

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

TALKING POINTE



WINTER 2025

The Australian Ballet acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise those who danced their own stories for millennia before us and their continued connection to land, waterways and culture.



Cover: Principal Artists Jill Ogai and Callum Linnane. Photo Christopher Rodgers-Wilson
Above: Principal Artists Benedicte Bemet & Joseph Caley. Photo Brodie James

3

**Philanthropy
Director's welcome**
"If you love it, support it"

24

**A decade of
dedication**
Ten years of the Ballet
Ambassador program

4

Company news
Milestones in motion

28

Fresh faces
Meet the newest artists
in our corps de ballet

6

**Claire Spencer AM
joins The Australian
Ballet**
New Executive Director
welcomed

32

**Sowing the seeds
of imagination**
A decade of magic
with Storytime Ballet

8

Leading with heart
David Hallberg's
continued commitment
and confidence in
The Australian Ballet

34

Legacies of love
Stories from our Gifts
in Wills community

14

**Raising the barre,
together**
The impact of
philanthropy in 2024

37

Ballet family events
Celebrating community
and connection

20

**Behind the curtain
with Annabelle and
Drew**
Our Philanthropy
Ambassadors interview
Larissa Kiyoto-Ward

39

**The Philanthropy
Team**
Who we are and how
to get in touch



Principal Artist Callum Linnane and Grace Carroll
Photo Sally Kaack

Philanthropy Director's welcome

Kenneth Watkins AM



“This is *your company*...
if you love it, support it.”

I feel fortunate to have spent such a long and meaningful career with The Australian Ballet. One of the great benefits of my 32-year tenure is the lived experience and perspective that it brings. Over the years, I've had the privilege of witnessing the company navigate numerous peaks and troughs, and time and time again, we've risen to the occasion.

What I cherish most in my role are the many memorable interactions with our community. Recently, a common theme in conversations has been that all of us, regardless of who we are, are experiencing a shift in the way we live our lives financially.

If you've read our financial reporting this year, you're already aware that we too, are feeling the impact of global cost-of-living challenges. The Australian Ballet is not immune to these pressures.

Rising operational expenses, changing consumer behaviour and the artistic demands of our relocation to the Regent Theatre are all contributing factors. While some of these costs are beyond our control and others unavoidable, I want you all to know that we are working tirelessly to continue delivering the very best of dance and ballet to you, our audience, and to all those who hold the company close.

The Board has, of course, taken a cautious and prudent approach in these times of increased pressure. They also remain deeply committed to preserving your national ballet company and the art form itself.

We have all been greatly encouraged by the news that David Hallberg has extended his contract with us until the end of 2030. This creative certainty gives our Board and Management the confidence to plan with conviction and remain dedicated to supporting the creation of the very best ballet within the current environment.

The unwavering generosity and support of you, our giving community, continues to provide immense comfort and inspiration too. Donations of all sizes start stories of passion, dedication and transformation. From nurturing creative talent and preserving timeless traditions to expanding the reach of the company and art form to diverse audiences, philanthropy makes these stories possible.

In a year of storytelling, this edition of *Talking Pointe* shares personal accounts of impact, stability and sustainability against a backdrop of artistic momentum and creative risk-taking.

Unsettled times often prompt us to pause and reflect on what truly matters to us – on what we value most. I hope this issue inspires you to think about the role ballet plays in your life and the story you want to write with us.

This is your company – your national ballet company. It belongs to you, so if you love it, support it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kenneth Watkins'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kenneth Watkins AM
Philanthropy Director

Company news

The Australian Ballet has launched into 2025 with the exciting announcement of dancer promotions, the immortalisation of Artistic Director David Hallberg and the unveiling of the 2024 Telstra Ballet Dancer of the Year. The journey continues!



Back: Drew Hedditch, Elijah Trevitt, Grace Carroll, Annabelle Watt, Joseph Romancewicz, Belle Urwin and Samara Merrick
Front: Davi Ramos, Benjamin Garrett and Serena Graham
Photo Annabelle Watt

Rising through the ranks

There was a flurry of promotions in the rehearsal studios of the Sydney Opera House during the company's final season of 2024, Sir Peter Wright's *The Nutcracker*.

In what has become a much-loved tradition of David Hallberg's directorship, the entire company gathered in person and online to witness and celebrate the dancer promotions.

Amidst cheers and applause from their peers, eleven talented artists were recognised for their exceptional skill, dedication and contribution to the company.

Davi Ramos was promoted from soloist to senior artist and Philanthropy Ambassador Drew Hedditch was elevated from coryphée to soloist. Additionally, nine corps de ballet artists advanced to coryphées: Grace Carroll, Benjamin Garrett, Serena Graham, Samara Merrick, Joseph Romancewicz, Elijah Trevitt, Belle Urwin, Yichuan Wang and Philanthropy Ambassador Annabelle Watt.

Artistic Director David Hallberg commented on the occasion, saying, "It's a thrill to announce the promotions of these exceptional artists and such an exciting way to finish 2024, celebrating those who have flourished throughout the year. Some of these artists have already taken on principal roles in 2024, and their impressive growth and dedication have earned them these well-deserved promotions.

"Each of them has demonstrated remarkable commitment and resilience in their careers, while also contributing to the positive culture of the company. Their talent embodies the artistic vision I have for The Australian Ballet, and I am excited to see them thrive in their new roles, bringing renewed energy and confidence to their performances."



Samuel Akins, Matthew Paten and Olivia Harris
Photo Sally Kaack

New dancers join the corps de ballet

We have been thrilled to welcome three exciting new additions to our dance family this year. Olivia Harris and Matthew Paten have joined us from The Australian Ballet School, while Samuel Akins has come to us from the Paris Opera Ballet.

“It is always a pleasure to welcome new dancers to the company,” shares David Hallberg, “and we are delighted to strengthen our corps de ballet with these three exceptional new members. Olivia and Matthew are graduates of The Australian Ballet School, which continues to play a vital role in nurturing Australian talent, while Samuel brings invaluable international experience. We can’t wait to see how their artistry will flourish and inspire in the years ahead.”

Turn to page 28 to learn more about our new corps de ballet artists.



A historic portrait revealed

Renowned Australian photographic artist, Bill Henson, has created a monumental portrait of David Hallberg in a larger-than-life commission for Arts Centre Melbourne.

The impressive piece measures approximately two by three meters and will be prominently displayed in the State Theatre foyer when The Australian Ballet’s Melbourne performance home reopens following its significant redevelopment.

Inspired by composer Franz Liszt’s *Dante Symphony*, the portrait features David styled as Dante, adorned with a wreath of bay leaves picked from Henson’s garden, watching over the State Theatre as it undergoes renovation.

