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**Oregon Ballet Theatre is soaring to new heights and emerging healthier than ever with a stronger financial hold, key program investments, a new home on the horizon, and a growing school.**

The energy is palpable at Oregon Ballet Theatre (OBT) as new leadership continues to chart a healthy path while the company prepares for its move to the South Waterfront and exciting new programs are announced. The financial challenges that once threatened the organization are beginning to fade as new commitments demonstrate a revitalized confidence in the organization. Recently OBT concluded its profoundly impactful 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary season and marked a 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year with a budget surplus.

The highly successful 2014/15 season impressed many by drawing 70,000 audience members and revenue that exceeded \$3 million in ticket sales representing near record highs in both total spectators and revenue. The company also finished the fiscal year with a reduction in credit line use as it began to build capital reserves. The unsung hero of the OBT story continues to be the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre (SOBT). Under the leadership of Anthony Jones school enrollment grew by more than 25% last year alone; SOBT projects an additional 30% growth in the coming season. Building on this momentum, the company is thrilled to announce the launch of several key initiatives that will help secure and deepen its connection with the community for years to come.

Oregon Ballet Theatre is excited to announce it will significantly expand its ballet school with the launch of a new branch location in West Linn. The studio, intended to serve areas from and beyond Gladstone to Oregon City and West Linn to Lake Oswego, is located at 19066 Willamette Drive. SOBT plans to open its doors on January 4<sup>th</sup> 2016 which is the same day its winter term begins in the new South Waterfront home.

*"Our new location will allow even greater access to the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre and OBT," Said School Director Anthony Jones. "All the wonderful programming families to our south have come to know and enjoy will be equally available to them but a bit closer to home."*

The West Linn location will house two studios and initially offer pre-ballet and early level classes for children, along with "mommy-and-me", adult ballet and fitness classes. The curriculum will later expand to include a full complement of ballet, dance and fitness programs – all taught by SOBT's world class instructors.

Earlier this summer OBT announced it was awarded a multi-year grant by the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust to launch a junior ensemble called OBT2. Since then this top level of the school has already established a roster of dancers and begun rehearsals. Under the guidance of former American Ballet Theatre soloist Lisa Sundstrom, OBT2 will play a key role in OBT's effort to serve the community by

bridging the gap between its professional company and broader Education Outreach initiatives. Through community performances, along with opportunities within OBT productions, these young artists will gain the performance experience necessary for dancers on the verge of a professional career.

While OBT continues to invest in its school and connect even deeper with our audience base, it is simultaneously investing in its choreographic future. Since arriving at OBT Artistic Director Kevin Irving has commissioned 4 world premieres by renowned dance makers such as James Kudelka, Darrell Grand Moultrie, and Nicolo Fonte as well as OBT premieres of major works such as *Cinderella* and *Napoli Act III*.

Now OBT is happy to announce plans that significantly expand its programming through a new outdoor performance series created solely by female choreographers. This fully produced event, expected to take place in the summer of 2017, will be free to the public and is made possible by a generous grant from the Oregon Community Foundation's Creative Heights Initiative. It will feature three works by North American female choreographers selected by five panelists from the local dance and performance community through an open application process.

*"While OBT has regularly offered free events during the summer with programs such as OBT Exposed, Fall Arts Live, and guest appearances with the Oregon Symphony and Pink Martini, this opportunity is quite unique,"* observes Irving. *"With the critical funding from the Creative Heights Initiative we will be able to present a fully produced evening of dance free to the public. We will also support and bring attention to female choreographers whose voices are disproportionately underrepresented in this field."*

The launch of all these new initiatives is capped by OBT's move to a new studio home in the South Waterfront. Its current studio located at 818 SE 6<sup>th</sup> Street has been OBT's home for more than 15 years but no longer suits the company's growing needs. An offer to purchase the property for redevelopment provided OBT with a unique opportunity to envision a healthier financial climate and to provide necessary space for its growing school and company. Proceeds from the sale will be used in part to clear the company's \$1.8 million debt while protecting the balance of the funds to begin planning for company's next stage.

Earlier this year the company announced it signed a 7 year lease for 14,000 square feet of space located at 0720 Bancroft. While slightly smaller than its current space, Oregon Ballet Theatre's new home is better configured to provide three full size rehearsal studios (one more than at present) and will better accommodate its increasing demands. The staff will also be more centralized to reinforce the kind of team management infrastructure that has greatly contributed toward the company's more disciplined and focused approach. The company expects to close on its sale in mid-December and open the new space by early January.

*"We have committed ourselves to a disciplined path that is rooted in our community,"* Said Executive Director Dennis Buehler. *"Portland is a place where innovation and creativity live in perfect harmony with community. We are laying a path where that will continue to happen for many years to come."*

By finding stronger financial ground, a bright new accessible home, and programs that connect deeper throughout the community, OBT's 26<sup>th</sup> season feels like the beginning of a new era.

## **ABOUT OREGON BALLET THEATRE**

Oregon Ballet Theatre is committed to *sharing our passion for the expressive power of ballet, inspiring an enduring appreciation of dance, and connecting in meaningful ways to our community through excellence in performance, training and educational programs.* OBT is the largest professional ballet company in Oregon, employing nearly 200 people and attracting artists from around the globe with a reputation for excellence. The company is rooted in the traditions of classical ballet, with a repertoire that ranges from the great classics to premieres from some of the most exciting choreographic voices in the field today. Our mission is dedicated to the vitality of, and access to, world-class ballet performance and training in our region. Founded in 1989 by James Canfield, a former principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet, OBT quickly developed a distinctive style and unique repertoire that grew to comprise over 80 ballets. From 2003-2012, under the direction of Christopher Stowell, OBT presented nearly 350 performances and added 51 ballets, including 20 world premieres, to its diverse body of work. In June 2013, OBT was delighted to name Kevin Irving as its third Artistic Director. Irving brings over 25 years of experience performing with and managing world-renowned cultural organizations and dance companies, including The Göteborg Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, and Compañía Nacional de Danza (Spain). He will be working with OBT to develop a unique approach to 21<sup>st</sup> century American ballet that reflects the vigor of the art form as it continues to evolve.