

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

TALKING POINTE



SUMMER 2023

The Australian Ballet acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



Cover: Principal Artist Amber Scott
Above: Artists of The Australian Ballet
Photos Kate Longley

Welcome from the Philanthropy Director

Kenneth Watkins AM



“With you, we can.”

In November of this year, I celebrated a very significant personal and professional milestone: 30 years with The Australian Ballet, and, let me tell you, what a privilege that is!

Naturally, this anniversary has given me cause to reflect, not least because it has coincided with the culmination of the company's 60th year.

When I joined the company in 1993, it was a very different place. Philanthropy took the form of The Australian Ballet Club which morphed into a patrons program in 1994, similar to the offering we know today. At that stage, our philanthropic growth had plateaued somewhat, but over the ensuing years we really started to move. We were very fortunate to feel the support of key leaders within the company, whose vision and belief in philanthropy propelled us on an exciting path forward.

In the years that have followed, with the unwavering support of a succession of fantastic teams, we have established an ongoing flow of untied funds through Annual Giving; amassed reserves to future-proof the company through an invigorated Planned Giving program; created endowment funds to support our artists in their dancing careers and as they transition into their working life beyond the stage; and raised essential funds to enable our touring ambitions internationally and throughout Australia.

We also have our philanthropic community to thank for some of the company's most spectacular creations in recent years. *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Spartacus*, our Storytime children's ballets and, most recently, *Don Quixote*, *Jewels* and *Swan Lake* have all been made possible by the generosity of our nearest and dearest, including Lady Potter AC CMRI and The David Hallberg Fund.

Of course, by the time you read this issue, *Swan Lake* will have emerged for its final season in Sydney and – wow! – what an outstanding example it is of philanthropy in action.

Swan Lake has been a creative endeavour unlike anything The Australian Ballet has done before. Uniting the entire company, from our subscribers to ticket buyers, donors and dancers, it has been a magical experience.

As I reflect on the journey I've shared with the company so far, what I find most touching is the growth of the community who stand beside us today. In any one year, around 4,000 individuals contribute towards the sustainability of the company we hold so dear. This means there are 4,000 people showing us that they love what we're doing and whose generosity gives us the ability to say, “we can” and to plan for the future with confidence. That strikes a really powerful chord.

Casting my attention to the future and to the aspirations of the company as we implement our new strategic plan, there is a huge amount to look forward to. Creating innovative work with exciting new choreographic voices; dancing in new theatres and establishing new partnerships through our seasons at the Regent Theatre and in prominent locations around the world and continuing to invest in the evolution of our company and adored art form.

If my three decades with The Australian Ballet have taught me anything, it's that with the heartfelt warmth and generosity of our supporters, we can overcome our greatest challenges and realise our boldest ambitions.

I hope you will stay on this journey with us and see where this path continues to lead.

Kenneth Watkins AM
Philanthropy Director

Vale Libby Christie AM

Remembering a guiding light of The Australian Ballet

Shockwaves reverberated around the Ballet family and performing arts community in October, when we received the news that Libby Christie, who served as our Executive Director for almost a decade, passed away suddenly while she was holidaying in Italy with her beloved husband, Peter.

In the days and weeks that followed, tributes poured in from across the Australian and international arts community, remembering Libby as an exemplary professional and transformational leader. A mentor to many, admired for her authenticity, tenacity, energy and resilience. A galvaniser and advocate, whose passionate support of the arts and artists brought about meaningful change in a collaborative and compassionate way, and inspired others to follow in her footsteps.

Indeed, many of you will have had the pleasure of getting to know Libby personally, sharing in her passion for ballet, music and the arts at one of the many patron events she attended during her time at the helm of the company she loved so much.

Reflecting on Libby's impact, Kenneth Watkins Philanthropy Director shares, "Libby's brave, compassionate and inspiring leadership steered us all through the darkest days of the pandemic. Her strength, pragmatism and ability to make tough decisions while keeping the interests of the company and art form at heart, kept us going. Libby held us all together and guided us towards a future where The Australian Ballet can continue to bring joy to so many."

All of us here at The Australian Ballet have been deeply saddened by Libby's death and will cherish the legacy she leaves from her tenure in one of the most complex and demanding jobs in the arts industry.

Vale Libby. The thread of your leadership will forever be woven through the tapestry of our company's rich and continuing history.

Libby Christie AM
Photo Simon Eeles



Company news

As the curtain comes down on another spectacular year of ballet, we celebrate some of the talented people in our midst who are taking their final bows, moving on to make new waves, or receiving recognition for their outstanding contribution to the company.



Principal Artist Amber Scott
Photo Kate Longley

A swan song

After a glittering 22-year career with The Australian Ballet, Principal Artist Amber Scott took her final curtain call on 30 September. Visiting the lake one last time in the coveted role of Odette/Odile, Amber's performance in *Swan Lake* highlights how it is one of the greatest works ever created for a ballerina.

Amber has spent most of her life gracefully immersed in The Australian Ballet. In 1994, aged eleven, she moved to Melbourne with her family to enrol in The Australian Ballet School, before joining The Australian Ballet in 2001 under the directorship of Ross Stretton.

Amber's exemplary career saw her shine onstage in every leading role in the major classical repertoire, with highlights including *Giselle*, *Manon*, *Onegin* and Graeme Murphy's *Swan Lake*. She also relished the opportunity to work with Stephen Page and Bangarra Dance Theatre on *Waramuk – in the dark night* and *Rites*, which opened her eyes to another way of moving.

Artistic Director David Hallberg, a long-time friend and frequent partner of Amber's, affectionately reflects on the impact her presence has had, "When dancing with Amber there was equal laughter and open ideas of interpretation. Her smile and ease have brought joy to all of our lives. Her warmth and soft sensitivity is as genuine off stage as it is on. Amber is a shining example of the grace, lyricism, and technical prowess this institution develops and nurtures. We wholeheartedly congratulate Amber on her exemplary career and contribution to the company."

The Queen of (our) Hearts

Also hanging up her pointe shoes at the conclusion of Season 2023 is Principal Artist Amy Harris who brought her spectacular 22-year career with the company to a powerful close with her impassioned performance as Marguerite in *Marguerite and Armand*.

An exceptional artist who earned her place in Marilyn Rowe's first intake at The Australian Ballet School and joined The Australian Ballet alongside Adam Bull as David McAllister stepped into the role of Artistic Director, Amy has danced under the leadership of some of the best-respected names in ballet and delighted audiences with her captivating performances.