The work symbolises the rich history uniting both organisations and the unbreakable bond that links them: art. The portrait will be on permanent public display in the Theatres Building at Arts Centre Melbourne when the State Theatre opens again in 2027.

2024 Telstra Ballet Dancer Award winner announced

Coryphée, Sara Andrlon has been unveiled as the recipient of the prestigious Telstra Ballet Dancer Award for 2024.

The Telstra Ballet Dancer Award is a key cornerstone of The Australian Ballet and Telstra’s 40-year partnership. Now in its 21st year, the esteemed award celebrates dancers who excel artistically and whose character and leadership embody The Australian Ballet’s core values: ambition, boldness, inclusivity, respect and responsibility.

Born in Hanau, Germany, Sara trained at The Australian Ballet School before beginning her professional journey with The Australian Ballet in 2019. She recently delighted audiences with her performance as Lillie Langtry, one of three actresses portrayed in the world premiere of Christopher Wheeldon’s *Oscar*®.

Judges unanimously agreed that Sara exemplifies an unwavering commitment to The Australian Ballet’s values, inspiring fellow company members and enriching culture, both on and off the stage. In recognition of her achievement, Sara received a \$15,000 cash prize, generously donated by Telstra.

Sara Andrlon
Photo Cassandra Hannagan

Claire Spencer AM joins The Australian Ballet as Executive Director

In March, following an extensive national and international search, The Australian Ballet appointed Claire Spencer AM as its new Executive Director.

Claire is a prominent and well-regarded figure in the Australian creative community, having held significant roles including Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Arts Centre Melbourne, Chief Operating Officer of Sydney Opera House and CEO of the Barbican Centre in London. Claire successfully led Arts Centre Melbourne through the global pandemic and guided the Barbican Centre in its pandemic recovery. In recognition of her outstanding contributions to the arts and community, Claire was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2020.

With her extensive experience in sustainable growth, financial management and cultural engagement, Claire is set to accelerate the delivery of The Australian Ballet's strategy at a crucial time for the organisation.

Dr Richard Dammery, Chair of The Australian Ballet, stated, "Claire's skills, experience, and collaborative leadership are imperative as we navigate a changing culture and audience, as well as our time away from our State Theatre home in Melbourne."

Upon stepping into her new role, Claire expressed, "It is a true privilege to be appointed Executive Director of The Australian Ballet. The Australian Ballet has been a significant presence in my life since the 1990s, and I have been consistently impressed by the company's ambition, beauty, strength and determination, especially during and after the pandemic."

She added, "I look forward to working with David Hallberg, the talented artists, and the dedicated staff to build on the company's extraordinary legacy and uphold its exceptional standards of ballet for audiences across Australia and beyond."

Dr Richard Dammery and The Australian Ballet Board also extended their gratitude to Sally Underwood, who served as Interim Executive Director for the six months preceding Claire's selection.

Claire Spencer AM and David Hallberg
Photo Eugene Hyland



Leading *with heart*

**David Hallberg's continued commitment
and confidence in The Australian Ballet**

Earlier this year, we were delighted to share the news that Artistic Director David Hallberg has extended his contract with The Australian Ballet through to the end of 2030. First appointed in January 2021 for a five-year term, David's visionary artistic leadership will now continue to shape our national ballet company for another five years, ensuring the consolidation and momentum of his artistic impact.

This decision, signalling David's unwavering commitment and confidence in the company, has sparked excitement within our community and marks a new chapter of stability and growth. We sat down with David to learn more about his evolving vision and his journey with the company so far.



David Hallberg and Principal Artist Benedicte Bemel
Photo Cameron Grayson

You've signed on for another five years, which is fantastic news. How is your artistic vision evolving as you look ahead?

I feel as though I've really absorbed our capability as a company over this time. The size of who we are and what we can do, with our 70 plus dancers and a full orchestra, in our two major home theatres and for our huge audience base.

I intend to use this capability to its full capacity. When I look forward to our return to the State Theatre in Melbourne and the extent of our repertoire, I want us to be differentiating ourselves from other companies and from the rest of the world.

I have also loved getting to know our audience more – what they love, what challenges them. Everyone's artistic preferences are different, and what is my taste won't always be others', but this is a two-way street. I really enjoy learning more about our community and what they're desiring from the company, and I love satiating their artistic appetite as much as my own.

If I think about Season 2025, for example, the year of storytelling, we have opened with *Nijinsky* – a complex, masterful production with a huge cast on stage, and we bookend that with *The Sleeping Beauty* – one of our biggest productions. I think that's what our audiences want to see on stage: rich, textured, full storytelling, and I want to bring them the highest quality of dance that Australia can offer!

“I have fallen in love with this company,
the dancers and the people around it.”

David Hallberg, Artistic Director







Above: David Hallberg with Artists of The Australian Ballet. Photo Brodie James
Below: David Hallberg with Davi Ramos. Photo Kate Longley

Reflecting on your first five years with the company, what are you most proud of?

I think I'm most proud of seeing the dancers' confidence grow. I've seen them become more confident performers, I've seen them become less passive, I've seen them embody new movement, like *Kunstkamer* and *Circle Electric*, *The Nutcracker* even. There's a newfound confidence that I feel they're embodying.

I found myself being brought to tears by the company early into the *Nijinsky* season. I was sitting in my seat and started to cry because they were that amazing. I thought how incredible it is to watch these artists become better than they were and to watch individual dancers embody their life's calling.

To watch the company take on a work of that magnitude and grow in it took my breath away. It's wonderful to witness development like that. I'm so proud of their success and their work ethic, their vulnerability and their achievements. It's a privilege to be a part of.

You've been shaping and building the dancers in the company since you arrived. What qualities do you look for in the artists you select?

There are three things that I'm really looking for. First and foremost, the basis of it all, is mastery of technique.

I'm also drawn to individual thought and interpretation; singular motivation. I want people in this company to have the autonomy to make their own decisions. Historically, I think ballet as an institution has been very good at telling the dancer not to make their own decisions, and when given the opportunity, I want dancers to make an active choice – not be passive about it.

Another thing I gravitate towards, is an instinctual sense of musicality. A sense of marrying movement with music, which blends into individual interpretation – how you interpret music, whether that's on stage or in class. I'm drawn to seeing a real, conscious choice of what an artist is going to do – a plan. In repertoire or in class work, dancers can often fall back on passive execution. What I love seeing and what I am seeing in the generation that I'm directing is their own ideas of how things should look or be interpreted.

As a leader, are there any life lessons from earlier in your career that inform your approach now?

