

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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Oregon Ballet Theatre Celebrates Spring by Taking Inspiration from the Earth

Oregon Ballet Theatre's thrilling "season of giants" continues with TERRA, a program that takes inspiration from the earth and welcomes the spring back into our lives. This powerful mixed repertory bill features company and world premieres by renowned contemporary choreographers Nacho Duato and Helen Pickett. Taken together these four ballets make for an incredible evening of dance. They also speak to the way humans connect with and are a part of nature. From the joy of an intimate caress made sweeter by the color and scents of spring, to the endurance of a culture dependent on the bounty of their land, these dances will inspire dialogue regarding our deep connection to the earth.

From Spanish dance master Nacho Duato, OBT will premiere *Jardí Tancat* a critical addition to the company's repertory. Created for NDT2 in 1983, *Jardí Tancat* was Nacho Duato's first ballet and was originally presented at a choreographic competition in Cologne Germany. The unique movement, music, and subject matter garnered him first prize at the competition, as well as instant fame and recognition as an important new voice in the dance world. Choreographed to Catalan folk tales collected and sung by Maria del Mar Bonet, *Jardí Tancat* presents a compelling portrait in movement of a Mediterranean people who work the barren land, praying to God for rain that does not come and enduring with great spirit all the hardship they face.

In the same program, OBT premieres Duato's *El Naranjo* (The Orange Tree). This sensuous *pas de deux* from the longer work *Gnawa* is perfectly paired with *Jardí Tancat* as Duato continues to be inspired by the Mediterranean and its people. *El Naranjo* is considered the transcendent moment of the ballet and OBT is thrilled to have been granted special permission to present it as a standalone piece. This unusual concession, from a choreographer whose ballets are performed by some of the most prestigious companies in the world, was made possible by OBT's Artistic Director Kevin Irving who spent 8 years as Principal Rehearsal Director of Duato's Compañia Nacional de Danza. Irving is staging both *Jardí Tancat* and *El Naranjo* for the company.

Adding brightness to the rich, earthy tones of Duato, OBT weaves two works from Helen Pickett into the performance. First, the thrilling return of *Petal*, a lush ballet drenched in the bright yellows, pinks, and oranges of budding flowers. *Petal* was an instant success with Portland audiences during its OBT premiere in the spring of 2014. Pickett's approach is informed by her years as a dancer with William Forsythe, but as the Oregonian's Katherine Thomas observed in her 2014 review, "Pickett's space-eating patterning and tone of carefree exuberance in the dance have a stamp all her own."

The program culminates with a world premiere from Pickett and the evening's title work, *Terra*, set to an original score by American Composer of "House of Cards" Fame, Jeff Beal. With roots in both ballet and theater, Pickett has a flair for drama. This latest production which takes inspiration from the indigenous dances of the world, contemporary ballet, and Joseph Campbell's work on myth and metaphor will be no exception. "TERRA explores how the earth gave meaning and identity to humanity," explains Pickett. "I started to investigate earth dance ceremonies and this gave rise to the rituals of life that transpire between human beings." Pickett brought these ideas to Beal. Beginning with percussion as the driving force, the composition evolved to include sensual guitar, searing strings, lyrical piano, and funky, wonderful "daily life-sounds." Listening to this music one feels what Campbell described as "the rapture of being alive!"

"TERRA is quite simply a delight for the senses," says Irving. "I'm so excited to be sharing these four ballets with Portland audiences. I know they will be transported by the rich colors, earthy rhythms, and incredible dance, to the sights, sounds, and smells of other lands and that our work might inspire dialogue about our responsibility in caring for this incredible place, terra, which we all share."

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 our 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 the 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*, August Bournonville's *Napoli*, and his own *Swan Lake* – 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.