Amy's extensive career encompassed highlights across the classical and contemporary canon. From *Infra*, *In the Upper Room* and *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* to the Principal roles in *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Coppélia*, *The Merry Widow*, not forgetting her star turn as the Queen of Hearts in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*®.

As David Hallberg recounts, "Amy's work will leave an indelible mark on stages across the country," but the lasting impact of her presence and contribution to the company will also be felt beyond the stage. "As well as the gift of her performances, Amy has been idolised by young dancers for many years. She has been a respected mentor and much-loved friend, imparting her knowledge, wisdom and warmth to new dancers joining the company."



Principal Artist Amy Harris and Nathan Brook
Photo Daniel Boud

A step change

Jacqueline Clark, a dedicated and deeply respected soloist whose commitment to the art form is enduring, has stepped away from the stage and into the studio in a new role within The Australian Ballet.

Taking on a new, short-term position as assistant Corps de Ballet Repetiteur, Jacqueline's wisdom and expertise will now be channelled in a different way as she works with Corps de Ballet Repetiteur Laura Day. Jacqueline will assist the Artistic team by guiding the Corps de Ballet through their rehearsals for *Swan Lake*, *The Dream / Marguerite and Armand* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*®.



Telstra Rising Star Award winner Lilla Harvey
Photo Lisa Tomasetti

Rising stars

On stage, after the final performance of George Balanchine's *Jewels* at the Sydney Opera House in May, the winners of the 20th annual 2023 Telstra Ballet Dancer Awards were announced.

In front of friends, family and supporters, Corps de Ballet Dancer Lilla Harvey was bestowed the prestigious honour of the Telstra Rising Star Award. Joining Lilla centre-stage, Soloist Isobelle Dashwood was awarded the Telstra People's Choice Award. Both dancers were met with rousing applause in recognition of their extraordinary talent, and dedication to the art form.

Artistic Director David Hallberg, congratulated Lilla and Isobelle on their wins. "We see such bright futures in these two dancers. Lilla and Isobelle are so deserving of this recognition as they have both dedicated so much hard work and time to reaching their goals and

achieving their aspirations. Their pursuit of strength and determination to excel has been exemplary in the past year and I'm delighted to see them taking a bow to relish in their achievements."

Corps de Ballet Dancer Adam Elmes and Coryphées Riley Lapham and Katherine Sonnekus were nominated alongside Lilla and Isobelle as finalists in the 2023 awards. The five dancers were nominated by the company's Artistic team, dancers and previous winners for their contributions to the company throughout the year. The winners were chosen by a panel of judges from The Australian Ballet and Telstra, as well as the general public via online voting.

The awards are a key component of our 39-year partnership with Telstra and have become widely regarded as the most prestigious prize in Australian ballet today.



David Hallberg and Kenneth Watkins AM
Photo Pierre Toussaint

A major milestone

Kenneth Watkins, The Australian Ballet's Philanthropy Director, recently celebrated his 30th anniversary with the company.

Kenneth joined The Australian Ballet in 1993 as Corporate Partnerships Manager, before progressing to Director of Development in 1997, where his responsibility expanded to include philanthropy as well as sponsorship. In time, Kenneth's role has narrowed to focus purely on philanthropy and private fundraising.

In a career that has spanned three decades and four artistic directors, Kenneth has immeasurably contributed to the vision, values and strategic objectives of the company. Working tirelessly to develop the next generation of fundraisers within the company, increase the profile of the organisation and fundraising to ensure that The Australian Ballet has the resources to be one of the pre-eminent ballet companies in the world.

His sector-wide mentorship and commitment to securing the sustainability of The Australian Ballet through relationship building as well as establishing a strong financial base through philanthropy contributed to Kenneth's inclusion in the 2021 Australia Day Honours List. He was recognised for significant service to the performing arts, particularly to ballet, and appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM).

Commenting on the effect of Kenneth's commitment, Executive Director, Lissa Twomey says, "Every day Kenneth wakes up and asks himself, 'What can I do today to make The Australian Ballet better?' He lives for The Ballet, he is The Ballet and we're indebted to the contribution he has made to the company's financial stability."

Kenneth's career so far has been fuelled by his devotion to the performing arts and shaped by the premise of persistence, dedication and determination, which he believes are the hallmarks of successful fundraising. Congratulations Kenneth!

The image shows the interior of the Regent Theatre, a grand and ornate space. The ceiling is a large, circular dome with intricate gold-colored carvings and a central chandelier. The walls are also highly decorated with gold leaf and classical motifs. The seating is arranged in a semi-circular pattern, with rows of dark leather seats. The stage is visible in the background, featuring a red curtain and a large, ornate structure. The overall atmosphere is one of luxury and historical grandeur.

Home is where *the art is*

Opening the doors to the Regent Theatre



A new chapter is upon us. In March 2024, at the conclusion of the Melbourne season of Christopher Wheeldon's, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*®, the State Theatre at Arts Centre Melbourne – our beloved Melbourne home venue of 40 years – will temporarily close for major upgrades and refurbishments.

Much like when an interim head of state is appointed if a monarch is unable to lead, the eponymously named Regent Theatre has been chosen to be our new performance home, while Arts Centre Melbourne is out of action for the next three years.

The historic Regent Theatre has been an artistic landmark in Melbourne since 1929. A sumptuous and ornate former picture palace located in the heart of Collins Street, the Regent was originally designed by Cedric Ballantyne, taking inspiration from Spanish Gothic and French Renaissance styles.

In recent years, the award-winning venue has been extensively renovated to improve sight lines by re-raking the stalls, reconfiguring seats and extending the dress circle to accommodate international-standard live theatre.

Excitingly, when the time comes to return to Arts Centre Melbourne in 2027, we will all enjoy the benefits of Melbourne's creative precinct transformation.

The State Theatre will be enhanced with new accessible seating and wheelchair positions, providing the opportunity for more people to enjoy live performance in the venue. Meanwhile, producing seasons will be easier than ever with transformed back-of-house amenities spanning the stage door, loading dock and rehearsal spaces. Additionally, with two new food and beverage outlets opening onto the Melbourne Arts Precinct's expansive new 18,000 square metre urban garden, we'll have even more options for pre and post-show dining.

Until then, we look forward to getting better acquainted with our new 'home away from home' that presents opportunities to create exciting new repertoire, and for the company to engage in different ways with our wonderful community, both on and off the stage.

We're here to help!