I'm certainly very mindful that I was there once. One thing I wish I didn't have as much of in my career is fear. I spent a lot of time doubting myself and fearing messing up. Because of this, I think there were times when I was too safe as a performer.

As someone who's now responsible for a new generation of artists, I'm trying to instil an instinct to take the safety guard off, to take risks as a performer and to relinquish that sense of fear.

So, do you feel like a true part of our community now?

Absolutely! I obviously had some very big shoes to fill. David McAllister was, and still is, beloved by all of us – but I feel like I'm really getting to know our Ballet family, and hopefully the feeling's mutual.

I came into this role wanting to be present and engaging, not enigmatic, and I remain true to this. I have fallen in love with this company, the dancers and the people around it.

I love Australia and I'm genuinely a happier person here. It's funny: in the way that New York hardens you, Melbourne softens you. It's made me warmer and I'm feeling settled, which is a great feeling to have and an even greater place to be.



Raising the barre, *together*

The impact of our giving
community in 2024

In 2024, philanthropy proved to be the lifeblood of The Australian Ballet, reminding us of its critical role in our journey.

As the final curtain fell on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*®, marking the end of the company's last season at Melbourne's State Theatre until 2027, we faced a period of transition and uncertainty. Our temporary move to the Regent Theatre brought challenges and opportunities for our audiences, artists and administration.

"We knew it would test our resilience while opening the door to new possibilities," says Philanthropy Director Kenneth Watkins. "Yet, amid these shifts, David's visionary leadership continues to energise us, guiding us to the forefront of the Australian and global arts industries, inspiring us to push boundaries and elevating our work."

In this spirit, we called upon our Ballet family to strengthen the company's unrestricted funds and endowment reserves. And support us they did! Kenneth proudly shares, "Our giving community contributed \$12.1 million (21%) to the company's budget in 2024. These essential resources enabled us to pursue the highest levels of artistic excellence during a challenging time, while also fortifying our future by steadily growing our endowment reserves."

Reflecting on the contributions in 2024, Kenneth observes, "We are profoundly grateful for the support of our community. Every gift, no matter its size, propels us forward and, as ticket prices continue to cover only half of our rising operational costs, the generosity of this community will become even more important in the years to come."

Read on to discover how the power of our supporter community has reinforced the stability of The Australian Ballet during 2024 - a truly transitional year.

Annual Giving

Our Annual Giving program, a beloved tradition of philanthropy, remains one of the most impactful ways our supporters show their commitment to the company. It continues to be a bedrock of our financial foundation.

In 2024, the program played a pivotal role, laying the groundwork for creative expression and artistic innovation. It enabled our national ballet company to strive for excellence in everything we do.

Throughout the year, 2,500 generous patrons donated over \$4.1 million in untied, flexible funds. These contributions underwrote our artistic operations, empowering us to nurture artistic talent, preserve timeless traditions and expand the reach of our company and art form.

Gifts in Wills and Planned Giving

Our Gifts in Wills and Planned Giving program is essential in safeguarding The Australian Ballet's future for generations to come and, in 2024, this program continued to flourish.

47 supporters confirmed their commitment to remember The Australian Ballet in their will, joining a special community of over 400 people who have pledged to celebrate their love for the company with a future bequest.

In 2024, \$1 million of income was generated from realised bequests to support our essential daily artistic operations. These funds were instrumental in various aspects of the company, including the refurbishment of sets and costumes for *The Nutcracker*, bringing esteemed coaches and répétiteurs to work with the company, supporting the creation of *Circle Electric* and funding an original music commission for our 2024 Education and Outreach program.

Specific purpose major gifts and endowment funds

\$9.5 million in contributions from specific purpose major gifts and endowment funds bolstered our sustainability and enabled the company to achieve strategic priorities in 2024.

Funding innovations to meet evolving needs

A key philanthropic priority in 2024 was the Innovation Years Campaign, a fundraising effort designed to stabilise our finances, support essential innovations, expand our repertoire and enable our creative ambitions during our time at the Regent Theatre.

This fund has allowed us to be more agile and resilient in a time of change. Empowering us to innovate in various ways – from curating dynamic repertoires and designing adaptable sets, to optimising performance venues and evolving our business model.

All of this has been made possible by the steadfast support of our donors, who champion our efforts to deliver exceptional productions to audiences old and new.

Investing in balanced repertoire for our new era

The Australian Ballet's canon of repertoire reflects not only who we are today but how we'll be remembered for generations to come, and philanthropy plays a central role in this.

The David Hallberg Fund for Artistic Aspiration, endowed by Lady Potter in 2021, continues to attract support from our community and in 2024, fully funded the masterpiece *Oscar*®.

Oscar® not only provided formative opportunities for our artists to grow but also expanded the reach and relevance of our company. It elevated the art form itself, bringing the transformative power of dance to diverse audiences.

Our 2024 *Bodytorque* program, *New World Record*, also benefitted from generous philanthropic support. The Geraldine Lawton Bequest funded this platform for original works created by six of Australia's most exciting emerging choreographers. The talented artists included The Australian Ballet's very own Jill Ogai, Serena Graham, Adam Elmes and Benjamin Garrett.

Enriching our artists and advancing the art form

Our extraordinary company of elite dancers is the centrepiece of our organisation, and the generosity of our supporters provides a vital income stream that sets the dancers up for success every day.

From funding essential artistic operations and the countless pairs of ballet shoes our artists rely on, to bringing esteemed coaches and répétiteurs to work with the company and empowering our pioneering Artistic Health team to implement cutting-edge strategies and research, our community keeps our dancers' worlds turning.

Since 2008, nine benefactors have established endowment funds to support company artist positions in perpetuity. The income generated from these funds creates a sustainable revenue source that strengthens the company's finances by reducing fixed costs, offsetting a portion of a dancer's salary each year. These funds were particularly important in 2024, providing budget relief in a financially challenging year, and will continue to play a critical role as the costs associated with producing ballet continue to rise.

Our commitment to our dancers extends far beyond the stage. In 2024, our Ballet Ambassador program – a nationwide network of emerging philanthropists, passionate about ballet and dedicated to purpose – enabled numerous impactful initiatives, including our ongoing research partnership with La Trobe University and an evolving relationship with the National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC). Both connections are significantly enhancing our dancers' performance and ensuring their health and wellbeing throughout their demanding careers and beyond.

The James & Diana Ramsay Foundation generously funded the visit of Guest Teacher Isabelle Guerin in 2024. Isabelle, a legendary former Étoile at Paris Opera Ballet, danced under Rudolf Nureyev's directorship and alongside revered dancers like Sylvie Guillem. Known for her immaculate footwork and precision en pointe, Isabelle provided our dancers with an exceptional opportunity to refine their technique in preparation for demanding repertoire.

