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April 20, 2016 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Effective with its 2016/2017 Season Oregon Ballet Theatre's Artistic Director Kevin Irving welcomes Jacqueline Straughan as Principal Dancer and announces several other new hires and key promotions expanding the size of the company to 27 members.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's (OBT) Artistic Director Kevin Irving has announced that critically acclaimed ballerina Jacqueline Straughan will join OBT as principal dancer effective with its 2016/2017 season. In addition to this exciting news the company is pleased to welcome Christopher Kaiser from Alberta Ballet along with OBT apprentices Emily Parker, Jessica Lind, and Paige Wilkey to the rank of company artist. OBT2 dancers Abigail Diedrich and Hannah Davis along with newcomer Andrew Wingert from the Suzanne Farrell Ballet will be joining as apprentices. The combined effect of these promotions and new hires will expand the company roster to 27 dancers.

Principal Dancer Jacqueline Straughan began her career with the National Ballet of Canada in Toronto. She later joined Ballet West where she quickly moved up the ranks to first soloist and gained a deep and impressive background performing in classical and contemporary ballets including works by William Forsythe, Jiří Kylián, and Oregon Ballet Theatre's own Resident Choreographer, Nicolo Fonte (who holds the same title at Ballet West). Critics have been wowed by Straughan's powerful stage presence and jaw-dropping technical ability. Remarking on a recent performance of William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* – which OBT will be presenting this fall – Leigh Witchel of Danceview Times observed:

“In (Paris Opera Ballet Star's) Sylvie Guillem's role... Straughan stressed the popped hips and quick feints from club dancing along with high extensions and a predatory air: a man-eating Gumby doll.”

“We are thrilled to have a dancer of Jacqueline's caliber join Oregon Ballet Theatre. Her command of both classical and contemporary works makes her a perfect fit to enhance the already considerable strengths of the company's top ranks,” observes Irving.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2016/2017 “Season of Giants” is nothing if not ambitious. With works by major choreographers including Balanchine, Forsythe, Petipa, and Duato, the required level of dancing throughout the company is demanding. Filling out the rank of company artist are: OBT Apprentice Emily Parker whose outstanding performance in Fonte's *Beautiful Decay* earned her an early promotion; newcomer Christopher Kaiser who graduated from Julliard and has danced with Alberta Ballet for three years; OBT Apprentice Jessica Lind who distinguished

herself as the lead Marzipan Shepherdess in this season's *George Balanchine's The Nutcracker*; and OBT Apprentice Paige Wilkey of whose performance in Dennis Spaight's *Crayola* last season dance critic Martha Ullman West observed, "Wilkey whatever she did, from holding an unsupported arabesque to whipping out fouettés to bourréeing rapidly across the stage, showed the promise and personality of a true ballerina."

Moving up to apprentice are OBT2 company members Hannah Davis and Abigail Diedrich. This is the first year OBT is promoting dancers from its junior ensemble to the company. Under the leadership of Lisa Sundstrom this group has performed extensively across the Portland community building the confidence and professionalism needed to transition to a professional career. Newcomer Andrew Wingert joins OBT as an apprentice from Suzanne Farrell Ballet where he was a member of the corps.

While welcoming many talented dancers this season, OBT also announces the departure of Company Artist Sarah Griffin as well as apprentices Alexander Negron and Ian Schwaner. The company thanks these dancers for their considerable contribution and wishes them all the best in their future projects.

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 Compañía 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 Helen Pickett.

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 JACQUELINE STRAUGHAN

Jacqueline Straughan hails from Carson City, Nevada. She went on to study at Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto under Mavis Staines in 1995. While at NBS Ms. Straughan worked with noted guest artists Arlette van Boven, Rudi van Dantzig, Christopher House and Denise Schultz. She was the recipient of the Peter Dwyer Scholarship and Christopher Ondaatje Award in 2000 for dance excellence.

Ms. Straughan's professional career began in 2000 with The National Ballet of Canada under the directorship of James Kudelka. Within a year she was promoted from Tier 2 in the company's apprentice program to Corps de Ballet. During her four year tenure with NBOC, Ms. Straughan performed featured roles in Ashton's *Montones I* and Mrozewski's *A Delicate Battle* and worked with Lynn Wallis and Suzanne Farrell. Dirk Badenhorst engaged Ms. Straughan to dance with South African Ballet Theatre in 2006 to perform in Greve's *Hamlet* and Balanchine's *Who Cares*.

That same year Ms. Straughan accepted a position at Ballet West as a New Artist, led then by Pamela Robinson-Harris. In 2008, after working with Peter Boal on *Red Angels* and Keith Roberts on *Nine Sinatra Songs*, Ballet West's current Artistic Director Adam Skulte promoted her to Demi Soloist. The Pas de Trois in Nicolo Fonte's *Bolero* and a title role in Butler's *Carmina Burana*, mounted by Malcolm Burn, paved the way to her promotion to Soloist in 2010. Notable roles such as Flora in Stevenson's *Dracula*, Mercedes in Holmes' *Don Quixote*, and her role in *Petite Mort*, staged by Roslyn Anderson, led to her latest promotion to First Soloist in 2013.

Rave reviews have highlighted Ms. Straughan's standout performances in Forsythe's *In The Middle*, *Somewhat Elevated*, Balanchine's *Rubies Pas de Deux*, Fonte's *Presto*, Ashton's *Cinderella*, and Dove's *Red Angels*.

In collaboration with BBC Worldwide, Ms. Straughan has appeared on network television as a cast member of *Breaking Pointe*. Seasons I and II of the docudrama based on Ballet West aired on the CW Network in 2012-2013.

In Ms. Straughan's time with Ballet West she has performed at the Kennedy Center, Wolf Trap National Park for Performing Arts, Fall for Dance Festival, Chicago Dancing Festival, and the Laguna Dance Festival. She has guested at the Utah Arts Festival, Tom Mattingly Dance Project and with Barak Ballet. Ms. Straughan has also performed for human trafficking and HIV/AIDS charity benefits including Fahodie For Friends, Golden Rainbow and Canada's Dancers For Life.

Ms. Straughan will join Oregon Ballet Theatre as Principal Dancer effective with its 2016/2017 season.