If you attend our performances in Melbourne, we understand that may need some additional assistance as you navigate the transition from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*®, our final season at the State Theatre, to our first seasons at the Regent Theatre from September.

Rest assured our dedicated Customer Experience team are available to support you during this time.

Email us: tickets@australianballet.com.au

Call us: 1300 369 741 (Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm, excluding Victorian Public Holidays)



“We’re only just getting started.”

David Hallberg on moulding
The Australian Ballet to his vision

As The Australian Ballet's 60th anniversary season builds to its thrilling climax, Artistic Director David Hallberg shares his personal sentiments on the season so far, the evolving shape of the company and his ambitious aspirations for the year ahead.

Our 60th anniversary season has been an exciting ride so far. Personally, it's been really satisfying to see the seeds that were sown when I started in this role come to fruition.

Launching the season in September last year, at The Australian Ballet's Production Centre in Altona, surrounded by the fabulous sets and costumes from six decades of the company's history, as well as our friends and supporters was a fantastic kick-off. It set the tone beautifully for the season ahead.

First up was *Don Quixote*, which was received as well as I could have hoped. I was very proud with how successfully we took the film to the stage, while also creating a fresh aesthetic for the ballet. Having Sylvie [Guillem] at the Ballet Centre too, to coach the dancers in such a personable and purposeful way was invaluable and added greatly to our presence on stage.

Identity was a visual, musical and choreographic feat. Exactly what's happening in Australian art right now and precisely what we needed at that moment in time too.

To complement *Identity*, we added *Jewels*: a gem of any repertoire in any company. Our dancers absolutely rose to the occasion and to the stylistic nuances the choreography demands. We built that production from the ground up and I am so proud of the costume department for how exquisitely they produced the costumes for *Jewels*. The meticulous approach the team took to reconstruct these very well-known costumes so beautifully took my breath away.

And, then came *Swan Lake*. When I was considering which work should bring our 60th year to a close, I instinctively felt like there was no choice but *Swan Lake*, and no production other than Anne Woolliams'. Delving into The Australian Ballet's rich archive and cultural memory through the creative process, while gently reshaping this beloved ballet to suit the company of today, was a very special experience. As was being joined in the studio by legendary dancers from those early seasons, including Anne's original Odette from 1977, Marilyn Rowe. Hearing their stories and anecdotes from working with Anne was a true privilege and deeply enriching for everyone in their presence. While I don't think I've ever

been as nervous as I was in the lead up to the opening night in Melbourne, I need not have been. The entire company across stages, workshops, orchestra pits and offices came together to deliver an exceptional production of real sophistication and depth.

At the time of writing this, we still have three seasons of *Swan Lake* to dance, as well as *The Dream / Marguerite and Armand* to share with audiences in Sydney, which is thrilling because I think we're only just beginning to realise what we're capable of.

We were already a prodigious company – I was in love with The Australian Ballet when David McAllister was Artistic Director – but this year we've been showing even more of our true selves. More of our talent and more of our vision, which is our responsibility as a major arts company. To think that we're only just getting started...

As I cast my mind ahead to Season 2024, I'm excited for the artists and audiences to experience the program we have in store. For me, repertoire curation is always strategic and it's about finding a balance. A balance for the dancers' nourishment and a balance for the audiences' nourishment.

For example, we have *Carmen*, which is gritty and contemporary, we have *Études*, which is technically demanding and has been in our repertoire for some time but will look so fresh in 2024. In contrast, we have the magic of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*®, a ballet with something for everyone and we finish the year in Sydney with *The Nutcracker* – one of my favourite works to watch and to dance.

This is the ultimate balancing act. It's about pushing in places – testing out what audiences' tastes are – but on the other hand, it's about giving people the beauty of what they love: the beauty of ballet.

All of this, and the freedom to realise my artistic dreams, wouldn't be possible without the efforts of our entire organisation and the backing of our community, who support my vision and empower me... us.

I'm so appreciative of everyone in our circle. Because of this camaraderie and solidarity, The Australian Ballet is in a position to create, raise the bar, realise a vision, achieve our ambitions, and – more importantly – exceed our potential.



Bold and Brave

David Hallberg's Season 2024
is pulsating with innovation,
imagination and ambition

Season 2024 presents and plays to a company that is breaking new ground and soaring to new heights. Curated with wisdom and integrity, it is fuelled by Artistic Director David Hallberg's instinct for evolution and yet has a deep reverence for the origins of the art form our community loves so much.

David's commitment to collaboration, connection and creativity has been a catalyst for this season of dance, and audiences can look forward to a smorgasbord of works that will continue to bring out the best of the artists and create fulfilling, shared experiences.

With a temporary new performance venue in Melbourne, while the city's Arts Precinct Transformation moves into its next phase and the State Theatre closes for renovation, David has tailor-made Season 2024 for the stages of the Regent Theatre and Sydney Opera House. Designing the program to shine within the parameters of both venues, maintain the extraordinary standard of performance expected from The Australian Ballet wherever we are performing and to appeal to new audiences.

Discover more about David Hallberg's vision for 2024 and the exciting artistic partnerships that reinforce his drive to give a platform for emerging Australian and established global talent.

“I want the company to present a diverse array of choreographic voices, whether they're Australian or not. I'm excited to bring the best, the freshest and the most individual creative minds to create original art with us in 2024.”

Artistic Director, David Hallberg

Samara Merrick and Maxim Zenin, *Circle Electric*
Photo Peter Foster



Jill Ogai
Photo Simon Eeles

Johan Inger

Renowned Swedish choreographer, Johan Inger, danced with Nederlands Dans Theater and has created works for leading companies all over Europe. In 2022, The Australian Ballet premiered Johan's comic, romantic dance theatre piece, *I New Then*, in DanceX – a three-part festival showcasing the depth, range and diversity of the nation's dance community. The work was so well received by audiences, that the company presented *I New Then* again at the Royal Opera House, as a highlight of the 2023 60th Anniversary Celebration in London.

Johan's influence will return to our 2024 season in his award-winning production of *Carmen*. An exhilarating work thrusting Georges Bizet's 19th-century opera into the modern world with a breathtaking display of athleticism and passion.

“One of the elements of my role I get the most satisfaction from, is giving Australian audiences a taste of choreographers they may have not seen before. We're in a landscape that isn't over-saturated with guest companies so, as Australia's national ballet company, I see it as our responsibility to introduce audiences to new and established choreographers, like Crystal Pite, like Paul Lightfoot, like Sol León – and like Johan Inger.

