

OREGON **BALLET** THEATRE

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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In the midst of unprecedented challenges, Oregon Ballet Theatre reorganizes and sets a course for the future

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 30th anniversary season was abruptly interrupted last February with the onset of COVID-19. The restrictions imposed on public gatherings resulted in the cancellation of the company's Newmark performances, *Beautiful Decay* and *The Americans 2.0*, retiring company dancers including veteran principal ballerina Ansa Capizzi were left to celebrate their careers in silence, OBT School faculty scrambled almost overnight to launch the spring term via Google classroom, and the marketing team worked to maintain audience engagement through the launch of "OBT@Home" an online resource offering performance clips, as well as behind-the-scenes videos, virtual dance offs and dance classes. Against this backdrop Executive Director Michael Greer made the decision to leave the organization for an opportunity to take over the Artsfund in Seattle. Artistic Director Kevin Irving will now be joined by interim ED Thomas Bruner as well as new Board leadership to set a course for the future, even while much of the uncertainty surrounding Covid-19 remains unresolved.

"We are so fortunate to have Thomas Bruner supporting OBT at this time," says Irving. "He is a fighter who has weathered storms." Bruner, who has years of experience leading nonprofits including as Executive Director of the Cascade AIDS Project and as the VP and Regional Executive of the American Red Cross, has a deep understanding of fundraising, financial planning, and board management. In addition to Bruner, OBT welcomes new Board members, Sanda Stein and Catherine Levi, and welcomes back former Board Trustees Cate Millar and Ken Ivey.

"Not since 2009 has the company had to face so much uncertainty, and yet we have been extremely fortunate in comparison with other arts organizations," Irving says referring to OBT's having completed its annual gala and its highest grossing productions of the season before COVID-19 hit. "Furthermore, while we are still facing challenges, the current situation has forced us to be creative in finding new ways of sharing our art form. Some of these ideas, including digital subscriptions, may even become permanent sources of additional revenue in the long run. We're excited about next season, and re-imagining what it might look like while navigating all the uncertainty."

Whatever plans emerge they will be constrained by budget limitations. While OBT received emergency support through the Federal Paycheck Protection Program enabling all dancers and staff to remain on payroll, this funding will be depleted by the end of June. To offset the stress of reduced cash flow resulting from lost ticket revenue, the company announced furloughs last week of eight staff members and 20% salary cuts for remaining staff effective July 1.

On a bright note for the immediate future, the OBT School recently announced that it will be teaching a portion of its annual Senior Summer Intensive in person. This is a major achievement given that most dance programs nationwide are going to a virtual format. To maintain social distancing, class sizes have been limited to ten students and extensive safety measures are being put in place. The OBT School will also move forward with in person summer dance workshops for younger students as well as adults. Classes will be taught at its South Waterfront studio as well as studio space provided by Northwest Academy, a private arts high school in downtown Portland. "After months of virtual training, we can't wait to be back in the studio and to teach in person. Nothing can replace that experience," says OBT School Director Marion Tonner.

"While the restrictions on class size and the safety measures we are putting in place will necessarily reduce the number of students we work with this summer," adds Irving, "the work we are doing to reintroduce in person training demonstrates the kind of commitment, adaptability, and innovative thinking that will see OBT through this challenging time."

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 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*, 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.