

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

CHRISTOPHER STOWELL / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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OREGON BALLET THEATRE CLOSES THE SEASON WITH RETURN OF FIREBIRD AND A WORLD-PREMIERE SLEEPING BEAUTY, ACT III PAUL DE STROOPER TO MAKE HIS FAREWELL PERFORMANCE

Portland, Ore... Oregon Ballet Theatre's **fairytale ending to the 2006-2007 season** is an enchanting pair of stories adored by generations of children and ballet lovers alike. **Yuri Possokhov's *Firebird*** returns to the Keller Auditorium, **June 8-10**, transforming the stage into a mystical land where a beautiful, feathered heroine helps a courageous young man win the heart of a princess; and **Christopher Stowell's world-premiere *Sleeping Beauty, Act III***, visits the magnificent wedding of Princess Aurora and Prince Florimund. Both works were created specifically for Oregon Ballet Theatre and pair virtuosic classical dancing with beloved narratives and beautiful sets and costumes. The full **OBT Orchestra**, under the direction of **Music Director Niel DePonte**, accompanies all performances. Due to popular demand, **a fifth show has been added.**

The program also marks the retirement of dancer **Paul DeStrooper**, who will leave Oregon Ballet Theatre at the end of the season to assume the role of **Artistic Director and Resident Choreographer at Ballet Victoria** in British Columbia. DeStrooper, a native of Canada, joined OBT in 2003 after dancing with Alberta Ballet and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. His major roles with OBT include principal parts in Jerome Robbins' *In the Night*, Paul Taylor's *Company B* and Christopher Stowell's *Eyes On You*. On the evening of **June 10**, for his farewell performance, De Strooper will dance the part of **Ivan in *Firebird***, a role that was created on him in 2004.

"Paul is a true man of the theater and a gentleman to every ballerina," said OBT Artistic Director Christopher Stowell. "He will be an enthusiastic and successful leader at Ballet Victoria."

Performances of *Firebird* and *The Sleeping Beauty, Act III*, take place **June 8-10, 2007**, at **Keller Auditorium**, SW Third at Clay.

Evenings: June 8, 9 and 10* at 7:30 p.m. / Matinees: June 9 and 10 at 2 p.m.
*Added performance

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Tickets start at \$16, 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

Sponsored by **American Express** and **Mentor Graphics**. OBT's summer program is an **Official Rose Festival Sanctioned Event**.

Audience enrichment for OBT's season-closing program includes **Dance Talks**, Monday, June 4, 2007, 7 p.m., at the Oregon Ballet Theatre studios, 818 SE Sixth Avenue. **Carol Shults**, OBT's first dance historian, and **Linda Besant** the current historian, will interview **Christopher Stowell** about his role as artistic director. The discussion will offer insights into **Stowell's aspirations for the future of Oregon Ballet Theatre**, and will conclude with a question and answer session. The 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 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 Summer Program

***Firebird* (2004)**

Music: Igor Stravinsky

Choreography: Yuri Possokhov

Costume and Scenic Design: Yuri Zhukov

Lighting Design: Michael Mazzola

The original ***Firebird*** premiered in 1910 for Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris. It was among the first creations for the company, and **Igor Stravinsky's** first work composed expressly for dance. With ***Firebird***, choreographer **Michel Fokine** threw off the conventions of classical ballet: in this work, monsters crawled and rolled rather than advancing in symmetrical lines, and the Firebird twisted and fluttered to escape her duet with the hero. Defying convention, the action unfolded without stop, never pausing for displays of virtuoso dancing.

From the Ballets Russes production, it is the music that has continued to exert a powerful draw. Either in its original form or as a suite, ***Firebird*** has inspired countless

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interpretations, ranging wildly from classical to avant-garde. There are many great versions, but none is definitive. For OBT's *Firebird*, choreographed in 2004, **Yuri Possokhov** used Stravinsky's 1945 *Firebird Suite*.

