

OREGON **BALLET** THEATRE

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Art Inspires Art in Creation of New Full-Length Ballet, *Marilyn*

A World Premiere by Dani Rowe, Oregon Ballet Theatre Artistic Director

PORTLAND, OR – Viewing Andy Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe Series in the personal collection of noted Portland philanthropist Jordan Schnitzer inspired OBT Artistic Director Dani Rowe’s new full-length ballet *Marilyn*. The world premiere ballet tells the story of Marilyn Monroe’s life from a new perspective.

The initial idea for *Marilyn* took root during a conversation between Dani Rowe and frequent collaborator, costume designer Emma Kingsbury after Marilyn Monroe’s iconic “Happy Birthday, Mr. President” dress was worn to the Met Gala in 2022. In considering Marilyn’s lasting cultural impact, the idea of making a Marilyn ballet surfaced and sparked excitement. “How could a ballet capture Marilyn’s layers?” Rowe asked herself. “Her glamour, vulnerability, and myth?”

Then, shortly after joining Oregon Ballet Theatre in 2023, Rowe had dinner with Portland philanthropist, Jordan Schnitzer. Schnitzer, who has been named an [ARTnews Top 200 art collector globally](#), is a lifelong Portland resident, local business owner and Oregon’s foremost fine art collector. Schnitzer spoke about his Andy Warhol collection and shared his insights into Warhol’s fascination with celebrity culture, particularly his Marilyn Monroe series. Schnitzer extended an invitation to view these prints up close and share more about Warhol’s screen-printing process.

“Seeing Warhol’s Marilyns up close deepened my understanding of his work and its resonance with Marilyn’s story,” says Rowe. “The vibrant prints captured her public image, while the imperfections hinted at the vulnerability beneath. This duality inspired the emotional core of the ballet: the tension between performance and authenticity, between image and reality.”

Rowe also found thematic inspiration in Warhol’s *Marilyn Diptych*, which juxtaposes colorful images of Marilyn with fading, black-and-white versions. This contrast speaks to the duality of her persona — the radiant star and the woman struggling with inner demons. The juxtaposition of brightness and darkness became central to the ballet’s narrative.

“When Dani Rowe visited The Schnitzer Collection, she saw one of our Andy Warhol screenprints of Marilyn Monroe. I could see the sheer captivating intensity of the moment! Later, she called and asked what I thought of her creating a ballet called Marilyn. I thought it was a spectacular idea and now all of us

can experience how one artist inspired another to create a magical performance! Thank you, Andy Warhol and thank you, Dani Rowe!”

--Jordan Schnitzer, President of Schnitzer Properties and the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation

From this foundation, Rowe began crafting a libretto that explores the different versions of Marilyn — the ingenue, the star, the wife, and the lost soul. **This ballet reflects the contradictions of Marilyn’s life, weaving together impressions of iconic moments to tell a story of fame, identity, and vulnerability.**

“Warhol’s Marilyns challenged me to look beyond the surface, to see the layers of humanity beneath the icon, and to bring that depth to life on stage,” says Rowe. “Ultimately, this ballet explores the fragile line between image and reality, between performance and truth. It’s a tribute to the enduring power of art to reveal the complexities of being human.”

A Production of Firsts & a Female Led Artistic Team

Marilyn represents many firsts for Oregon Ballet Theatre. It is the first full length ballet for Artistic Director Dani Rowe and was created in association with the Estate of Marilyn Monroe, LLC. *Marilyn* also marks one of OBT’s first co-productions.

Marilyn is also notable for featuring a female led artistic team. According to a [2023 Dance Data Project report](#), only 29% of ballet companies have female artistic directors. Among the largest 150 ballet companies in the U.S., [only a quarter of the works produced in 2022 were choreographed by women](#).

Included in the *Marilyn* artistic team with Dani Rowe are Composer [Shannon Rugani](#); Costume and Scenic Designer [Emma Kingsbury](#); and Lighting and Scenic Designer [David Finn](#).

“Working alongside incredible artists like Dani and Emma is not only a privilege, but also a rare and significant moment. In my 15 years as a professional dancer and performer, I never danced for a female choreographer and only performed to a handful of compositions by women. The opportunity to collaborate with a female led creative team is something truly special and long overdue in our industry,” said Composer Shannon Rugani. “It’s always an honor to work alongside an artistic genius, and this experience with Dani has been nothing short of inspiring.”

“In our endeavor to authentically and respectfully portray the essence of Norma Jeane and her ultimate evolution into Marilyn Monroe - we anchor our ballet’s narrative in her genuine life experiences. Recognizing that Hollywood’s studio system was central to Marilyn’s existence, our set design draws inspiration from the archetypal sound stages of studios like MGM, encapsulating both the artifice of filmmaking and the environment where Marilyn’s cinematic journey unfolded,” said Costume and Scenic Designer Emma Kingsbury. “Understanding her as an icon meant understanding how her iconic looks were thought up and then executed.”

“Dani has a great sense of story, an imagination that feeds unique movement, and a talent to create a choreography that inherently tells the story. We love that Dani is open to new ideas and generous in her creative collaboration,” said Scenic and Lighting Designer David Finn. “Marilyn was so much more than

the icon that we know.”