“The experience of working with Johan on *I New Then* was a really nourishing one for the dancers – they loved working with him, and it took them in new directions. *Carmen* is a well-known title, and there are many versions in the world, but we don't really have one to call our own. Johan's version is a particularly interesting work and I'm excited to see the dancers tackle one of the most ambitious contemporary productions we've programmed to date.”



Artists of The Australian Ballet, *Circle Electric*
Photo Peter Foster

Stephanie Lake

Multi-award-winning contemporary choreographer, Stephanie Lake has been captivating audiences worldwide with her unique style and artistic vision throughout her 20-year performance career. After wrapping up a tour of her works *Manifesto* and *Colossus* with Stephanie Lake Company, she returned to her current home of Melbourne to join The Australian Ballet and realise a world-premiere of her newest creation, *Circle Electric*, for the company's 2023 tour of Australia.

In 2024, Stephanie will join The Australian Ballet as Resident Choreographer and evolve *Circle Electric* into her first full-length commission for us using the full force of the company, to appear alongside *Études* in an entrancing double bill of classical and contemporary works.

“Stephanie Lake is one of the most energetic voices in ensemble contemporary dance today. She has created for Queensland Ballet and Sydney Dance Theatre, and she has toured the globe with her company. Now, it’s our turn and we couldn’t be more excited.

“Stephanie’s amazing ensemble works are so visually arresting. Her partnership with frequent musical collaborator, composer Robin Fox, brings movement and music together on another level that radiates a palpable energy from the stage.

“We have the great fortune to be able to offer Stephanie a platform and the resources to create her biggest commission yet with her largest cast to date. *Circle Electric* was received phenomenally well on our Australian tour this year, and I just know audiences will eat it up when we present the full work in 2024.”

Christopher Wheeldon

British-born Director and Choreographer Christopher Wheeldon's talent knows no bounds. His unique choreography makes him one of the most sought-after and highly regarded choreographers of his generation, who has created and staged productions for many of the world's major ballet companies. The Australian Ballet last collaborated with Christopher on his multi-award-winning musical, *An American in Paris* and will be taking audiences back down the rabbit hole with his extravagant *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*® in early 2024.

Known for his innovative, rich and awe-inspiring productions, Christopher will return to the company later in Season 2024 with the world premiere of *Oscar*®, generously supported by Lady Potter AC CMRI and The David Hallberg Fund. Reuniting with co-collaborators Composer Joby Talbot and Set and Costume Designer Jean-Marc Puissant, the full-length production, commissioned exclusively for The Australian Ballet, will tell the fascinating story of history's famous humourist, Oscar Wilde.

"I just love working with Christopher and it's a big deal that he's coming to Australia to create a work solely for us. *Oscar*® will be a major creation by a major talent, but Christopher also creates gorgeous art, so it'll be visually and choreographically striking.

"Christopher's a seasoned creative and very demanding in the studio. Specific in the best way possible. He knows exactly what he wants and will get down to the specificity of an individual arm movement or foot positioning to achieve his vision. The nuance of his experience creates an environment that allows the artists in the room to flourish in their own way.

"The huge array of repertoire Christopher has created for New York City Ballet, The Royal Ballet and The Australian Ballet, is testament to the clarity of his vision. I'm really looking forward to seeing how Wilde's wit and flamboyance comes to life on the stage under his creative guidance."

Christopher Wheeldon and Jade Wood
Photo Lynette Wills



Flying high on the *world stage*

Celebrating the return
of the international tour

2023 has been a remarkable year for The Australian Ballet in many wonderful ways, but the company's 60th anniversary tour to London will likely become the highlight etched on the hearts of the artists and touring party members who were fortunate to be there.



International tours are always a significant moment for the company, but there was something extra meaningful about our most recent tour to London. It celebrated 60 years of The Australian Ballet and of our special relationship with the UK, heralded our return to Covent Garden's iconic Royal Opera House stage for the first time in 35 years and marked our first international tour since 2019.

Speaking on the significance of the London Tour, David explains, "London was a perfect place to celebrate our 60th anniversary. Not least because of our shared history with The Royal Ballet and Royal Opera House, going back to when Dame Ninette de Valois [Founder of The Royal Ballet] suggested Dame Peggy van Praagh support the development of what we now know and love as The Australian Ballet. It was absolutely the right destination for our celebration and it created such a buzz within the company, which was really beautiful."

The London 2023 Tour also symbolised the beginning of an exciting new chapter for The Australian Ballet, which had so far been out of reach during the pandemic. Taking to the Royal Opera House stage to address the audience on opening night, Artistic Director David Hallberg renewed his ambition to proudly take the very best of Australian dance, artistry and creativity to the world.

Gloriously, our dancers rose to the occasion, performing to a full auditorium at each of the six performances – five of George Balanchine's *Jewels* and a mixed bill performance that reflected our extensive repertoire honed over the last 60 years – much to the delight of audiences, who responded with triumphant applause as well as standing ovations at the conclusion of shows.

Of course, to self-present a sold-out tour of this scale 17,000km away is only possible with the support of many. In this case, a global network of individuals who enabled this landmark tour. As Philanthropy Director, Kenneth Watkins expresses, "Our recent 60th anniversary London Tour, was a monumental moment for us and a career highlight for so many in the company. None of this would have been possible without our community's belief in us. We are indebted to everyone who generously supported us, so that we could proudly represent our country on one of the world's greatest stages. It was an absolute honour to be dancing for UK audiences on the prestigious stage of the Royal Opera House once again, and we look forward to the privilege of many more tours to come."

Principal Artist Dimity Azoury and Jarryd Madden
Photo Tristram Kenton

Reflections from the road

It's undeniable that the London Tour has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience for dancers across the company, with many recognising the opportunity as a 'bucket list moment'.

We caught up with Senior Artists and Philanthropy Ambassadors Jill Ogai and Jarryd Madden, Soloist Drew Hedditch and Corps de Ballet Artist Annabelle Watt – two sensational dancers who will take over the Philanthropy Ambassadors mantle in 2024 – to reflect on the significance of this international tour, and what it meant to them.

You're just back from London – the company's first international tour since 2019 and your first time performing at the Royal Opera House. What did that experience mean to you?

Jarryd: There's such a heightened expectation when you're delivering an international tour – even more so when you're in London, at the centre of the dance world and at the home of one of the biggest, and best, ballet companies in the world.

