

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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From a deep field of gifted candidates emerge three winners in Oregon Ballet Theatre's *ChoreographyXX* competition celebrating dance created by women

Last January Oregon Ballet Theatre (OBT) announced the launch of *ChoreographyXX* a competition and performance project promoting female choreographers made possible by a generous grant from the Oregon Community Foundation's Creative Heights Initiative. In the weeks that followed the company received nearly 90 submissions from incredibly gifted candidates. Today OBT Artistic Director Kevin Irving is pleased to announce the three winners of the competition: Gioconda Barbuto, Helen Simoneau, and Nicole Haskins. These talented women have each been awarded a commission to set a new work on OBT. The three world premieres will be presented free to the public June 29-30, 2017 at Washington Park's Rose Garden Amphitheater.

The competition's winning candidates were selected by a jury of Northwest artists and arts producers that included: Angela Mattox (Artistic Director, PICA), Paul King (Co-Founder, White Bird), local choreographer Mary Oslund (Co-Founder, Conduit) and long-time ballet teacher Catherine Levi (Corvallis Academy of Balletwas). The jury was led by OBT Artistic Director Kevin Irving. Together the group sought applicants with work that reflected a creative capacity for unique, contemporary expressions of a classical ballet vocabulary. "We were thrilled with the incredible response to this competition," comments Irving. "With such a wealth of talent we couldn't have dreamed up a better mix of choreographic voices than we have in Barbuto, Simoneau, and Haskins"

Each of these talented women are accomplished dancers with vastly different choreographic styles and in different stages of their careers. Barbuto - a Canadian resident of Italian descent - was a soloist with Les Grand Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, where she danced for 16 years distinguishing herself in ballets by a range of choreographers including George Balanchine, Nacho Duato, Michel Fokine, José Limon, and Jiri Kylián - for whom she later danced in NDT3. With such a rich background Barbuto's artistic approach is grounded in ballet in a manner that is forward looking. "The root of Ballet technique supports quality of movement with line and expression and it allows for new and interesting propositions in the ever-evolving development of dance," she writes in her artistic statement. "I am very enthusiastic about dance and its evolution." Barbuto's style is highly

organic. Using workshops, she takes a collective creative approach to find an honesty of expression in each dancer.

Southern Californian native Nicole Haskins currently dances with the Smuin Ballet for which she has also created several works in addition to commissions for the Sacramento Ballet and Richmond Ballet. Her interest in choreography began early setting small pieces for fellow dancers in her hometown studio. She continued to hone her skills eventually winning a chance to study choreography at New York City Ballet's New York Choreographic Institute. As with many choreographers, music is Haskins primary inspiration. "My choreography strives to connect audiences to the beauty of music and the artistry of the individual dancer," she says. At the same time Haskins is interested in groups, shapes, and patterns taking almost a mathematical approach to her work. "I have always been comfortable with shapes and mathematics in my choreography, and tend to plot out the general outline of the music and formations of a piece, but the most satisfying results are when the dancers help inform the direction the piece should take and fill in the broad strokes I prepared in advance."

A native of Quebec, Simoneau is the artistic director of Helen Simoneau Danse a small company that performs annually in Winston-Salem (NC) as well as nationally and internationally. Simoneau has been commissioned by The Juilliard School, the American Dance Festival, The Yard, Springboard Danse Montréal, and the Swiss International Coaching Project (SiWiC) in Zurich. She is a Bogliasco Fellow, was a Baryshnikov Arts Center resident artist, and won 1st Place for Choreography at the 13th Internationales Solo-Tanz-Theater Festival in Stuttgart, Germany. She is thrilled to be working with the classically trained dancers of OBT. "The gift of time and space with such exquisitely skilled dancers within a forward thinking company like OBT is a huge opportunity for me at this point in my career!"

Rehearsals for the three new works begin in May 2017. Each choreographer will be assigned a third of the company and have a month to develop a fully staged ballet. "It is such an honor to have these talented women enriching OBT's repertory. And what more perfect setting to watch their new work blossom than in Portland's one-of-a-kind Rose Garden Amphitheater," comments Irving. "We can hardly wait for this exciting project to begin!"

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, we were delighted to name Kevin Irving as the company's 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 Compañia Nacional de Danza (Spain). His tenure has been marked by a commitment to collaborative partnerships with other Portland artists and organizations, including the Portland Art Museum, Multnomah County Library, Kenji Bunch, and Pink Martini. He has expanded the company's classical repertoire – with the premieres of Ben Stevenson's Cinderella and August Bournonville's Napoli – while preserving OBT's legacy and restoring major works such as James Canfield's Romeo & Juliet. At the same time, he continues to build a diverse body of work with world premieres from internationally acclaimed, contemporary choreographers such as Nicolo Fonte, Darrell Grand Moultrie, and James Kudelka.

Irving is working with OBT to develop a unique approach to 21st century American ballet that reflects the vigor of the art form as it continues to evolve.

