

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, OBT ANNOUNCES CHRISTOPHER STOWELL CONTRACT EXTENSION AND HIRES MICHELLE REYNOLDS TO HEAD DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Portland, Ore... The Oregon Ballet Theatre Board of Directors announced today that it has unanimously voted to extend **Artistic Director Christopher Stowell's** employment contract through the 2013-14 season, at the completion of which he will have been at the helm of OBT's artistic endeavors for ten years.

Since joining OBT in 2003, Stowell has overseen a period of extraordinary growth at the state's premier professional ballet company. He increased the dancer roster from 20 to 28 artists, expanded the performance season from four to five programs, attracted national attention for OBT, and accepted invitations for the company to dance at **the Kennedy Center** and the **Chicago Dance Festival**. This month he takes OBT east once again for its debut at **New York City Center**.

Stowell has made significant additions to OBT's performance repertoire, including masterpieces by Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, as well as company and world premieres by Paul Taylor, William Forsythe, Lar Lubovitch, James Kudelka, Helgi Tomasson, Kent Stowell, Peter Martins, Christopher Wheeldon, Trey McIntyre, Yuri Possokhov, Julia Adam, and Nicolo Fonte. He has also choreographed seven new works of his own for OBT, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the company's first full-length production of *Swan Lake*.

During Stowell's first five years at OBT, ticket revenue increased 50% and the subscriber base rose more than 30%. Subscription sales for Stowell's upcoming sixth season are already the highest in company history, and continue to grow.

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Along with School of Oregon Ballet Theatre Director **Damara Bennett**, Stowell has also reaffirmed OBT's status as the state's top training ground for pre-professional dancers. SOBT alumni who trained under Bennett and Stowell are now dancing professionally with OBT, Pacific Northwest Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. The pair have also sent two students in the past three years to study at Juilliard.

"In securing Christopher's artistic leadership we are assured that an Oregon treasure and a national talent remains in this community producing the highest caliber of art for Oregon as well as the national and international stages," said **OBT Board Chair Tom Cody**. "We need to nurture and protect this treasure; it benefits a huge spectrum of people- from the kids in the OBT school, to the artists in the company, to our constituents in the community."

"On the heels of our success in Washington D.C., and with our City Center debut only weeks away, I'm more inspired and enthusiastic than ever about our future," said Stowell. "Knowing that I will continue working with this incredible team and for this visionary community motivates me to push us even further in the next five years toward realizing our full potential."

Immediate Past Board Chair John Bernard, who was instrumental in securing a new contract for Stowell, added, "Because of Christopher's amazing artistic creativity and dramatic showmanship, we are blessed to have one of this country's best ballet companies. His work appeals to aficionados and first timers alike, proven by the incredible audience growth we have enjoyed."

In a separate step further securing Oregon Ballet Theatre's future, **Michelle Reynolds** has been named OBT's new Director of Development. She succeeds Dan Ryan, who left in June to become Executive Director of the Portland Public Schools Foundation.

Reynolds joins OBT from Chamber Music Northwest, where she has served as Director of Marketing and Development since 2005. Previously, she was Executive Director of Oregon Repertory Singers.

"Michelle brings a wealth of fundraising expertise to Oregon Ballet Theatre, as well as first-hand knowledge of the Portland arts community," said **OBT Executive Director Jon Ulsh**. "She's an exceptionally strong leader, and is experienced at all facets of arts administration, including strategic planning, board cultivation, and generating both earned and contributed income. We're thrilled and extremely lucky to have her on the team."

Reynolds begins work at OBT on September 22.

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