Jill: It was just so much fun dancing on that stage. Since I was four or five years old, I was obsessed with Darcey Bussell, and she danced at Covent Garden. I have always wondered if I would ever dance there myself. So to actually be there, standing on the stage, was amazing. I kept thinking, "This is what I do!"

Drew: Walking through Stage Door and being on the inside of such a historic institution was incredible. Then, to walk out onto the stage – with all the company together – what a special moment that was!

Annabelle: This was my first international tour, so I wasn't really sure what to expect, but – wow – it was the most fulfilling work of my career so far. As a child, I had a DVD of The Royal Ballet performing *Jewels* on the Royal Opera House stage, which I used to watch all the time. I actually wrote 'perform at the Royal Opera House' on a bucket list when I was twelve. So, to be performing that ballet on that stage, it was a literal bucket list moment for me.

Annabelle Watt
Photo Brodie James



Did the significance of performing at the Royal Opera House bring any different qualities to your performances?

Jill: It really did. The Royal Opera House is a gorgeous theatre and, what's interesting is, that the seating doesn't go so far back as the Australian theatres we perform in. It goes up high and comes in around to the side of stage. That makes it feel three-dimensional, which is really nice, and in turn makes you dance with more dimension and project more. I think, when you're relaxed enough and enjoying the moment, you're able to really sense that shift.

Annabelle: The weight of being in such an iconic theatre felt amazing, and we knew the gravity of being on that stage. But, weirdly, rather than getting overwhelmed, I felt quite comfortable in the wildly beautiful theatre.

Jarryd: I agree, I was expecting to be daunted by the space but because of the way the stage is designed, with the balconies touching the proscenium arch, it was actually a really warm, intimate environment. Like a nice, big golden hug!

Drew: Coming off the back of our Sydney and Melbourne seasons of *Jewels*, I think we were so ready for the experience that we could really enjoy it together. The feeling we'd get at the end of *Diamonds*, was something else. We're all on stage, in formation, the music is building and the orchestra is sounding incredible, everyone's collective energy is pulling together, and you'd look your partner in the eyes and be thinking, "We did it!" I think we all stood there performing the work and projecting how proud we were of what we were doing.

What went through your minds as you danced on the hallowed Royal Opera House stage?

Jill: It's obviously such a special stage and it's held all these amazing dancers. Standing there, you soak up the proscenium and take in the audience... In that moment, it felt like everything was possible. I just ran out there and ate it up!

Drew: I had quite a surreal moment standing up on stage during the opening night performance, during the final scene of *Emeralds*, when I have quite a lot of time standing centre stage and looking out into the auditorium. At that point, it hit me that so many influential and iconic dancers had stood where I was standing, looked where I was looking and now it was my turn. I realised that I was now a part of history and that really hit me. It was so nice to have that moment to absorb and appreciate the experience.

Drew Hedditch, centre, and Artists of The Australian Ballet
Photo Tristram Kenton



How was it to spend time in The Royal Ballet's residence, home to the famous Ashton and Fonteyn studios...

Drew: We had a lot of Royal Ballet dancers with us in the space, taking class, which was really cool because, even though we might not have met before, we all share the same language: dance.

Annabelle: Yes, I felt like a real fan girl to be sharing class with them – especially Marianela Nuñez, Diamond of all Diamonds – and then going on to perform *Diamonds* at night!

Jill: The whole building's very inspiring, and the studios are stunning: high ceilings and really light and bright. To be taking class alongside The Royal Ballet Principals was really something, and another incredible layer to the whole extraordinary experience. To be surrounded by these amazing dancers, was just as inspiring as dancing on the stage itself.

Jarryd: That was fun! Walking into the studios you've seen in so many different things over the years – filmed for World Ballet Day or featured on dancers' Instagram feeds – was really cool. I mean, it's just a room, but what a room to find yourself in. And to share your space with the likes of Sarah Lamb, Matthew Ball and Marianela was just brilliant.

Was there anyone special supporting you from the audience?

Annabelle: I had my whole family over there, which was wonderful. One of my brothers had never seen me dance professionally, so the Royal Opera House was quite the introduction. They saw *Jewels* and the Gala and absolutely loved it.

Drew: What struck me most, were the patrons who had helped to fund the tour and also made the trip to London to be there with us. To be greeted by the people who have supported us through our careers and to hear them cheering for us in the UK, was something else. They were so proud and excited.

Jarryd: Yes, it was really lovely to see so many familiar faces from our performances here over in London. Our patrons really are the cheer squad of the company and it meant so much to have that support and encouragement while we were away.



Principal Artist Chengwu Guo and Jill Ogai rehearsing at The Royal Ballet studios
Photo Brodie James

Any other notable highlights?

Jill: One thing I recall is the atmosphere at the Gala performance on our final night. There were so many people in the wings watching each other. And everyone was dancing so well and with so much soul, it was amazing to watch. We're often so busy that we don't get to watch and comprehend how diverse and versatile the company is. But there, on that night, we were all filled with pride and joy, clapping and cheering each other on as they performed with such heart. It was really special.

Jarryd: It reminded me of my old competition days. There was such a sense of community and celebration, and everyone was cheering each other along from backstage. To hear the audience loving it too, was the icing on the cake!

Drew: It was crazy. I don't know how we managed to get that collective feeling, but I think it was a combination of us knowing it was the end of the tour and being really proud of what we'd accomplished. I know I had a moment where I realised that this was all our work that we were presenting, and our identity we were sharing with the audience, so let's show them who we are – how diverse and versatile we are – and give them an amazing show.

Annabelle: It's a real credit to David's leadership and what he's done for the company, to take us to the Royal Opera House, with *Jewels* – it's gutsy! But the trust he instilled in us to do that and to perform to such a high standard, really gave us the belief we could do it. And so we did!

Taking flight

The reimagination of *Swan Lake*

It began as a passing conversation between two Davids: McAllister and Hallberg. Successive artistic directors in conversation, exchanging insights and inspiration. David McAllister lighting a spark in David Hallberg's mind with his reference to the institutional, cultural and creative significance of Anne Woolliams' iconic staging of the timeless classic, *Swan Lake*.

From that moment on, the crowning jewel of The Australian Ballet's diamond anniversary season was chosen.

Hundreds of ballet lovers – led by the visionary Lachlan and Sarah Murdoch Foundation and James & Diana Ramsay Foundation – kick-started the creative journey with their philanthropy. Their immediate and whole-hearted generosity writing the first words of a new chapter in the company's history for future generations to look back on with admiration.