Strengthening our ties with the Paris Opera Ballet, we welcomed Hannah O'Neill, a Paris Opera Ballet Étoile and alumna of The Australian Ballet School, as a guest artist. Hannah graced the stage as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker* – an appearance made possible by the generous support of the Joan & Peter Clemenger Fund.

“We are dancing through this time of change together with *hope, resilience, and a shared commitment to the future of our national ballet company.*”

Kenneth Watkins AM, Philanthropy Director



Samara Merrick and Jeremy Hargreaves
Photo Pierre Toussaint

Spreading the joy of dance across the nation

As Australia's national ballet company and a proud cultural leader, our goal is to give dance lovers from all walks of life the chance to share the joy of live ballet. In 2024, philanthropic support allowed us to advance this commitment with gusto.

Australian touring continues to be a feature of our annual calendar. In addition to creating even deeper connections with communities across the nation, The Australian Ballet On Tour (formerly the Regional Tour) brings the very best of Australian dance, artistry and creativity to communities across the country. In 2024, The Australian Ballet On Tour entertained 6,974 audience members across its eight-town tour of Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales.

In 2024, our Education and Outreach program received significant support through specific purpose major gifts. This extensive program of inclusive and accessible initiatives aims to boost participation, knowledge and awareness of dance while enhancing educational and wellbeing outcomes nationwide.

Thanks to visionary philanthropic support from our supporter community, the program toured six states and territories, reaching 26,354 participants at no cost. These contributions have made a profound impact, fostering a love for dance and enriching lives across the nation.

Meanwhile, Storytime Ballet, our seasons of interactive performances for the next generation of dance enthusiasts, continues to garner enthusiastic support from our community. The James & Diana Ramsay Foundation, Gandel Philanthropy and over 2,000 individual donors across Australia brought the magic of Storytime Ballet: *Cinderella/The Sleeping Beauty* to 24,237 audience members in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Canberra and Brisbane in 2024.

Additionally, the generosity of Metal Manufactures Pty Limited made our 2024 livestream series possible – digitally delivering our productions and backstage content to 5,553 individuals in Australia and internationally.

Annual Giving

Over \$4.1 million donated by 2,500 patrons

Major Gifts

\$9.5 million underpinned strategic priorities

Gifts in Wills

\$1 million from bequests supported artistic endeavours

Touring Australia

6,974 audience members entertained by The Australian Ballet On Tour

Education and Outreach

26,354 participants reached

Storytime Ballet

24,237 audience members spellbound

Livestreams

5,553 viewers worldwide





BEHIND THE CURTAIN

with Annabelle and Drew

Larissa Kiyoto-Ward on debuts,
de-roling and dancing with friends

In a new series, Philanthropy Ambassadors Annabelle Watt and Drew Hedditch take us behind the scenes as they interview their fellow artists about life at The Australian Ballet.

In this conversation, Annabelle and Drew speak with Coryphée Larissa Kiyoto-Ward who debuted in her first principal role earlier this season: the titular character in Johan Inger's *Carmen*.

Drew: Correct me if I'm wrong, but this is your third role in this production?

Larissa: Yes, I play Manuela – she's the boss of the cigarette factory, I also play Ellie – one of the cigarreras, and now Carmen.

Drew: We performed *Carmen* in Sydney before we did it in Melbourne and there have been a few other strong performers who have danced the role of Carmen before you. Did you have any help from them?

Larissa: Yes, Jill (Ogai, Principal Artist) has been really lovely and very helpful, and I've chatted to Dim (Dimitry Azoury, Principal Artist) about it too. She saw my first studio run and she gave me some really great tips and things to think about, which was really cool.

Annabelle: How's it been working with Adam Elmes (Coryphée), who's done the production before and has returned to the role of Don José this season?

Larissa: He's been really chill, which has been great. He said to me that it feels so weird coming back to a

production, because you don't feel as stressed about it. We graduated from The Australian Ballet School together, so that's been special. Lilly (Maskery, Corps de Ballet) graduated then as well – she plays the role of The Boy in my cast – so it's been nice to have the Class of 2019 out there on stage together.

Drew: For special debuts, like this, it starts with your first full run in the studio with your friends and colleagues there applauding and supporting you. How was the first studio call for you?

Larissa: It was so special, doing it with everyone around me, but I was so nervous...

Drew: Studio runs are so nerve-wracking, because you're being vulnerable in front of everyone who you know and it's so intimate.

Larissa: Especially because they know you so well. Putting on a character – being a character – is so scary. When I finished my first run, I was like, "Woah, I did that!"

Larissa Kiyoto-Ward and Belle Urwin
Photo Kate Longley



Larissa Kiyoto-Ward, Mason Lovegrove
and Bryce Latham
Photo Brodie James



Drew: Is there anything that you found surprising as you stepped from the studio onto the stage in this role?

Larissa: I didn't actually realise how intense being Carmen on stage would be. In the studio, it was still intense but being on stage with the lights and the orchestra, and the costume and everything... it got to the end where Adam walks around, pulling me and it felt so real. It was quite scary in a way.

Drew: Nothing really prepares you for the pressure and the demands of such an intense role. Have there been any techniques you've used after a performance to help with coming back to 'Larissa' and not being 'Carmen' anymore?

Larissa: Yes, Amy Cater (Intimacy Coach) came in and she taught us 'de-roling' strategies which were really helpful. So, after each performance I put on some really 'boppy' music and start shaking Carmen out as I take off the costume.

Annabelle: This ballet's very sensual and there are a lot of moments where there's improvisation of flirtations. How have you found working with Amy Cater has supported you in playing the role?

Larissa: It was nice to clarify that, just because you're playing a character, it doesn't mean you have to do something you don't feel comfortable with. For example, a lot of us will now ask our dance partners' permission before we touch them in a certain way.

Drew: It's a very new approach to working within the ballet world and a step forward that The Australian Ballet's taking in how we are as artists and the comfortability we have in the roles we're playing...

Larissa: Absolutely, and, I think it makes you feel more at ease playing the role too because you want to feel comfortable in yourself before you go out and portray a character.

Annabelle: Carmen is a different kind of role – a strong, independent woman. Is that a character you enjoy playing?

Larissa: It's been a great role to play – such a complicated story and such a complicated character. People can easily see her as the villain but she's just a human. It's really cool to just play a human, a person.

Annabelle: It's a special role as well, playing a fierce woman on stage. You are a fierce woman in real life, so naturally you lend yourself to something like this. Has it been fun to tap into?

