

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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OBT CLOSURES THE 2008-09 SEASON WITH A KENNEDY CENTER REPRISE AND THREE WORKS BY THE LEGENDARY JEROME ROBBINS

Portland, Ore... Oregon Ballet Theatre concludes its 19th performance season with a three-ballet celebration of the late **Jerome Robbins** (1918-1998). The trio of works, *Afternoon of a Faun*, *The Cage*, and *The Concert*, all created between 1951 and 1956, offers a window into Robbins's early output and a time when ballet in America had barely put down roots. Robbins was in his thirties when he created the ballets, and all of them have remained in the active repertory of companies around the world for more than fifty years. The choreography of each also overlaps with Robbins's work on the stage musicals *The King and I*, *Two's Company*, and *Peter Pan*, comprising a decade which saw him focus on dramatizing human situations with inventive and astute theatrical movement.

The three Robbins ballets are joined on OBT's summer program by *RUSH*, a modern masterpiece by **Christopher Wheeldon**, arguably the most celebrated young choreographer in the world today. **OBT performed *RUSH* at The Kennedy Center** in the summer of 2008, drawing critical praise from the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal. It is included here for the first time as part of the OBT season.

Performances of OBT's Summer Program, *Rush + Robbins*, take place at Keller Auditorium, located in downtown Portland at SW Third and Clay.

Evenings: June 5-6 at 7:30 p.m. / Matinees: June 6-7 at 2 p.m.

Tickets start at \$15.

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

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The presenting sponsor of *Rush + Robbins* is **Tektronix**.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2008-09 season is sponsored by **Gerding Edlen Development** and **The Oregonian**. Season media support is provided by **KGW, kink fm102, Northwest Cable News** and **the stations of All Classical FM**.

Audience enrichment events for *Rush + Robbins* include **Dance Talks**, Monday, **June 1st, 7 p.m., at the OBT studios, 818 SE Sixth Avenue**. This **FREE** forum gives audiences a chance to hear directly from 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 visual aids to assist audience members in contextualizing the work(s) under discussion.

The June 1st Dance Talks will feature a **film documentary about Jerome Robbins** and a conversation between **Christopher Stowell** and special guest **Deborah DuBowy**. Ms. DuBowy is the founder and producer of *Words on Dance*, a nationally-recognized, San Francisco-based non-profit organization that presents screenings and live onstage discussions with notable dance artists.

The film includes extensive video of Robbins' ballets in rehearsal and performance. Notable figures from the dance world who are featured include Robert La Fosse (New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Tony Award winner for *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*), Stephanie Saland (former New York City Ballet principal dancer), Helgi Tomasson (Artistic Director, San Francisco Ballet, former New York City Ballet principal dancer), Edward Villella (Artistic Director, Miami City Ballet, former New York City Ballet principal dancer) and Amanda Vaill, author of *SOMEWHERE: The Life of Jerome Robbins*. The film is from a major documentation project on Jerome Robbins first presented at *Words on Dance* in San Francisco in March of 2008. Portland audiences will be the first outside the Bay area to see this exciting new documentary.

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 OBT Dance Historian **Linda Besant**, takes place in the orchestra level seating area of the Keller Auditorium, **one hour prior to each performance**. Performance Perspectives demystifies ballet's exacting movement vocabulary, ventures into dance history, and investigates the process of dance production.

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Oregon Ballet Theatre's Summer Program

RUSH

Music: *Sinfonietta La Jolla for piano and chamber orchestra*, H. 328

Composer: Bohuslav Martinu

Choreographer: Christopher Wheeldon

Original Staging: Anita Paciotti and Joanna Berman

Scenic & Costume Design: Jon Morrell

Lighting Design: Mark Stanley

Lighting Execution: Michael Mazzola

Piano Soloist: Carol Rich

Premiere: August 28, 2003, San Francisco Ballet, The Edinburgh Playhouse, Scotland

OBT Premiere: May 8, 2008, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland

RUSH received its Oregon Ballet Theatre (and Portland) premiere in May of 2008 as part of the White Bird Dance Series – an occasion also marking the first time it was performed by a company other than San Francisco Ballet, for whom it was created. The following month, OBT took the work to the Kennedy Center for Ballet Across America, a festival of performances by nine ballet companies selected to represent the Western, Eastern and Midwestern regions of the United States. Critics in the nation's capitol hailed the ballet as “a bright, fresh gem” (*The Washington Times*) and OBT as “a group of talented, winsome dancers...who seized the stage with appetite and attention-getting strength.” (*The Washington Post*)

With this program, *RUSH* makes its official debut as part of the OBT season. Set to an energetic Bohuslav Martinu score, **performed live by the OBT Orchestra**, it employs a corps of five couples, two pair of soloists and a principal couple who dance a powerful duet at the very heart of the work. “Elegant, elegiac and dark” (*Dance View Times*), this central pas deux serves as an intimate counterpoint to the bright, fast-paced athleticism that otherwise marks the ballet. Spiraling lifts and close partnering throughout contribute to the duet's smoldering, unbroken drama.