Intent on realising his artistic vision to the highest possible standard, David enlisted the ingenuity and expertise of a world-leading creative team. Set Designer Daniel Ostling and Costume Designer Mara Blumenfeld are the dynamic duo behind the strikingly and breathtakingly realistic designs adorning the dancers and stage. While the talents of Lighting Designer T.J. Gerckens accentuate the details and complete the picture.

On stage, dancers across every rank of the company are shining even brighter, thanks to the expert instruction of two very special Guest Coaches, Sylvie Guillem and Marilyn Rowe, who added an extra special *je ne sais quoi* to rehearsals. Sylvie, one of history's most acclaimed dancers, and Marilyn, who was part of the company when Anne Woolliams created *Swan Lake* and danced Odette in both the 1977 season as well as the 21st anniversary broadcast, have brought incomparable experience and knowledge to the studio. The generosity of their guidance has established the important link between the artists today and those who have danced the timeless steps before them.

Now, more than two years later, David Hallberg's reimaging of *Swan Lake* is bringing The Australian Ballet's 60th anniversary celebrations to a sensational crescendo and setting the benchmark for the company's next decade of dance.

As the extraordinary season draws to a close, we're delighted to share this behind-the-scenes photo series with you, which illuminates the stunning production details enabled by philanthropy.

Thank you to everyone who came on this journey with us. Your generosity is bringing so much joy to our community and your legacy will live on – just as the production will – for generations to come.



Lead and Production
Partner



Leadership
Gifts

Lachlan and
Sarah Murdoch
Foundation 





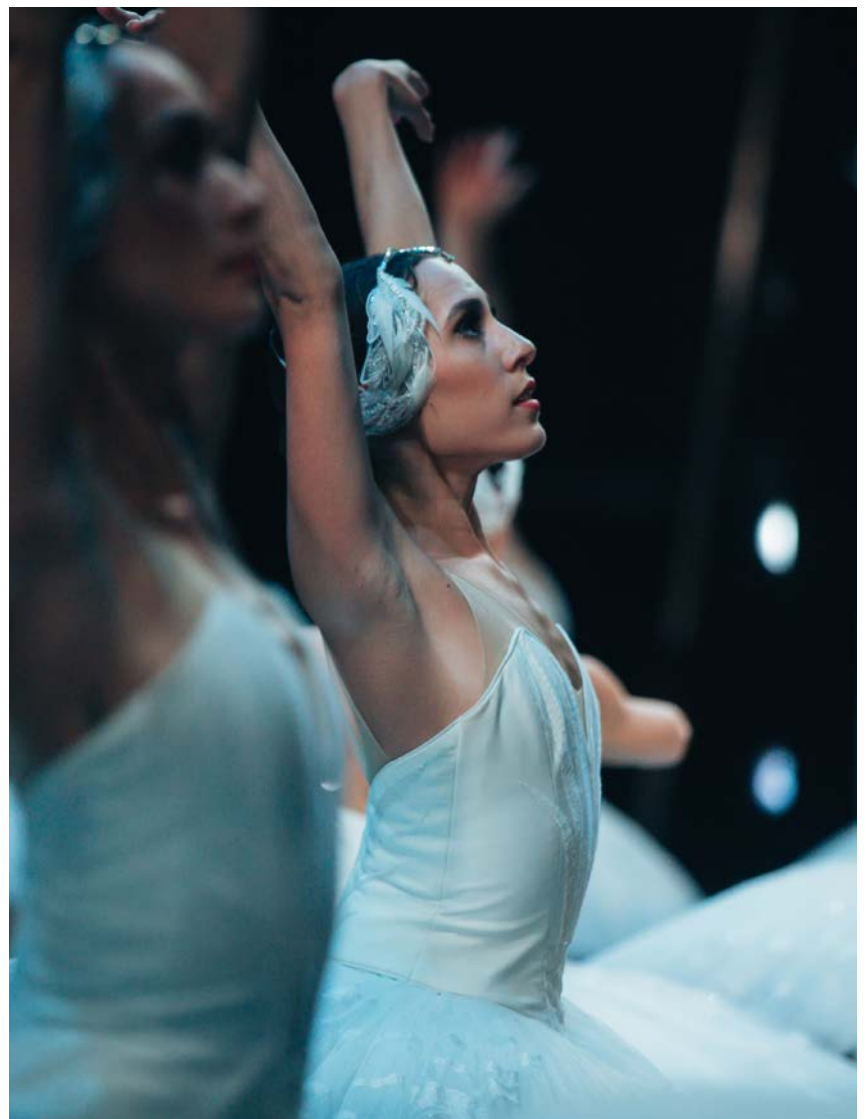




Principal Artist Ako Kondo and Jarryd Madden
Photo Brodie James



Artists of The Australian Ballet
Photo Kate Longley



Evie Ferris
Photo Kate Longley



Optimising peak performance

A dynamic new study with La Trobe University

Swan Lake is well-loved and recognised for being one of the most breathtaking and challenging works a ballet dancer can perform. In particular, the technically and artistically demanding dual role of Odette/Odile, which is often considered the pinnacle of dramatic and technical prowess.

The Australian Ballet's Artistic Research team continues to lead the way, investigating clinically relevant issues that will improve our dancers' health and wellbeing. In partnership with our Research Partner, La Trobe University, a pioneering new study has been launched to uncover what happens to the tendons around a dancer's ankle during rehearsals for and performances of *Swan Lake's* iconic choreography.

Bruna Tessarin, a physiotherapist in the final year of her PhD with a background in dance and a passion for ballet, has joined us from Brazil to complete her study within the La Trobe University and The Australian Ballet's world-renowned Artistic Health team.

Bruna's lived experience as a dancer and academic expertise gives her the unique perspective to understand the physical commitment it takes for a dancer to perform at their peak for a full season and she is keen to discover how dancers' bodies respond to the unique loads of classical ballet.

Following the company as it tours around Australia throughout the entire *Swan Lake* season, Brunna and La Trobe University will investigate the dancers' Achilles tendon health using ultrasound scanning and novel clinical testing procedures, to deepen the understanding of how the Achilles tendon responds to the demands of rehearsals and performances.

In time, the research team hopes to uncover insights that will build knowledge about injury prevention and rehabilitation to benefit not only the ballet community, but also clinicians and athletes in other sports.



Sylvie Guillem
Photo Pierre Toussaint

STAR POWER

The stellar impact of Sylvie Guillem CBE

Sylvie Guillem is widely regarded as one of the greatest dancers of our time. A protégé of Rudolf Nureyev who made her the youngest ever Etoile at the Paris Opera Ballet, Sylvie's most notable performances have included the lead roles in *Giselle* as well as Nureyev's staging of *Swan Lake* and *Don Quixote*.