Larissa: Yes! Coming out on stage for the first time and having to be this person who's very sensual and 'out there' was kind of surprising. Off stage, I'm out there in a different kind of way – more goofy than lustful – but I realised I could do it and that was great!

Drew: What are the takeaways that you have learned through this experience and will move forward through your career?

Larissa: I really liked how, in this production, you don't have to be perfect and that's something that I want to take away and channel into the other things that I do. It's so easy to get caught up on the things that didn't go to plan and spiral but, with *Carmen*, it's about the balance of finding the in-between of perfect and imperfect. It's so raw and I really want to take that into what I do in the future.

Annabelle: It really lends itself to self-expression and interpretation. It's been so beautiful to watch. Congratulations.

A DECADE OF DEDICATION

Celebrating ten years of

THE BALLET AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Ten years ago, Sarah Murdoch, Global Ambassador of The Australian Ballet and founder of the Ballet Ambassador program, saw a unique opportunity to connect the company with an emerging generation of philanthropists.

Driven by her vision to create deeper connections between young ballet enthusiasts and The Australian Ballet, the Ballet Ambassador program was launched. Its mission was clear: to cultivate a network of emerging philanthropists who care about the art form and are committed to advancing the company's strategic goals.

Over the past decade, the Ballet Ambassador program has blossomed into a nationwide community of individuals who are not only passionate about ballet

but also dedicated to supporting initiatives across the company. From Storytime Ballet and *Spartacus*, to Australian touring, community outreach and, more recently, dancer performance and wellbeing, the generous spirit of our Ballet Ambassadors has been key to the program's success.

Through an exclusive calendar of events and gatherings, the Ballet Ambassador program has raised funds for numerous ground-breaking strategies and research initiatives led by our trailblazing Artistic Health team.

Today, we shine the spotlight on some of the Artistic Health initiatives made possible by our Ballet Ambassadors over the past decade. These efforts have had a tangible impact on dancers' performance, ensuring they remain healthy throughout their demanding careers and beyond.

“The Ballet Ambassador program has allowed us to achieve so much in supporting both the dancers’ performances and their long-term health. We are incredibly grateful for the unwavering support of our Ballet Ambassadors in helping us reach new heights.”

Sarah Murdoch, Ballet Ambassador program founder

Artists of The Australian Ballet
Photo Pierre Toussaint



REHABILITATION ROOM



Photos Brodie James

The Australian Ballet and La Trobe University's research partnership

The Australian Ballet's Artistic Research team continues to lead the way in exploring clinically relevant issues to enhance our dancers' health and wellbeing. In partnership with our longstanding Learning Partner, La Trobe University, and empowered by our Ballet Ambassadors, we've launched several research projects that not only benefit our dancers but also have the potential to improve outcomes for athletes across all sports.

Swan Lake study

Known for its breathtaking beauty and demanding choreography, *Swan Lake* presents a unique challenge for our dancers. Performing it 62 times in a season can put significant strain on the ankles, particularly the tendons. To better understand this, we conducted a year-long study on the tendons around dancers' ankles during preparation and performances of *Swan Lake*'s iconic choreography.

Led by Dr. Bruna Tessarin (PhD) the study utilised various cutting-edge clinical tests and technology to assess the impact of the extended run of *Swan Lake* in 2023. The results were promising: our dancers' ankles remained strong and healthy, likely due to the injury-prevention measures promoted at The Australian Ballet.

The findings were presented at the International Association for Dance Medicine & Science (IADMS) Conference in October 2024, where our company's approach to injury prevention was globally recognised.

Osteoarthritis in ballet dancers

A recent study led by Storytime Ballet Tour Physiotherapist, Dr. Melanie Fuller, PhD, challenged the common assumption that ballet leads to arthritis. Dr. Fuller's comprehensive literature review concluded that ballet does not contribute to osteoarthritis, particularly in professional dancers' feet.

While more research is needed in this area, this important finding helps to reframe the narrative around ballet's impact on joint health.

Foot health study

Under the leadership of Associate Professor Ebonie Rio, The Australian Ballet's Artistic Health team has completed a comprehensive foot health study comparing the feet of ballet dancers to those of recreational runners. We measured pain, strength, muscle size, and joint health using VALD strength testing devices and magnetic resonance imaging.

This is the most thorough research to date on foot health in dancers and athletes, and it aims to shed light on the impact of years of ballet on feet.

Mental fatigue study

Ballet's unique combination of physical, cognitive, and aesthetic demands often leads to both physical and mental fatigue. Physiotherapist and Researcher Matthew Wirdnam published a qualitative study, *A Sprained Ankle is the Biggest Sign of Mental Fatigue*, which explores perceptions and experiences of mental fatigue in ballet.

This pioneering research is the first to establish a link between mental fatigue and physical injury, paving the way for future studies into injury prevention, learning and performance in ballet. As part of our ongoing commitment to the mental health of our dancers, we will be developing a program designed to reduce mental fatigue in consultation with the company.

Partnership with National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC)

Body Image and Disordered Eating Guidelines

Classical ballet, as an aesthetic art form, often leads to high rates of body image issues and disordered eating. With the support of the Ballet Ambassadors and in partnership with the NEDC, The Australian Ballet has developed and implemented world-leading guidelines aimed at preventing and managing eating disorders within the company.

These guidelines were presented at the IADMS Conference in 2024 and have since been shared with other ballet companies worldwide. Additionally, Dr. Beth Shelton of NEDC and Associate Professor Sue Mayes of The Australian Ballet have conducted in-company education sessions, with ongoing training planned to underpin the wellbeing of our dancers.

Dancer Development Fund

Given the relatively short span of a dancer's career, many consider new avenues when they reach their early 30s. To support this transition, The Australian Ballet has a well-established Dancer Development Fund, now supported by the Ballet Ambassador program.

Dancers with eight or more years of service are eligible to apply for grants up to \$10,000, which can be used for further education, business loans, or professional development after they leave the company.

Since 2010, over 30 retired dancers have used these grants for further studies, entrepreneurial ventures, and creative pursuits, ensuring that their legacies continue long after they retire from the stage.

Fresh faces

**Meet the newest artists in
our corps de ballet**

Welcoming the next wave of talent, three new dancers joined the company in January 2025. We delve into the lives, passions, aspirations and dreams of these fresh faces.

Photos Pierre Toussaint



Samuel Akins

Hailing from Birmingham Alabama, Samuel started his ballet training at a local ballet school before continuing his studies in New York City with American Ballet Theatre and the School of American Ballet. Samuel's career has seen him perform with many companies around the world, including the prestigious Paris Opera Ballet. He has also spent time training with The Australian Ballet during previous visits to Melbourne.

What was your journey into dance, and how did you realise it was your true calling?