RUSH is one of two works by Christopher Wheeldon in the OBT repertoire. In 2004, the company performed the choreographer's *There Where She Loved*.

Christopher Wheeldon was born in Yeovil, Somerset, England, and began his ballet training when he was 8 years old. At age 11, Mr. Wheeldon enrolled at The Royal Ballet School where he trained until he was 18. He joined The Royal Ballet in 1991, and that same year won the Gold Medal at the Prix de Lausanne competition. In 1993, Mr. Wheeldon was invited to become a member of New York City Ballet, and was promoted to the rank of soloist in 1998. He retired from dancing at the end of NYCB's 2000 spring season to concentrate on his choreographic work. During NYCB's 2000-2001 season, Mr.

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Wheeldon served as the Company's first-ever artist in residence, creating two ballets: *Polyphonia*, set to piano music by Györgi Ligeti, and *Variations Sérieuses*, set to music by Felix Mendelssohn. In July 2001 Mr. Wheeldon was named NYCB's Resident Choreographer. *Morphoses*, also set to Ligeti music, premiered in June 2002 as part of the tenth Diamond Project festival, and *Carousel (A Dance)*, set to music by Richard Rodgers, premiered in November 2002 at the Opening Night Benefit. In spring 2003, Mr. Wheeldon created two ballets: *Carnival of the Animals*, set to the score by Camille Saint-Saëns and with verse by John Lithgow, and *Liturgy*, set to music by Arvo Pärt.

Other works for NYCB include *Slavonic Dances* (1997 Diamond Project) and *Mercurial Manoeuvres* (2000 Diamond Project). In 1999, Mr. Wheeldon choreographed *Scènes de Ballet* for the School of American Ballet's workshop performances and for NYCB's 50th Anniversary season. Mr. Wheeldon has also choreographed works for Boston Ballet, The Colorado Ballet, The Royal Ballet and School, and San Francisco Ballet, among others. In 1996 Mr. Wheeldon received the Mae L. Wien Award for choreography from the School of American Ballet, and in 1997 the Martin E. Segal Award from Lincoln Center for promising newcomer in choreography. He choreographed ballet sequences for the 2000 feature film *Center Stage* directed by Nicholas Hytner, and Mr. Wheeldon and Mr. Hytner also collaborated on a stage version of *The Sweet Smell of Success*, which opened on Broadway in 2002.

Mr. Wheeldon was given the London Critics' Circle Award for best new ballet for *Polyphonia* and the American Choreography Award for best choreography in a movie for *Center Stage*. A production of *Polyphonia* performed by NYCB dancers in fall 2002 received the Olivier Award for best new dance production.

Afternoon of a Faun

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

Composer: Claude Debussy

Choreographer: Jerome Robbins

Original Staging: Bart Cook

Costume Design: Irene Sharaff

Lighting & Scenic Design: Jean Rosenthal

Lighting Execution: Michael Mazzola

Premiere: May 14, 1953, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama

OBT Premiere: February 23, 2008, Keller Auditorium, Portland

Dance historian Nancy Reynolds writes of Jerome Robbins's *Afternoon of a Faun*:

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.'

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The ballet 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. Its 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."

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* (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.

The Cage – Company Premiere

Music: *Concerto in D for String Orchestra, "Basler"* (1946)

Composer: Igor Stravinsky

Choreographer: Jerome Robbins

Staging: Bart Cook

Costume Design: Ruth Sobotka

Scenic Design: Jean Rosenthal

Original Lighting Design: Jennifer Tipton

Lighting Execution: Les Dickert

Premiere: June 10, 1951, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama

"[Jerome Robbins made] some of the loveliest ballets in the repertoire, as well as one of the nastiest—*The Cage*, a ballet set to Stravinsky in which Freud meets Giselle in a tale of adolescent female insects achieving adulthood by mating with and then killing a male." – Martha Ullman West, *The Oregonian*

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The choreographic seed for this unusual work was Stravinsky's *Concerto in D for Strings*, in which Robbins felt something "terribly driven, coerced, compelled." He first conceived *The Cage's* women as Amazons, but struggled with the choreography. He then encountered a book about spiders, and was exhilarated by new possibilities for the ballet, saying, "I did not have to confine myself to human beings moving in a way that we know is human... The eye becomes a sort of Geiger counter which starts to tick in the brain and emotions as you approach a subject of value to you." Suddenly, new ideas were everywhere—a certain movement of the Novice's hand was sparked by a chipmunk, another by the whip of a tiger's tail at the zoo.