Possokhov felt a note of poignancy in the musical theme for the *Firebird*, and re-imagined the story as a **love triangle** between the Firebird, a hero and a Princess. A young man, Ivan, encounters the Firebird in the forest and captures her, but ultimately decides to set her free. She falls in love with him and rewards his kindness with the gift of a magic feather that can be used to summon her in times of need. Ivan then discovers a beautiful princess and her attendants, all enchanted by the evil magician, Kaschei. Ivan calls for the Firebird's help and she assists him in defeating the sorcerer. Ivan and the freed princess fall in love, and he and the Firebird are separated forever.

As in the days of Diaghilev, Possokhov and designer **Yuri Zhukov** communicated closely on the décor for this *Firebird*, creating a look loosely sparked by the fairy tale **illustrations on Russian liquor packaging** and of 1900s Russian illustrator **Ivan Biliban**. After premiering at OBT, an adapted version of Possokhov's *Firebird* was subsequently taken into the repertoire of San Francisco Ballet.

Firebird is performed in honor of the **125th anniversary of Igor Stravinsky's birth**.

Yuri Possokhov received his dance training at the Moscow Ballet School and danced 24 years with the Bolshoi Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, where he was a principal dancer.

As a choreographer, Mr. Possokhov's credits include *Songs of Spain*, *A Duet for Two* and *Impromptu Scriabin*, which was performed at the 1997 Jackson International Ballet Competition. *Magritomania*, a work inspired by the paintings of René Magritte, premiered in March 2000 at San Francisco Ballet and, in 2001, garnered him the Isadora Duncan Award for Outstanding Choreography. Mr. Possokhov's ballet *Damned* premiered in 2002 and is based on the Euripides play *Medea*. In 2003, he collaborated with San Francisco Ballet Artistic Director Helgi Tomasson on a new staging of the full-length *Don Quixote*. He created *Firebird* for OBT in 2004 and *La Valse* in 2005. In 2006, he retired from the stage to assume the title role of resident choreographer at San Francisco Ballet.

The Sleeping Beauty, Act III (World Premiere)

Music: Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Choreography: Christopher Stowell after Marius Petipa

Costume and Set Design: Desmond Heely

Lighting Design: Michael Mazzola

Based on a French fairy tale from the time of Louis XIV, ***The Sleeping Beauty*** was born

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at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg in 1890. It was for **Marius Petipa**, the 70-year-old Ballet Master of the Czar's Imperial Theatres, the first opportunity to work with the great composer, **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky**. The pair would go on to also create *The Nutcracker*.

“This score tells us that the theme of *The Sleeping Beauty* is the power of good over evil,” said **OBT Artistic Director Christopher Stowell**. “This is the pinnacle of Tchaikovsky's music for ballet. If anyone can conjure up a better soundscape for a fairy tale, I want to hear it.”

Like *Firebird* or *Swan Lake*, the story and music of *The Sleeping Beauty* has inspired countless choreographers to stage the work. Stowell's version begins with Act III, at the wedding celebration of Princess Aurora and Prince Florimund. The arc of the storytelling is at this point essentially complete; Aurora has already been awakened from her enchantment, and the royal court and famous fairy tale characters have gathered to entertain the happy couple with dazzling *divertissements*. For Petipa, this arrival at pure dancing was always the climax of his ballets.

“To my mind, it is here that we find the deeper theme of *The Sleeping Beauty*, much more than in the fairy tale,” said Stowell. “In striving for the purest and most beautiful dancing, the art form of ballet finds continual reawakening. This is classical virtue in the fullest sense of the word. It's about aristocratic responsibility - not in an elitist way, but in the sense that a monarch or a leader should be the one who sets the finest example.”

For Stowell, stepping into Act III of *The Sleeping Beauty* is the next appropriate milestone for Oregon Ballet Theatre. “It takes a steady stream of soloists,” he said. “The *Blue Bird* variation is famously athletic and notoriously taxing. The *Grand pas de deux* is the ultimate in classical style and virtuosity, with no drama to hide behind. It's the best kind of ‘academic dancing,’ that speaks purely from its own power.”

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 four world premieres for OBT, including the company's first full-length *Swan Lake* in 2006, 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

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interpreter of the George Balanchine repertoire, Mr. Stowell appeared in almost every Balanchine ballet performed by SFB. Upon his retirement, 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.

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**

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 Muangmaithong•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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