

OREGON **BALLET** THEATRE

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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Oregon Ballet Theatre Company Dancers on the Move – Promotions, New Hires, and Retirement

With the onset of Covid-19, Oregon Ballet Theatre faced a completely changed landscape. There was considerable uncertainty regarding when and how it's 2020/21 Season would begin, and what it would look like. In September OBT took its first steps forward with its Exposed series when wild fires followed by cold and rain nearly derailed the bold outdoor initiative. Despite all this, one constant remained in place: OBT continued to show up and dance! Now with its reimagined 2020/21 Season OBT MOVES in full swing, the company is thrilled to announce the promotion of OBT fan favorite Eva Burton to principal dancer and to welcome Company Artist Mathilde Lambert. OBT is also pleased to announce that apprentices Zuzu Metzler and Bailey Shaw have been promoted to company artists.

Burton joined OBT as a company artist ten years ago after training at San Francisco Ballet School and was promoted to soloist in 2016. Her artistry has shined in many major roles including 20th century works such as the lead in William Forsythe's *In the Middle Somewhat Elevated*, and Waltz Girl in George Balanchine's *Serenade*; to coveted classics such as Cinderella in Ben Stevenson's beloved production, the Sugar Plum Fairy in George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*, and most recently Aurora in Christopher Stowell's *Sleeping Beauty*, considered one of the most technically difficult ballets. "During these very trying times happy news is rare, so it was with great joy that I announced the promotion of Eva to principal dancer," says Artistic Director Kevin Irving. "Not only is Eva a proficient, expressive, and beautifully musical dancer, but her consistent commitment and dedication through the years, in good times and bad, are the qualities of a true prima ballerina. Particularly now as we face this most challenging season, her combination of grit and beauty is what uplifts the company."

French American Mathilde Lambert received her early training at the Washington Ballet School in DC before moving to Europe when she was 16 to study in France, Italy, and in the Netherlands as a trainee at the Dutch National Ballet. Lambert was just 18 when she accepted her first professional contract with the Northern Ballet in Leeds England. She returned to the United States to dance with Columbia Classical Ballet for a season before accepting a contract with OBT.

Zuzu Metzler grew up training at Oregon Ballet Theatre School under school directors Damara Bennett, Anthony Jones and since 2018, Marion Tonner. She was then accepted to OBT2 the company's junior ensemble and then advanced in company apprentice in 2018. OBT is delighted to have Metzler join the company this year.

Raleigh North Carolina native Bailey Shaw joined OBT as an apprentice last year following two seasons dancing with Ballet Met's second company. "I am really excited to be a company artist this season. To make it to this point is what every young dancer dreams of and to finally have that dream be a reality feels like such an accomplishment!"

While OBT warmly congratulates its newly hired and promoted dancers, it also extends its best wishes to company artists Kimberly Nobriga and Emily Parker who have announced their early retirement. The disruption in training and rehearsals brought on by Covid-19 gave both dancers a chance to reflect on future plans. Nobriga acknowledges that, "it was a very tough decision to leave and bittersweet. I'll miss everyone at OBT but all the changes because of COVID made it seem like the best time to move onto the next chapter and explore what else I can accomplish. I'm thankful to be able to look back on last season and know that I finished on a high note with everyone.

Parker is retiring to pursue her second dream of becoming a physician. "The pandemic really made me reflect deeply about life after my performing career and how I want to contribute to the world," says Parker. "I was not anticipating retiring at this point, but these wild circumstances presented the right opportunity for me to make my transition into a career in research and medicine."

Audiences can learn more about Oregon Ballet Theatre dancers this season through the company's video portraits project and by following the company on its social media channels. They will also be appearing in Wish List, OBT's in-person events opening October 29 at Portland's Left Bank Annex!

MORE INFORMATION

WISH LIST IN-PERSON EVENTS:

Every dancer keeps a running list of roles and ballets they hope to dance one day – for that matter every Artistic Director as well keeps in mind ballets he/she wants to present and roles with which they want to challenge their dancers. Wish List is an evening of solos and duets that explores those challenges and reveals the differences between dancers, between roles, and between artistic styles.

October 29 – November 15, 2020

Repertory ranging from the purest classical variations to the most contemporary displays of virtuoso performance – some even coached by truly inspirational leaders in dance – will be shared in an intimate and raw setting, celebrating the resilience and passion of the OBT dancers.

These events are open to OBT donors and subscribers only. Information here:

<https://www.obt.org/performances-and-tickets/wish-list>

OBT DANCER VIDEO PORTRAITS:

Experience firsthand the how, when, why of each dancer's journey. See the grit and determination it takes to make what is tremendously difficult look effortless. Learn about the dancer's frustrations and fears of mastering new choreography, and the ultimate joy of the artistic process.

Get unlimited access to these and other 2020/21 season video with an All Access or Digital Access Pass or purchase on demand. Details here: <https://www.obt.org/performances-and-tickets/original-obt-digital-content/>

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 30 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.