I started dancing at the age of seven and discovered ballet through my musical theatre experience. After watching my first ballet performance, I fell in love with the art form, and by age eleven, I knew that dancing was for me.

What has been the biggest lesson you've learned since transitioning from student to professional dancer?

One of the most important lessons I've learned is that the journey is ongoing. The transition from student to professional taught me that growth happens outside your comfort zone and that every performance, rehearsal and creative collaboration is an opportunity to evolve as an artist.

What has been a highlight of your time with the company so far?

Meeting not only the incredible dancers but also the entire team of staff and supporting members throughout the organisation. It's inspiring to see the passion and dedication that everyone brings to the company.

What is your dream role or repertoire to perform?

I'm open to various roles and repertoires, but I especially enjoy opportunities where I can be involved in the creative process - pieces that allow me to dive deep into a character or explore aspects of my own identity. Dancing choreography that evokes strong emotions and encourages self-reflection is always a joy for me.

What are five key items you always have with you in the studio?

Flat shoes, my blue water bottle, an elastic band, leg warmers and a piece of Adidas gear.

What brings you joy outside of dance?

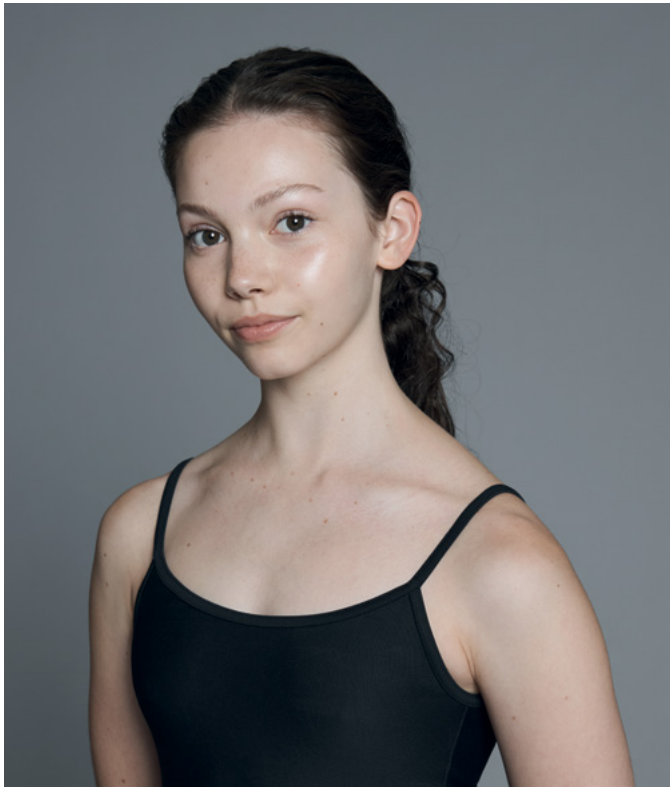
Outside of dance, I love spending quality time with my partner and friends. I also enjoy getting outdoors and exploring new places around the city - especially with some great music in the background.

Do you have a favourite quote that inspires you?

"I don't try to dance better than anyone else; I only try to dance better than myself." - Mikhail Baryshnikov

"Dancing choreography that evokes strong emotions and encourages self-reflection is always a joy for me."

Samuel Akins



Olivia Harris

Olivia began her ballet training at the age of 13 and quickly focused on developing her skills in classical ballet. She joined The Australian Ballet School in 2022, where she trained in the graduate program and performed in several key ballet works. In 2024, Olivia had the opportunity to perform with The Australian Ballet in *Études* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*[®]. She was awarded The Ballet Society NSW Friends Award, the Graeme Murphy AO Award for Contemporary Dance, and the Excellence Award during her time at the school.

What does it mean to you to dance professionally with The Australian Ballet?

I am so proud of myself and the journey it has taken to get here. The thought of dancing for such an innovative, multicultural and supportive company is so exciting. It really is a dream come true.

What has been the biggest lesson you've learned since transitioning from student to professional dancer?

The importance of backing myself and looking after myself. With long days and varying demands depending on performance schedules, I've learned that finding space to listen to what my body needs is very important.

What has been a highlight of your time with the company so far?

Being seconded to the *Études* season in 2024 was very special. To spend six weeks with the company in my home city, learning an incredibly challenging ballet will always be a memory I treasure.

What is your dream role or repertoire to perform?

Most definitely Tatiana Larina from *Onegin*. The final pas de deux of the ballet brings me to tears every time and no matter how often I hear the music I still get goosebumps. Equally, I love the innocence and youth of Olga who is Tatiana's younger sister. It would be such a career fulfilling experience to perform either of these roles.

What are five key items you always have with you in the studio?

Obviously, pointe shoes – and more than one pair. My shoes die very quickly so having multiple pairs is a must. I always have a pair of ballet flats too, my water bottle, which I use for stretching and hydration, warmup clothes and clothes to keep me warm before and after class. And, of course, my pointe shoe bag with toe pads, scissors, sewing equipment and anything else I could possibly need.

What brings you joy outside of dance?

I love being in nature and the sun. Whether it's a walk, being in the park or swimming, being outside grounds me and brings me so much joy. Even more so if I'm with my friends as I'm a bit of an extrovert!

What might our community be surprised to learn about you?

I lived overseas for two years, which sparked a love for exploring different cultures, atmospheres and lifestyles. I want to travel as much as I can and learn while I explore the world.

“Dancing for such an innovative, multicultural and supportive company is so exciting. It really is a dream come true.”

Olivia Harris



“The role of des Grieux is one I would love to perform one day. I can't wait to watch our amazing principal artists tackle this role.”

Matthew Paten

Matthew Paten

Born in Canberra, Matthew began his ballet training at 14 and moved to Melbourne in 2021 to train full-time at The Australian Ballet School. He was named School Captain and awarded a scholarship for his graduate year. Matthew performed with The Australian Ballet in the world premiere of Christopher Wheeldon's *Oscar*® in Sydney and Melbourne, marking his professional debut.

What was your journey into dance, and how did you realise it was your true calling?

Dance has been my biggest passion from a very young age, but I was more interested in jazz, tap, hip hop and contemporary. When my parents took me to my first ballet class, I didn't enjoy it at all – in fact, I cried the whole time! When I was 14, however, my teachers spotted the potential I had in ballet, so I started taking ballet classes more regularly. From then, everything started to move very quickly, and within two years, I was moving interstate to train at The Australian Ballet School.

What has been the biggest lesson you've learned since transitioning from student to professional dancer?

