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With the Generous Support of the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, Oregon Ballet Theatre to Launch Junior Company OBT2 and Names Former American Ballet Theatre and Pennsylvania Ballet Principal Lisa Sundstrom as Program Director

Oregon Ballet Theatre (OBT) is pleased to announce the launch of its junior company, OBT2, under the direction of former Pennsylvania Ballet and American Ballet Theatre dancer Lisa Sundstrom. The launch has been made possible by the generous support of the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust which recently awarded a sizable grant to be invested over three years toward the development of the ensemble. This exciting project ushers in a new era for OBT which will broaden the company's reach in the community, enhance programming, and ensure a vibrant future for students and company alike by investing in and making a deeper connection with the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre (SOBT).

Sundstrom's impressive career took off when at the age of 15 she was accepted on full scholarship to the ABT School and was noticed by ballet icon Mikhail Baryshnikov, who was then Artistic Director of the Company. A year later she joined ABT II where she gained extensive performance experience. Mr. Baryshnikov promoted her to the main company soon after. Sundstrom went on to dance with both Pennsylvania Ballet and ABT performing soloist and principal roles in many major works. After retiring from the stage she began coaching and teaching dancers at many prestigious schools including SOBT in her home state of Oregon. "I can't tell you how pleased we are to have someone like Lisa on board to lead OBT2," comments Artistic Director Kevin Irving. "Her years of experience dancing as a pre-professional with ABT II, and then at the highest levels in one of the world's most acclaimed companies, as well as her considerable teaching experience make her the ideal coach to mentor and prepare young dancers for a professional career."

OBT2's inaugural 2015/2016 season will be a transition year during which the company will be comprised of OBT Apprentices and select dancers from SOBT's Pre-Professional Division. In addition to local performances supporting OBT's Education Outreach initiatives which include performances in schools and at senior and community centers in the Portland Metro Area, the ensemble will take part in the company's season productions: *Amore Italiano*, *George Balanchine's The Nutcracker*, and *Romeo & Juliet*. With these invaluable performance opportunities, OBT2 will provide a critical professional transition for the most gifted students at the top levels of SOBT.

Membership in OBT2 will be by audition, with a maximum of two years participation. Dancers must be no older than 21 when they are accepted ensuring that the focus of the junior company is on training up-and-coming artists for rewarding careers with OBT or other major ballet companies. “As a young dancer I was so fortunate to perform with ABT II,” observes Sundstrom. “I know firsthand the invaluable experience a dancer gains by being part of a junior company in terms of performance as well as self-confidence and artistic maturity.”

OBT2 will play a key role in OBT’s efforts to serve the community by bridging a critical gap between the professional company and its broader Education Outreach initiatives. To this end the ensemble will be limited to 10-12 dancers and build its own repertory suitable for performance in smaller, more intimate settings. All this will result in increased touring and community outreach and create an exciting juncture for the organization - one at which OBT can turn outward and forward, with a renewed focus on the artists and audiences of tomorrow.

In the coming months OBT2 will be announcing its touring schedule and repertory for this exciting first year. OBT is deeply grateful to the Murdock Charitable Trust for supporting its vision, and in helping secure a stronger foundation from which to strengthen its school, build its company, and enrich the community with its art form.

ABOUT OREGON BALLET THEATRE

Founded in 1989, Oregon Ballet Theatre is the state's largest full-time professional ballet company. Oregon Ballet Theatre is committed to its mission to share our passion for the expressive power of ballet, to inspire an enduring appreciation of dance, and to connect in meaningful ways to our community through excellence in performance, training and educational programs.

ABOUT LISA SUNDSTROM

Lisa Sundstrom received her early training in her hometown of Astoria, Oregon and at The Marin Ballet in San Rafael, California. At fifteen, she gained the attention of international star and American Ballet Theatre Director, Mikhail Baryshnikov, when she won a full scholarship and stipend to ABT School in New York City. After completing the school program, Ms. Sundstrom toured the US with ABT II. There, she made her New York debut at the Joyce Theater performing Lucille Grahn— famous 19th Century Danish ballerina, coached by Robert Joffrey for his revival of the ballet Pas de Déesses. After seeing her performance, Mr. Baryshnikov invited her to join ABT, where she gained knowledge of the great classical and romantic ballets as well as modern and contemporary styles. Ms. Sundstrom joined Pennsylvania Ballet as a soloist and was quickly promoted to principal dancer, dancing many of George Balanchine’s acclaimed ballets. After eight seasons, she rejoined American Ballet Theatre and toured worldwide performing featured roles.

Ms. Sundstrom has danced the leading roles in: Swan Lake, Romeo and Juliet, Don

Quixote, Sleeping Beauty, Giselle, Cinderella, Lilac Garden, The Nutcracker, Prodigal Son, La Sonnabula, Agon, Concerto Borocco and Allegro Brilliante in addition to numerous other ballets. She has worked with choreographers Sir Kenneth MacMillan, Sir Anthony Tudor, Merce Cunningham, Twyla Tharp, Lynne Taylor-Corbett, James Kudelka and Peter Martins and been coached by ballerinas Gelsey Kirkland, Suzanne Farrell, Natalia Makarova and Irina Kolpakova. As a guest artist, Ms. Sundstrom has performed with various companies including Oregon Ballet Theatre, Diablo Ballet and Lines Contemporary Ballet. She has been interviewed for radio, been featured in Dance Magazine and appeared on PBS "Dance in America" in Les Sylphides, Paquita and Twyla Tharp's Push Comes to Shove with American Ballet Theatre and in the role of Effie in Peter Martins' La Sylphide with Pennsylvania Ballet.

After retiring from the stage, Ms. Sundstrom taught full time at The Rock School of the Pennsylvania Ballet and as an adjunct professor at University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She then moved to her home state of Oregon, where she directed Portland Festival Ballet, restaging The Nutcracker and presenting her ballet, La Bella Luna, at Regional Dance America. She has been a guest teacher for Ballet Academy East in New York City, Pennsylvania Youth Ballet in Carlisle, PA, Nutmeg Ballet in Torrington, CT, Berkeley Ballet Theatre in Berkeley, CA, Marin Ballet in San Rafael, CA and many other schools around the country. She has also taught abroad at Ballettakademien in Stockholm, Sweden and Studio Architanz in Tokyo, Japan. Passionate about sharing her knowledge, Ms. Sundstrom is committed to helping dancers of all levels reach their highest potential.
