

OREGON **BALLET** THEATRE

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Portland, OR (June 18, 2020)

Oregon Ballet Theatre's Principal Dancer Ansa Capizzi and Company Artist Adam Hartley retire without a final curtain.

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 30th anniversary season was abruptly interrupted last February with the onset of Covid-19. The company had just completed its run of *Sleeping Beauty* which included the unexpected final performance of one of the company's finest dancers, Ansa Capizzi, in the starring role of Aurora. At the end of this year OBT was to also bid farewell to veteran company artist, Adam Hartley, and soloist Matthew Pawlicki-Sinclair, as well as company artists Alexa Domenden, Marc Lapierre, and Theodore Watler. Each season typically brings retirement, promotions, and much celebration within the OBT family and among its fans. Unfortunately for these artists there was no festive send off. Instead there was a silent ending to perhaps the strangest season the company will ever experience.

Capizzi came to the United States from Nagoya, Japan. She joined OBT as an apprentice in 2003. During her 17 years with the company she won the hearts of audiences and moved through the ranks to soloist in 2007 and principal in 2018. During this time she won the admiration of two artistic directors, first Christopher Stowell and since 2013, Kevin Irving.

Stowell, who first met Capizzi while on an audition tour through Japan noted the contrast between her outward fragility and inner strength. "Beyond her sparkling stage presence and delicate strength, Ansa's bravery in leaving her family and pursuing a career as a professional dancer in Portland, Oregon, is her most striking and impressive characteristic," Stowell said. "This quality followed her as she became one of OBT's most distinctive artists and accomplished principal dancers."

Capizzi also won the heart of OBT's founder, James Canfield, who cast her as Juliet in the 2017 revival of his *Romeo and Juliet*. Of this performance dance critic Martha Ullman West writing for Oregon ArtsWatch observed: "I love watching dancers come into their own, and that's exactly what soloist Ansa Deguchi (now Capizzi) did as Juliet. From her first exuberant jeté in the ballet's second scene, to her final, anguished embrace of Romeo's dead body in the crypt, Deguchi sustained dramatically and technically one of the great ballerina roles in the 20th century classical repertory...Her entry in the ballroom scene; her yearning plea from her balcony for Romeo to appear after the ball; the liquid way she extended her leg in *développé* while dancing with Romeo in that heady pas de deux; her reluctant dance with Paris; her frantic runs when she awakened in her tomb: all were marked by a musicality in her phrasing I had not seen before."

Long time OBT audiences will also miss veteran dancer Adam Hartley who joined the company as an apprentice in 2007. Adam was equally comfortable with classical and contemporary work. One of his favorite ballets was OBT resident choreographer Nicolo Fonte's *Bolero*. "The piece basically follows the build of the music," Hartley explains. "It starts out with a dark and cold sort of industrial feel and slowly as the instruments are added and the

music builds, so too do the warmth of colors and energy of the dancers on stage. Quite literally it comes to life with dancers in dark red almost like blood flowing through the body. I think it's a really brilliant and effective idea for a piece. And the energy you feel on stage during the final group partnering section is incredible. All those bodies moving together so powerfully just gives you so much life. It's a piece I will never forget. I'm so happy and fortunate to have been a part of it." Looking ahead Hartley is considering getting more involved in another passion of his; brewing craft beer.

Following two incredible seasons, OBT soloist Matthew Pawlicki-Sinclair has made the difficult decision to leave the company. "My time as a soloist with OBT has been too short for my true liking," Pawlicki-Sinclair says. "The current state of the world made me change my plans for the future and my family and I will return to the Netherlands. The two years that I danced with this incredible company were extremely rich and fulfilling. I came here after dancing at Dutch National Ballet for ten years. The decision to move here was a big one, but as soon as we began work on *Napoli* I knew I had made the right choice. I can say with delight and pride that many of my performances at OBT have been career highlights and some of the most fulfilling experiences I've ever had on stage. Dancing the prince in *Sleeping Beauty* is like a cherry on top of my career, and I am very grateful to Kevin (AD Kevin Irving) for seeing my potential. Working with the dancers, staff and choreographers at OBT has deepened my love for our art and have helped me refine my craft. I will always be very grateful for this."

Looking ahead Pawlicki-Sinclair, whose notable performances also included Nicolo Fonte's *Presto* and the Prince in Ben Stevenson's *Cinderella*, will be rethinking his role as a dancer to focus on choreography and teaching. "I will continue to keep in touch with OBT," he adds. "Hopefully to return in some way one day. I wish the company all the best in these unprecedented times, and I am certain that they will persevere beautifully."

"The company will greatly miss these fine artists," says Irving. "Saying goodbye in silence is particularly difficult for all of us. Every dancer who has been a part of our OBT family has impacted us in ways too numerous to account for because ballet creates such intimate connections between artists working in the studio and with audiences who come to appreciate the fruits of their labor when they see them in performance. I will personally miss seeing those departing who have been tirelessly devoted to supporting the mission of OBT through their hard work and the joy they have shared so generously. We hope audiences will join us in celebrating them through memories we will share in the weeks ahead through social media, our newsletters, and on our website. Please join us in a loud standing ovation!"

ABOUT OREGON BALLET THEATRE

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 our region.

Oregon Ballet Theatre was founded in 1989 through the consolidation of Pacific Ballet Theatre and Ballet Oregon; James Canfield, a former principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet, was the company's first artistic director. Under his leadership, 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, Kevin Irving became 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 Gothenburg 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* and Christopher Stowell's *The Sleeping Beauty*. At the same time, he continues to build a diverse body of work with premieres from internationally acclaimed contemporary choreographers such as Nacho Duato, Jiří Kylián, and James Kudelka, while investing in American choreographers such as Alvin Ailey, Twyla Tharp, and Agnes de Mille as well as new dance makers Helen Pickett, Darrell Grand Moultrie and OBT's Resident Choreographer, Nicolo Fonte.

OBT's investment in the community extends far beyond our stages and studios, as we seek to enrich the community and invest in our art form. We provide ballet training to over 800 students through the OBT School, which attracts dancers from as far away as Spain and Japan, and through OBT2, our junior company, which brings professional level performance to underserved audiences throughout Portland.

Our robust Education and Community Engagement programming impacts nearly 40,000 people annually, including thousands of K-12 youth across 21 school districts. Ongoing efforts to ensure equitable access include: scholarships to OBT School, field trip transportation for low income and Title 1 schools, and our Share the Wonder campaign, which provides thousands of tickets to our mainstage performances for families in need.