You can imagine the buzz at The Primrose Potter Australian Ballet Centre when it was announced that Sylvie, who has famously shied away from the limelight since retiring from the stage at the stroke of midnight on 1 January 2016, was going to bring her understated and wholly authentic approach to Australian shores and join the company as Guest Coach, Principal Roles for *Don Quixote* and *Swan Lake*.

Over the course of her visits, Sylvie generously bestowed her deep knowledge of Nureyev's work and unique take on artistic interpretation with our artists as they prepared to bring the two heavyweights of the classical canon to audiences for the company's 60th anniversary season.

Sylvie and David

When David Hallberg joined The Australian Ballet – a world-renowned and international artist in his own right – he conveyed his aspirations to take the dancers and audiences on a global voyage of artistic exploration and expansion.

This ambition centred on taking the company farther afield and – crucially – bringing world-class coaches and teachers to our shores, to empower the dancers to realise even greater technical and artistic horizons.

Emerging from the shadows of the global pandemic that once limited international travel so significantly, welcoming Sylvie Guillem to The Australian Ballet has been a symbolic moment; a visit signifying a new act for the company and a renewed momentum behind David's artistic vision.



“Sylvie Guillem is the absolute pinnacle. The highest echelon of artist and the quality of coach I have long aspired to have within The Australian Ballet. Not because of her name, but because of who she is and because of the qualities she brings that allows artists to truly bloom.”

David Hallberg, Artistic Director

Sylvie and the dancers

Initially engaged to coach the dancers performing Principal roles in *Don Quixote* and *Swan Lake*, the impact of Sylvie's presence, insight and wisdom has rippled across every rank of the dancing company.

Sylvie's technical ability and artistic individuality which once defined her performances on stage, today created a unique, incomparable way of expressing her art form which she generously shared with the dancers of The Australian Ballet.

For Senior Artist Jill Ogai, working with Sylvie was a dream come true. "For me, it was all about Darcey Bussell and Sylvie Guillem when I was growing up. They were everything I wanted to be. So, to meet Sylvie in person and to have the opportunity to work with her in the studio was an incredible moment. And terrifying! I was so nervous at first. My nerves soon subsided though, as I knew I was ready to learn from her. From that point on, I didn't allow myself to be too intimidated and focused on being present, asking questions and really engaging with her to absorb as much of her knowledge as I could."

As Jill explains, Sylvie's manner created a sanctuary for the dancers to get to know the characters they were playing, understand their place in the ballets and discover their own individual interpretations of the roles.

"Sylvie made you feel very comfortable to be risky; to try new things and to play around with the craft. She wasn't caught up on the technical side of things too much. Instead, she asked thought-provoking questions, such as, 'What is the texture of this step?', 'What is the musicality here?' or, 'Why don't you have style in that moment?' Each comment opened the door for you to make you think on a different level, to listen to your own intuition, to clearly communicate your intent, and to dance with renewed confidence."

Sylvie's visits demonstrated her humility as an artist. Her encouraging force and generosity of spirit was felt widely and had echoes of Nureyev's hands-on approach when he was filming the *Don Quixote* movie in 1973. Speaking of her broader influence, Jill expands, "I feel like she affected the whole company. Her presence and attitude to working, her love of ballet, and the conviction she had for nuance were so vibrant. Having a ballerina of Sylvie's calibre – someone who's been that successful and is that glorious – come and show us how important nuances are, changes the way you think about dance. It can't but transform your performance."

Sylvie and the art

The results spoke for themselves. As first-hand accounts from audiences and media have shown, Sylvie's individualised coaching technique has brought out the best of every dancer. And by encouraging the dancers to make intelligent choices that suited their personal performance style, she has gifted them skills that will last a lifetime.

Generously supported by The Bowness Family Foundation Fund for Artistic Development, Sylvie's presence has undoubtedly empowered David Hallberg and the dancers of The Australian Ballet to achieve elevated standards and greater heights in this landmark year.

"For the audiences, these dancers commanded their roles in ways that they hadn't seen before because they were given the tools and the food to find it within themselves. They were their own stars on stage and the audience witnessed that."

David Hallberg, Artistic Director



The gift that
keeps on giving

With a gift in your will, your foresight is our future

It's been more than three decades since The Australian Ballet's Planned Giving program was established, with the singular aim of building a stable foundation for the company through the generosity of gifts in wills.

In the years following, more than 400 passionate supporters have joined a very special group of ballet lovers who share a deep respect for the company and art form, and who have made the heartfelt commitment to leave a gift to The Australian Ballet in their will.

Planned Giving Managers, Jane Harris and Sonia Brennan, regularly spend time with members of the community who consider The Australian Ballet to be an important part of their lives, and plan to continue their generous support of the company with an inclusion in their will.

"We have the privilege of speaking to lifelong supporters of the company. People who have experienced great joy from watching the dancers of The Australian Ballet perform throughout their lives, often in the company of their loved ones," explains Sonia. "Their decision to leave a gift to the company in their will, is their way of saying 'thank you'. A lasting and deeply personal legacy that contributes to the future running of the organisation and ensures that The Australian Ballet can continue to bring joy to others, when they are no longer able to attend."

"A common theme that comes up in our conversations with bequestors, is the significance of contacting us to let us know that you have included a gift to the company in your will," says Jane. "Notifying us of a gift in your will is a powerful thing to do. When people then make the meaningful decision to confirm their bequest by sharing an excerpt of their will with us, it grants us visibility of our 'pipeline of promises', which gives the board and management the confidence to plan into the future."

As Philanthropy Director Kenneth Watkins emphasises, gifts of every size make a huge difference to the sustainability of the company. "Each year, The Australian Ballet takes the interest earned on gifts in wills and uses this income to help fund the artistic operations of the company. As the costs associated with producing ballet of the highest standard continue to rise year on year, these funds are becoming increasingly vital."

Funds from bequests have been immeasurably precious to the company in recent years. In particular, at the height of the pandemic, when the financial reserves of the company's bequests provided the security The Australian Ballet needed to borrow additional funds when regular activities were restricted.

Kenneth, a bequestor himself, adds, "When you leave a gift in your will, your life savings become our life savings. Providing for The Australian Ballet in this way, is like you're contributing to the company's superannuation fund: reinforcing our future stability for future generations' enjoyment."