ABOUT GIOCONDA BARBUTO

Gioconda Barbuto is an Italo-Canadian dancer and choreographer. She began her training with Gladys Forrester and pursued her artistic development at the Banff Centre and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. A dancer of explosive wit, subtle intelligence, and a fine sense of theatricality, Gioconda has distinguished herself throughout her career in an impressive number of works by choreographers such as George Balanchine, Nacho Duato, Michel Fokine, Christopher House, Jiri Kylián, Hans Van Manen, James Kudelka, José Limon, Brian Macdonald, Mark Morris, Ohad Naharin, Fernand Nault, Anthony Tudor, Sol León /Paul Lightfoot, Meryl Tankard, Johann Inger, American performance designer and director Robert Wilson and many others. She danced with the Minnesota Dance

Theatre before becoming a soloist with Les Grand Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, where she danced for 16 years. In 1998 she was invited by Jiri Kylian to join Nederlands Dans Theater III in The Hague, Holland, with a group of high caliber dancers, all over the age of forty, and toured internationally with the company for eight years. Gioconda is featured in two of Jiri Kylian's award winning Films, Birth Day and Car Men.

In 1996 she was nominated for the Kennedy Center Fellowship and was the recipient of the Clifford E. Lee choreography award. She is a recipient of several grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and has created many of her own solo and group projects with many renowned dance artists, such as Margie Gillis, Ginette Laurin, Paul Andre Fortier, Coleman/Lemieux, Martino Müller, Anik Bissonnette, Emily Molnar and Joe Laughlin to name a few.

Gioconda's choreography has been presented at TU Dance, Ballet BC, Ballet Jorgen, Banff Festival Ballet, Danse Cite, Tangente, L'Agora de la danse, Vancouver Dance Centre, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, BJM Danse Montreal, Alberta Ballet, Minnesota Dance Theater, Northwest Dance Project, McKnight Fellowship Solo Commission, Bravo FACT, CBC Canada/Films Piche Ferrari, Ballet Kelowna, The Juilliard School, Arts Umbrella Dance Company, You Dance/National Ballet of Canada, Simon Fraser University Dance, Ecole Supérieure de Ballet de Quebec, Dutch National Ballet Academy, Nederlands Dans Theater Choreographic Workshop and many more. Gioconda has also created and directed the graduating production L'Abri, for the National Circus School.

The 2015-2016 season brought many new projects and highlights for Gioconda, she was selected as the 2015 McKnight International Artist and has choreographed and premiered a new work for the partnering company TU Dance entitled FOOTPRINT with music by Gabriel Prokofiev. Her season began with a creation and performance of a new work in collaboration with Joe Laughlin, entitled 4OUR, which will continue on an eastern Canada tour in the fall of 2016. Amongst her many commissions, she will also choreograph a new solo for Joe Laughlin and has been invited back to Arts Umbrella Dance Company, Ecole Supérieure de Ballet de Quebec as well as the Dutch National Ballet Academy. Gioconda also conducted creative movement workshops for Danse a la Carte, Northrop University, TU Dance, and for the summer dance intensives of the Dutch National Ballet, Arts Umbrella Dance and RUBBERBANDance Group. Her workshops will also be featured at the Vancouver Training Society and Yokohama Dance Intensive. This spring, for the Atelier et Laboratoire de Creation, Gioconda will be on faculty for the 10th Anniversary of TransFormation Danse.

Gioconda continues to share her passion for Dance and the Performance Arts, through her choreography, performances, movement workshops, directing and coaching.

ABOUT NICOLE HASKINS

Hailing from Venice Beach, California, Nicole Haskins received her training at The Westside School of Ballet. She has danced professionally with Sacramento Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Washington

Ballet, and Amy Seiwert's Imagery. Nicole is also an experienced choreographer. She participated in the New York Choreographic Institute affiliated with the New York City Ballet, and received their Fellowship Grant the following year. She also created a world premiere for Richmond Ballet's New Works Festival. Now in her third season with Smuin Ballet, Nicole's favorite role has been in Helen Pickett's Petal, and she was honored to be invited to choreograph Fantasia for the 2014 edition of The Christmas Ballet.

ABOUT HELEN SIMONEAU

A native of Québec, Canada, HELEN SIMONEAU, is the artistic director and founder of Helen Simoneau Danse now in its 6th season. Simoneau has been commissioned by The Juilliard School, the American Dance Festival, the UNC School of the Arts, the Bessie Schönberg Residency at The Yard, Springboard Danse Montréal, and the Swiss International Coaching Project (SiWiC) in Zurich. She was a resident artist at Baryshnikov Arts Center, Bates Dance Festival and has received fellowships from Bogliasco Foundation and North Carolina Arts Council. In addition to annual company performances in Winston-Salem (NC), her company has been presented in Austria, Brazil, Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and has toured throughout Germany, Asia, and the United States. Notable venues that have presented her work include The Guggenheim Museum (NYC), Dance Place (DC), Joyce SoHo (NYC), Tangente (Montréal), The Aoyama Round Theatre (Tokyo), the L.I.G. Art Hall Busan (South Korea), Jacob's Pillow Inside/Out (MA), PACT-Zollverein in Essen (Germany), and Athens International Dance Festival (Greece). Her work was also presented at the 13th Internationales Solo-Tanz-Theatre Festival in Stuttgart, Germany, where she was awarded 1st place for Choreography.