A Portland-Made Co-Production with BalletMet and Tulsa Ballet

Financing new work is a challenge for most fine arts organizations, and what began as a playful idea has grown into a major artistic endeavor, supported by multiple ballet companies. OBT invited Tulsa Ballet and BalletMet to partner in the role of co-producers of *Marilyn*. As co-producers, they share a portion of the costs to build the production and will collectively own and manage the production. After the ballet premieres in Portland, it will then tour to Tulsa, OK and Columbus, OH respectively, to be performed by their organizations.

The companies also brought in Sarah Lakey, Pacific Northwest Ballet Company Manager, in the role of Co-production Project Manager. Lakey believes we’ll be seeing more co-productions in the future.

Lakey shares that coordinating three companies with diverse schedules and needs complicates decision-making with everything from creative to contracts to budget, but she notes that this structure has significant benefits like sharing financial burdens, creating opportunities for deeper collaboration, fostering trust within the dance community, and building resilience in the art form—especially when it comes to creating new works.

Lakey first met Dani Rowe and her creative team in 2023 at PNB, where Dani created the ballet *The Window*. “Her soulful storytelling through dance really struck a chord with me,” said Lakey. “When I heard Dani was creating her first full-length ballet with the same team, I couldn't resist the opportunity to join.”

As Oregon Ballet Theatre’s first co-production in its 35-year history, *Marilyn* has been thoughtfully crafted to travel light, making it accessible for other ballet companies anywhere in the world to feature.

Sets and costumes have been built in Oregon and have included OBT’s production team and local artists, including OBT’s Costume Shop and fashion designer [Adam Arnold](#).

In the world of dance where partnering is second nature, collaborating with like-minded arts groups to create new work makes both fiscal and artistic sense. And in a true full-circle moment, Oregon Ballet Theatre’s *Marilyn* is generously commissioned by Jordan Schnitzer and the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer CARE Foundation.

A Welcome Addition to Portland’s Vibrant Creative Community

Rowe has just rounded the corner of her second year at OBT. During that time, she’s attracted artists from around the globe to Portland. Notable accomplishments include:

- The American premiere of Loughlan Prior’s *Hansel and Gretel*, which Pointe Magazine dubbed one of the 12 Stand Out Performances of 2024

- A new adaptation of *Giselle* from Tiit Helimets and Dani Rowe after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot
- An upcoming world premiere from French choreographer Nicolas Blanc, which will debut in June at *The OBT Collection*

In addition to attracting international talent, Rowe launched *OBT by Design*, an annual choreographic event in which OBT company artists create new works on OBT's second company, OBT2.

PERFORMANCES AND TICKETS

Show Run: April 4 - 13, 2025

Performance Location: Newmark Theatre 1111 SW Broadway, Portland, OR 97205

Tickets start at \$32 and can be purchased at obt.org

Performance Dates and Times:

Friday, April 4 – 7:30 pm

Saturday April 5 – 2:00 pm

Saturday, April 5 – 7:30 pm

Sunday, April 6 – 2:00 pm

Thursday, April 10 – 7:30 pm

Friday, April 11 – 7:30 pm

Saturday, April 12 – 2:00 pm

Saturday, April 12 – 7:30 pm

Sunday, April 13 – 2:00 pm

Groups of 10 or more save 25% with OBT's Group Sale Discount by calling the OBT Box Office at 503- 222-5538, Monday through Friday between 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM.

MEDIA ASSETS

Marilyn Trailer – Vertical

[YouTube Link for Sharing Publicly](#)

[Link to Download Video File](#)

Marilyn Trailer – Horizontal

[YouTube Link for Sharing Publicly](#)

[Link to Download Video File](#)

Marilyn Visual Asset Folder

Please note: The file names contain the relevant caption information.

ABOUT OBT

Celebrating our 35th anniversary with our 2024-25 Season, OBT is the largest professional dance company in Oregon, employing over 300 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, including our own Artistic Director, Dani Rowe. Our mission is dedicated to the vitality of, and access to, world-class ballet performance and training in our region.

In addition to our 5-show main stage season, we introduce students to ballet and the importance of lifelong movement through our education and community engagement programs, and we train dancers from three years old to 80 years old through the professional and recreational classes at the Oregon Ballet Theatre School. Many of our students go on to successful professional careers at companies including the Joffrey, the Dutch National Ballet, and within our own organization.

ABOUT MARILYN MONROE

Marilyn Monroe is one of the most influential pop culture icons of all time. A true trailblazer, Monroe forged her own path, embracing her individuality and pursuing her passions in an era when paths for women were few. She appeared in 29 films over the course of her career, became a Golden Globe winner for *Some Like It Hot*, and continued to set a new standard for women in film. As part of her quest for control, she launched her own production company, Marilyn Monroe Productions, affording her control over her image, while pushing back on the Hollywood system to ensure her voice and others were heard. Her pioneering spirit, independence and confidence, along with her incomparable star power, continue to inspire modern generations and transcend cultures and backgrounds. Partnerships with both luxury and mass-consumer brands, in addition to an extensive merchandising program, reinforce her status as a global icon.