Something I am still getting used to is having to change my schedule and routines during performance seasons. Our days become very long with shows finishing quite late, so everything must shift – from when you eat, wake up, go to bed, and everything else in between. This is something I'm still learning and figuring out what works for me.

What has been a highlight of your time with the company so far?

Getting to work with Christopher Wheeldon for *Oscar*® and John Neumeier for *Nijinsky*, was such a highlight. It was so surreal being in the room with such highly regarded choreographers, and having the privilege to learn from them was so inspiring.

What is your dream role or repertoire to perform?

At the moment I am loving working on the ballet *Manon*. The role of des Grieux is one I would love to perform one day, and I can't wait to watch our amazing principal artists tackle this role.

What are you most looking forward to performing in 2025?

I am really looking forward to performing *Don Quixote* on our tour to Japan. To be able to dance on stages around the world is an incredible opportunity.

What brings you joy outside of dance?

Quality time with my family is something I really cherish. I moved from Canberra to Melbourne to pursue my ballet career, so it is always special when I get to see my family and spend time at home.

What might our community be surprised to learn about you?

I am quite a competitive person – especially when it comes to card or board games!

SOWING THE SEEDS OF IMAGINATION

A decade of magic with Storytime Ballet

Ten years ago, then-Executive Director of The Australian Ballet, the late Libby Christie AM, a lifelong supporter of ballet and a new grandparent, was struck by the idea of welcoming a whole new generation to the art form – a world of beauty, wonder and enchantment – in a way that was tailored especially for children.

Like many in our community, Libby was introduced to ballet as a child by her mother. A formative experience she credited with creating some of her most cherished memories. She was determined to offer that same gift to other children at a time when their imaginations are most creative and full of possibility. And so, the seed of Storytime Ballet was planted...

David McAllister, Artistic Director of the company in 2015, shared Libby's passion for engaging young minds and was instrumental in bringing her vision to fruition. He eagerly set about adapting the fairytale classic, *The Sleeping Beauty*, into a bite-sized work to inspire the next generation of dancers and dance lovers and remains creatively involved with the program to this day.

Powered by the generosity of our philanthropic community, who raised \$1.2 million to fund the program, The Australian Ballet's first season for young audiences came to be. The format was a resounding hit in 2015, and in 2025 – 10 years and more than 600 performances later – the critically acclaimed seasons have become a much-loved fixture in many families' calendars.

With each relaxed performance lasting just under an hour, the shows are gently guided by an experienced narrator who leads the audience through a classic fairytale and invites children in attendance – many who come dressed in their favourite ballet-inspired outfits – to participate along the way.

Kit Thompson and Charlton Tough
Photo Kate Longley





Describing the atmosphere in the theatre, Becky Ruffell, Storytime Ballet Producer, shares, “To be in the audience, surrounded by hundreds of kids who are interacting with the show around you, waving and dancing, is a truly magical experience. You can feel the excitement in the air!”

“I grew up seeing ballet from a young age and that was really formative for me,” Becky continues. “Sadly, ballet isn’t always accessible, so it’s really special to be involved with a season like this that gives children the opportunity to experience a relaxed, live performance at such a young age.”

In addition to inspiring creative minds and active lifestyles in the next generation, Storytime Ballet has also been a fertile ground for the careers of many of The Australian Ballet’s talented company members. Soloists Isobelle Dashwood and Mason Lovegrove, and Coryphées Timothy Coleman, Saranja Crowe and Montana Rubin all danced in the first season of Storytime Ballet. Meanwhile, Jasmin Dwyer and Chantelle van de Hoek, who also took to the stage in the inaugural season, went on to become The Australian Ballet’s Education and Outreach Program Producer and Team Leader, respectively, with Chantelle continuing to appear in Storytime performances to this day.

Reflecting on the impact of Storytime Ballet, Artistic Director David Hallberg explains, “There is nothing like seeing ballet for the first time as a child. As a company, we’re committed to making ballet accessible to all and Storytime Ballet is crafted to give our youngest audiences a memorable introduction to the magic of ballet – sparking a passion for dance in children and families alike.”

STORYTIME FACTS & STATS

- There have been 603 Storytime performances over the past 10 years
- 284 of these performances have been of *The Sleeping Beauty*
- Other Storytime Ballet productions have included *The Nutcracker*, *Coppelia* and *Cinderella*
- Sean McGrath has narrated every single show
- Chantelle van der Hoek has appeared in every season of Storytime Ballet, bar one
- Storytime Ballet has been performed at 22 venues across the country
- Over 300,000 people have attended a performance throughout the decade



Legacies of love

Stories from our Gifts in Wills community

You might be surprised to learn that some of The Australian Ballet's most impactful supporters are those whose generosity will be realised after they are no longer with us.

In fact, our Gifts in Wills and Planned Giving program has been the quiet achiever of our philanthropic portfolio since its creation in 1990. In the years since, hundreds of Ballet family members – some without the means to support the company in their lifetimes – have acted on their desire and foresight to remember The Australian Ballet in their estate by including a gift to the company in their will.

Over the past three decades, bequests from ballet lovers who have passed away have grown into a solid foundation of reserves, which now accounts for around half of the company's endowment funds.

Gifts of every size have combined to become a financial bedrock for the company and stabilised us during our toughest times, such as the challenges of the pandemic.

Supplemented by over 400 bequests yet to be realised, this special group of supporters is paving the way for our long-term financial sustainability, making us less vulnerable to economic shifts.

If you're considering including The Australian Ballet in your will, you might find it inspiring to hear from members of our Gifts in Wills community who have confirmed their bequest to the company. The following accounts are from supporters who have all made this meaningful decision or have loved ones who have, each for their own inspiring reasons.



Jane and Stephen Gow, NSW

"We were both blessed in being introduced to ballet by our parents, who first attended performances during the Australian tours of the Ballet Russes. Since the 1980s, we've found great joy in being part of the ballet audience at the Sydney Opera House, now every season. We marvel at the depth of talent and versatility in The Australian Ballet, delight in watching the dancers grow and evolve, and commend the company's outreach work in regional areas.

"Our love of The Australian Ballet has been a constant in both our lives, and in recognition of our families' lifelong love of dance, we have been moved to offer a bequest to support the company's future. We appreciate that philanthropy is crucial to ensuring peak arts organisations like The Australian Ballet continue to thrive and are proud to be helping to secure a sustainable future for the next generations."



Anne Hamilton Hall, VIC

"I have reached a stage of life where I am able to make contributions to organisations like The Australian Ballet which have been a source of wonderful theatrical experiences for much of my life.

"Giving back is important to me, and the joy of knowing my contributions will help secure a bright future is immeasurable.

