

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 27, 2008

MEDIA CONTACT
Erik Jones
503.227.0977
erik.jones@obt.org

SCHOOL OF OREGON BALLET THEATRE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE TO INCLUDE COLLABORATION WITH DA VINCI MIDDLE SCHOOL

Portland, Ore. ... On April 11 and 13, **The School of Oregon Ballet Theatre** presents its **2008 Annual Performance**, featuring the world premiere of *Dr. da Vinci's Undersea Adventure*, a new work choreographed by Oregon Ballet Theatre principal dancer **Anne Mueller**. Dancers from OBT's school will perform the ballet alongside students from Northeast Portland's **da Vinci Middle School**, marking the first time the yearly program has included a collaboration with another educational institution.

The School of Oregon Ballet Theatre is the state's premier ballet training facility. SOBT has exceptionally talented students, master instructors and alumni who currently dance with OBT as well as with companies such as New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. The Annual School Performance features world-class works performed by students of all levels, some on the brink of launching their professional careers.

In celebration of the school's nearly two-decade history of training top-level dancers, the 2008 program also features guest performances by alumni **Steven Houser** and **Lucas Threefoot**, both current members of Oregon Ballet Theatre's professional company.

In addition to *Dr. Da Vinci's Undersea Adventure*, the Annual School Performance includes works by **George Balanchine**, **Sir Frederick Ashton**, **Jerome Robbins**, **Michael Smuin** and **Tom Rudd**, as well as a piece choreographed by school director **Damara Bennett** in the style of Danish master **Harald Lander**.

Performances take place at the **Newmark Theatre**, inside the PCPA Building at SW Broadway and Main.

Evening: Friday, April 11, at 7:00 p.m. / Matinee: Sunday, April 13 at 2 p.m.

Tickets start at \$10.

-more-

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-5pm / Ticketmaster Outlets

Audience enrichment for the Annual School Performance includes **Performance Perspectives**, a pre-performance talk hosted by OBT Historian and Lecturer **Linda Besant**. Providing context for the entire program, Performance Perspectives takes place in the orchestra level seating area of the Newmark Theatre and **begins one hour prior to the opening curtain.**

The School of Oregon Ballet Theatre's Annual Performance

Serenade

Music: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Choreography: George Balanchine

“Making a ballet is a choreographer’s way of showing how he understands a piece of music, not in words, not in narrative form, but in dancing.” – George Balanchine

Named for its accompanying Tchaikovsky score, *Serenade* was the first ballet George Balanchine choreographed in the United States. Premiering in 1934, it was created for the students of New York City’s newly established School of American Ballet. Balanchine’s choreography developed naturally from events that transpired in an evening class he held to teach his students stage technique. In making the ballet, he choreographed movement for however many dancers he had at his disposal on any given night – first seventeen girls, then nine, six and, finally, a few boys. Balanchine also incorporated unplanned incidents that occurred during rehearsal, including a late arriving student and a girl falling down.

The end result is a beautiful, ethereal ballet that is beloved the world over. *Serenade* is a signature Balanchine work and a staple in the repertoire of most major companies.

Circus Polka

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Choreography: Jerome Robbins

One of George Balanchine’s more unique projects was a commission he received from the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus to create a dance for elephants. Upon accepting the project, the choreographer called his friend Igor Stravinsky and requested a score to accompany the work:

-more-

“What kind of music?” Stravinsky asked.
“A polka,” replied Balanchine.
“For whom?”
“Elephants.”
“How old?”
“Young.”
“If they are very young,” said the composer, “I’ll do it.”

In 1972, for the first Stravinsky Festival, Jerome Robbins choreographed a new work based on Balanchine’s original commission, keeping the circus theme but replacing the elephants with students from the School of American Ballet. The debut performance of Robbins’ *Circus Polka* ended with the young dancers arranging themselves into a formation depicting the initials I.S. - for Igor Stravinsky to whom the show was dedicated.

Mobile

Music: Aram Khatchaturian
Choreography: Tom Rudd

Mobile is a modernist work from 1969 set to music that has become widely associated with the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The ballet’s compact movement vocabulary and cast of just three dancers combine to convey a sense of overwhelming vastness onstage. The performers initially come into view in a pool of light, suggesting that perhaps they have always been present and the audience is simply being offered a window of time in which to temporarily observe them.

Since its debut, *Mobile* has been a mainstay in the repertoire of twenty companies around the world, including San Francisco Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, and the modern dance group Pilobolus. *Mobile* was also the subject of a short film entitled *Balances*.

Mandolin Dance (from Romeo & Juliet)

Music: Sergei Prokofiev
Choreography: Michael Smuin

Excerpted from the second act of Michael Smuin’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Mandolin Dance* presents a pair of street performers who dance to entertain a crowd. It appears on this program as a tribute to Smuin, who co-directed San Francisco Ballet during OBT school director Damara Bennett’s tenure as a dancer, as well as the outset of OBT artistic director Christopher Stowell’s performance career. Mr. Smuin passed away in 2007 after 54 prolific years in ballet as a dancer, teacher, choreographer and director.

-more-

Etudes Variations

Music: Carl Czerny

Choreography: Damara Bennett after Harald Lander

Choreographed by school director Damara Bennett in the style of longtime Royal Danish Ballet director Harald Lander, *Etudes Variations* showcases the skills developed by OBT's intermediate level students. In the work, sixteen girls begin with traditional ballet exercises before proceeding to more complicated choreography. These performances mark the students' first opportunity to perform *en pointe* before an audience.

Maypole Dance (from La Fille Mal Gardée)

Music: Ferdinand Herold

Choreography: Sir Frederick Ashton

The original 1789 *La Fille Mal Gardée*, with choreography by Jean Dauberval, premiered in France two weeks before the storming of the Bastille. *Fille* was one of the first ballets to feature a hero and heroine who are common people, rather than grandiose gods or royalty. Centering on a love story between an ordinary country boy and girl, it was truly a "people's ballet." This excerpt is from British choreographer Frederick Ashton's 1960 revival of the work.

Valse-Fantaisie

Music: Mikhail Glinka

Choreography: George Balanchine

Mikhail Glinka was Russia's first national composer, and has been called the Mozart of his country. Balanchine first encountered his work as a student at the Maryinsky Theatre in Moscow, performing to Glinka's compositions as a young dancer and returned to them time and again as a choreographer.

Something about the composer's *Fantaisie in B minor* impressed Balanchine deeply. He employed it at least three times during his career, creating a different rendition with similar themes on each occasion. The 1967 version – for a ballerina, her partner, and four women – first appeared as a section of a four-part work, called *Glinkiana* in homage to the composer. Over time, the other three sections fell away, leaving us with a concise, romantic vignette that we recognize today as *Valse-Fantaisie*.

-more-

Dr. da Vinci's Undersea Adventure -- World Premiere

Music: Various

Choreography: Anne Mueller

Oregon Ballet Theatre principal dancer Anne Mueller's clever new work for children tells the captivating story of Dr. Maria da Vinci, a descendent of Leonardo and one of the world's foremost undersea scientists. Alerted by the sea god Neptune to an imminent pollution dump, she enlists the aid of jellyfish, starfish and other marine creatures to help her corral and eliminate invading toxins as they are unleashed into the underwater environment.

Dr. da Vinci's Undersea Adventure is performed by students from the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre and da Vinci Middle School. The ballet features colorful and creative sets and costumes as well as a whimsically eclectic mix of musical compositions from artists such as Mark Mothersbaugh of Devo, the experimental Icelandic music group Múm and South African composer Abdullah Ibrahim.

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.

###