The Cage has fascinated audiences around the world for decades, perhaps because, as John Martin wrote following the premiere in 1951, "It is stimulating to have an artist speak out with such unbridled venom; the courage to be honest, even though unpleasant, is all too rare."

The Concert

Music: *Polonaise in A Major, Op. 40, No. 1; Berceuse, Op. 57; Prelude, Op. 28, No. 16; Prelude, Op. 28, No. 18; Waltz in E-minor, posthumous, Op. 15; Prelude Op. 28, No. 7; Mazurka in G Major, posthumous; Prelude, Op. 28, No. 4; Ballade, Op. 47, No. 3*

Composer: Frederic Chopin

Choreographer: Jerome Robbins

Original Staging: Christine Redpath

Costume Design: Irene Scharaff

Scenic Design: Edward Gorey

Original Lighting Design: Jennifer Tipton

Lighting Execution: Nicole Pearce

Piano Soloist: Carol Rich

Premiere: March 6, 1956, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama

OBT Premiere: October 14, 2006, Keller Auditorium, Portland

In his original program notes for this ballet, Jerome Robbins wrote, "One of the pleasures of attending a concert is the freedom to lose oneself in listening to the music. Quite unconsciously, mental pictures and images form..." *The Concert* makes gentle fun of such imaginary wanderings, dipping into Robbins's broad knowledge of comic convention, from sight gags to slapstick. Critic Walter Terry wrote, "Here was a dance joke, defying literal description, which had the audience shrieking and choking with laughter. . . . its best scenes are as funny as anything to be found in the theater of dance." For fifty years, companies all over the world have found that its humor transcends place and time. Christopher Stowell's mother, Francia Russell, was in the original cast of the work when it premiered at the New York City Ballet, and Stowell himself performed the role of the Shy Boy with San Francisco Ballet. Renowned cartoonist Edward Gorey designed the sets for *The Concert*.

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Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2008 – 2009 Season

“Swan Lake”

October 11-18, 2008 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra
Swan Lake (2006)—Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky/Christopher Stowell (after Petipa and Ivanov)

“George Balanchine’s *The Nutcracker*™”

December 12-24, 2008 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra

“Lambarena”

February 21-28, 2009 • Keller Auditorium • Music: Ensembles
Ash (1991)—Michael Torke/Peter Martins
The Rite of Spring (2009)—Igor Stravinsky/Christopher Stowell—**World Premiere**
Lambarena (1994)—J.S. Bach and traditional African music/Val Caniparoli—**Company Premiere**

“Left Unsaid”

April 17–26, 2009 • Newmark Theatre • Music: Ensembles
The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude (1996)—Franz Schubert/William Forsythe
Left Unsaid (2003)—J.S. Bach/Nicolo Fonte—**Company Premiere**
Tarantella (1964)—Louis Moreau Gottschalk/George Balanchine—**Company Premiere**
Hush by James Kudelka (2009)—**World Premiere**

“Rush + Robbins”

June 5 -7, 2009 • Keller Auditorium • with Full Orchestra
RUSH (2003)—Bohuslav Martinu/Christopher Wheeldon
Afternoon of a Faun (1953)—Claude Debussy/Jerome Robbins
The Cage (1951)—Igor Stravinsky/Jerome Robbins —**Company Premiere**
The Concert (1956)—Frederic Chopin/Jerome Robbins

COMPANY ROSTER

Principal Dancers

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

Soloists

Candace Bouchard • Brennan Boyer • Ansa Deguchi • Daniela Deloe • Adrian Fry • Steven Houser • Chauncey Parsons

Company Artists

Leta Biasucci • Martina Chavez • Andrea Cooper • Damian Drake • Olga Krochik • Mia Leimkuhler • Matthew Pippin • Julia Rowe • Grace Shibley • Brian Simcoe • Christian Squires • Lucas Threefoot • Javier Ubell • Raychel Weiner

Apprentices

Lauren Anderson • Ian Buchanan • Michael Davis • Christina Hanna • Mackenzie Martin • Janel Meindersee • Lydia Relle • Brent Slack-Wolfe • Ashley Smith

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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