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* (1996)—Franz Schubert/William Forsythe—**Company Premiere**

*Almost Mozart* (2006)—W.A. Mozart/James Kudelka

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2007)—Felix Mendelssohn/Christopher Stowell—**World Premiere**

#### **"George Balanchine's The Nutcracker™"**

December 8-24, 2007 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra

#### **"France"**

February 23-March 1, 2008 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra

*Zais* (2002)—Jean-Philippe Rameau/Christopher Stowell—**Company Premiere**

*Afternoon of a Faun* (1953)—Claude Debussy/Jerome Robbins—**Company Premiere**

*Pas de Deux Parisien* (2008)—Léo Delibes/Christopher Stowell—**World Premiere**

*Bolero* (2008)—Maurice Ravel/Nicolo Fonte—**World Premiere**

#### **"America"**

April 18–27, 2008 • Newmark Theatre • Music: Ensembles

*Through Eden's Gates* (2007)—William Bolcom/Kent Stowell

*Just* (2006)—Henry Cowell/Trey McIntyre

*Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* (1968)—Richard Rodgers/George Balanchine—**Company Premiere**

#### **"Russia"**

June 6 -8, 2008 • Keller Auditorium • Music: Ensembles

*Rubies* (1967)—Igor Stravinsky/George Balanchine

*Tolstoy's Waltz* (2008)—Various/Christopher Stowell—**World Premiere**

*Raymonda* (2008)—Alexander Glazounov/Yuri Possokhov, after Marius Petipa—**World Premiere**

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## COMPANY ROSTER

### *Principal Dancers*

Jon Drake • Yuka Iino • Gavin Larsen • Kathi Martuza • Anne Mueller • Alison Roper • Artur Sultanov •  
Ronnie Underwood

### *Soloists*

Brennan Boyer • Ansa Deguchi • Daniela Deloe • Steven Houser • Ilir Shtylla

### *Company Artists*

Candace Bouchard • Martina Chavez • Andrea Cooper • Jacqueline Damico • Damian Drake • Adrian Fry •  
Olga Krochik • Mia Leimkuhler • Matthew Pippin • Grace Shibley • Brian Simcoe • Emily Tedesco •  
Lucas Threefoot • Holly Tolbert • Javier Ubell

### *Apprentices*

Michael Davis • Kate Kearney • Patrick Kilbane • Mackenzie Martin • Abby Relic

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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