Deciding to include The Australian Ballet in your will

If you are considering leaving a gift in your will to The Australian Ballet, we encourage you to discuss any plans that you might have for your will with your family and friends, and to seek your own legal advice. It is important to have these conversations with those closest to you right from the outset.

Once these discussions have taken place and you have made the decision to leave a gift to the company in your will, we invite you to get in touch to share your plans with us.

When you confirm your bequest, in recognition of your commitment and support, we will invite you to join the Dame Peggy van Praagh Leadership Circle, which was named in honour of The Australian Ballet's founding Artistic Director.

Members of The Dame Peggy van Praagh Leadership Circle enjoy unique opportunities to engage with the company, gain a greater insight into the life of The Australian Ballet, and – if they wish – are acknowledged for their support on our website, in our souvenir programs and Annual Reports.

Getting in touch

We understand that this is a very personal matter. If you would like to have a conversation about including The Australian Ballet in your will, please get in contact.

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Glory June Tuohy-Daniell



Yuiko Masukawa

Glory June Tuohy-Daniell and Yuiko Masukawa, two distinct and up-and-coming choreographers have been crowned joint winners of the 2023 Telstra Emerging Choreographer (TEC) competition, in recognition of their promising talents.

TEC was conceived by Artistic Director David Hallberg – a career-long advocate for choreographic incubation – and, with the support of Telstra, our Principal Partner of 39 years, the initiative returned for a third year in 2023 to nurture and create a platform for emerging voices in choreography.

This year's judging panel, comprising David Hallberg, internationally recognised choreographer Tim Harbour and awarded interdisciplinary artist Sandra Parker, were so inspired by the strength of the entries that they chose to award the accolade to two creatives.

Glory, a descendant of Indjalandji-Dhidhanu and Alyewarre Aboriginal peoples in North West Queensland and Northern Territory, and Yuiko, a Japanese choreographer and dancer based in Naarm (Melbourne), were among 70 vibrant choreographic voices from Australia's thriving dance community who submitted their proposals for consideration.

Speaking about the calibre of the winning entries, David Hallberg observes, "Both Glory and Yuiko are unique choreographic voices who are sure to leave an important mark on our art form. I'm thrilled that we have been able to celebrate their creativity and acknowledge both as this year's Telstra Emerging Choreographers. I can't wait to witness the long and fulfilling careers that lay ahead of them."

Glory and Yuiko will each receive a \$10,000 cash prize to put towards further developing and advancing their choreographic careers.

The future of dance

Talented two named Telstra Emerging Choreographers 2023

Principal Partner

60 THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET



Ballet Family events

The Ballet Society's 60th Anniversary Gala Dinners

26 May 2023, Sofitel Melbourne on Collins

9 June 2023, Adelaide Town Hall

Earlier this year, members of The Ballet Society VIC, NSW and SA celebrated the rich history, inspiring artistry and bright future of The Australian Ballet at two dazzling gala dinners in Adelaide and Melbourne.

With some of the company's brightest stars in attendance and special guests galore, these events were a fitting way to recognise the dedication and support of three very special fundraising organisations who have laid the foundation upon which The Australian Ballet has grown.



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1. (L-R) Ty King-Wall and Amber Scott

2. (L-R) Natasha Bowness, Lady Potter AC CMRI and Peter Reilly OAM

3. (L-R) Virginia Trioli and David McAllister AC

4. (L-R) Felicity Gunner OAM, Kaye Feetham, Lady Potter AC CMRI, Annette Gillen OAM and Beverley Brown OAM

5. (L-R) Edward and Jacqui Stratton-Smith

6. (L-R) Chloe Hurn, Lorraine Irving OAM and Katrina Reynolds

Photos Gavin D Andrew and Festival City Photography

60th Anniversary London Tour Opening Night Reception and Celebration

2 August 2023

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

In London, international members of The Australian Ballet family gathered together to celebrate the company's much-anticipated return to the iconic Royal Opera House stage for the first time in 35 years and our first international tour since 2019.



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1. Paul Hamlyn Hall, Royal Opera House

2. David Hallberg welcomes guests

3. Lissa Twomey addresses the room

4. (L-R) David Hallberg, Lady Potter AC CMRI and Natasha Bowness

5. (L-R) Henry Berlin, Lilly Maskery, Aya Watanabe and Tom Gannon

6. (L-R) Ako Kondo and Brett Chynoweth

7. (L-R) Annabelle Watt, Evie Ferris and Belle Urwin

Photos Harry Richards

Talking Pointe

Family Lunch

31 August 2023

Garden Restaurant, National Gallery of Victoria

In August, we came together to celebrate family, friendship and our shared love of The Australian Ballet at our annual Family Lunch in Melbourne. Guests enjoyed a three-course French farmhouse inspired menu developed by chef Annie Smithers and took part in a Luxury Raffle to raise funds for the company's community engagement programs that spread the joy of dance across Australia.



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1. Garden Restaurant, National Gallery of Victoria

2. Family Lunch guests

3. Clive Scott AM talking to Lou Hamon

4. Samara Merrick in conversation with Andrew Wright

5. (L-R) Penny Barlow, Bec Clarke and Sylvie Murray

Photos Josie Hayden Photography

Swan Lake Gala Celebration

18 September 2023

The Pavilion, Arts Centre Melbourne

On the eve of the world premiere of David Hallberg's reimagining of Anne Woolliams' *Swan Lake*, the community of philanthropic supporters who enabled the historic production attended a very special first viewing in Melbourne. This was a long-awaited celebration to mark a magical moment in the company's history with those who made it all possible.



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- 1. Kenneth Watkins AM welcomes guests
 - 2. (L-R) Jane Freudenstein AM and Natasha Bowness
 - 3. (L-R) Didy McLaurin and Joan Lyons
 - 4. (L-R) Jane Crittaden, Lorraine Beck, Lissa Mentha and Jodie Maunder
 - 5. (L-R) Susan Bienkowski, Barbara Duhig, Kenneth Watkins AM and Barbara Bedwell
 - 6. (L-R) David Wynne, Danielle Kanata, Helen Mantzis, Lisa Bolte and Graeme Uthmeyer
- Photos Casey Horsfield

THE PHILANTHROPY TEAM

If you have any questions about how your generosity is supporting The Australian Ballet of today and tomorrow, please get in touch.

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PHILANTHROPY EVENTS

Supporters and patrons are invited to attend a range of special events each season. If you would like to find out more, please contact us.

Event Enquiries

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