"It is a privilege to be able to support future generations in experiencing the same pleasure I have found in The Australian Ballet's beautiful and athletic performances. My hope is that ballet will continue to reach many and varied audiences around Australia, sharing the skills with diverse groups and inspiring generational support."



Charles Hardman, VIC

"I was nine when I first saw The Australian Ballet perform *The Nutcracker* on a school excursion. I remember being mesmerised by the theatre and how the performance filled the room. If it wasn't for that excursion, I would not have visited the theatre or seen ballet until much later in life, if at all. It opened my eyes to a whole new world I didn't know existed.

"The Australian Ballet is a world-class performing arts organisation right here in our backyard. I hope that my gift will go some way to ensuring the company can exist forever and provide opportunities for new audiences to be exposed to theatre, ballet, the orchestra and all the other art forms that exist in and around the company."



Margie Luke, NSW

"My first encounter with ballet was as a child when my mother, Iris, took me to see a performance of *The Nutcracker* in London's Covent Garden during the 'Swinging Sixties'. This connection continued into the 1970s when my parents had season tickets to see The Australian Ballet at the newly opened Sydney Opera House. After my father passed away in 1991, I accompanied Iris in Dad's memory.

"I knew my mother had left a gift to The Australian Ballet in her will and she had always encouraged me to continue our family tradition of supporting the company. So, when she passed away in January 2024, I chose to continue her legacy by remembering the company in my will as well, which brings me great comfort. I hope my bequest will provide opportunities to aspiring dancers to continue their studies and realise their dreams."



TJ Nakasuwan, VIC

“Throughout my association with The Australian Ballet, I have had the privilege of getting to know many supporters who have committed a special gift for the company in their will. They all share a common sentiment: ‘The company has brought so much joy to my life, it’s the least I can do.’

“I am grateful for the sense of belonging and the feeling of being part of a family that The Australian Ballet has given me over the years. I am very proud to be even a very small part of this great legacy and hope my contribution will allow the company to continue being an integral part of the fabric of Australian culture for many generations to come.”



Robyn Tamke, WA

“I am deeply proud of The Australian Ballet. As our national ballet company, it plays a vital cultural role by pushing the boundaries of what ballet can be and bringing a blend of artistry, precision, and passion to every performance.

“It gives me immense peace of mind to know that I can continue supporting The Australian Ballet beyond this world with a gift in my will. This is my way of thanking and honouring the company for the lifelong memories it has given me, while also leaving a lasting imprint. I hope my contribution ensures that the beauty and power of ballet continue to inspire future dancers and audiences.”



Elisabeth Pidd, NSW

“Witnessing the progression of The Australian Ballet’s dancers and the artistry they bring to the stage brings me immense joy. I feel a deep connection to them and a true sense of belonging to the Ballet family.

“Supporting this wonderful art form, which brings me so much pleasure, is very important to me. I hope my contribution will help the company continue to present high-quality ballet performances long into the future.”



Get in touch

Reach out to us to start a confidential conversation and discover how your passion for ballet can help secure a thriving future for our national ballet company.

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Ballet Family events

Regent Seven Seas Cruises® Patrons Tour

13 January 2025, *Seven Seas Explorer*®

Photos Andrew Wright, Vlach Ashton and
Regent Seven Seas Cruises®

Members of our giving community sailed into 2025 with an exclusive lunch courtesy of Regent Seven Seas Cruises®, ultra-luxury travel partner of The Australian Ballet.

Guests indulged in a private gourmet lunch featuring the finest food and wines aboard the opulent *Seven Seas Explorer*®, docked in Melbourne. This rare occasion included an exclusive tour of one of the most luxurious vessels The World's Most Luxurious Fleet™. Guests marvelled at the exquisite all-suite, all-balcony accommodation, world-class theatre, eight dining venues, health spa and outdoor area boasting an infinity pool. The spectacular event offered an ultra-luxury cruise experience that money can't buy.



1. (Anti-clockwise from left) Katrina Knowles, Sheena Broughton, Caroline Reed, Vivien Knowles, Lisa Pile – Vice President Sales & General Manager, Asia Pacific Regent Seven Seas Cruises®, Andrew Wright – The Australian Ballet, Libby Cousins AM, Mandy Collins, Sylvia Allegos, Helen Mantzis – The Australian Ballet Foundation Board and Jim Cousins AO standing on the atrium staircase aboard *Seven Seas Explorer*®

2. The elegant pool deck aboard *Seven Seas Explorer*®

3. The Constellation Theatre radiates a sophisticated atmosphere with a touch of old-world glamour

4. Serene Spa + Wellness™ offers a variety of treatments curated especially for Regent

5. Compass Rose restaurant: the perfect setting for breakfast or dinner

Ballet Ambassador Summer Drinks

5 February 2025 in Malvern, Melbourne
7 February 2025 in Centennial Park, Sydney

Photos Sally Kaack (Melbourne) and
Katje Ford (Sydney)

Our Ballet Ambassadors kicked off the 2025 season with two delightful evenings filled with delicious canapés and refreshing drinks. These special gatherings were generously hosted by Southern Chapter member, Cecilia Rosenberg, and Northern Chapter member, Penny Kyros, in their beautiful homes.



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.

1. (L-R) David Hallberg, Penny Kyros and Leah Bischoff
2. (L-R) Elizabeth Zahra, Fleur Lazarus and Katherine Pontifex
3. (L-R) John Maragiannis, David Wood and Alexandre de Lacharrière
4. (L-R) Katherine Hesse, Kate Griffiths, Belinda Pittorino, Sharon Bennie, Sally Cowper and Rachel Shafran
5. (L-R) Penny Barlow and Cecilia Rosenberg
6. (L-R) Nicky Long and Felicity Bongiorno
7. Guests enjoyed a perfect Melbourne summer evening
8. David Hallberg addresses guests in Melbourne
9. (L-R) Regina Levine, Anna Andrews, Carrie Gourlay, Sarah Alder and Tiffany Levine

THE PHILANTHROPY TEAM

We invite you to reach out with any questions about how your generosity can help ensure a bright and enduring future for Australia's national ballet company.

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Introducing *our new team members*

We've been excited to welcome some new faces to the Philanthropy Team in 2025. Rachel, Holly and Emily bring a wealth of diverse skills and fresh perspectives to the team and are eager to connect with you throughout and beyond Season 2025. Welcome aboard!

PHILANTHROPY EVENTS

We occasionally extend special invitations to our supporters for exclusive in-season events, providing a unique chance to connect more deeply with the company. To discover more, please reach out to us.

Event Enquiries

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Talking Pointe is made from 30% recycled materials from sustainably managed sources.



Scan this QR code to learn more about the power of philanthropy at The Australian Ballet.

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