

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

TALKING POINTE



SUMMER 2024

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 Benedicte Bemet
Above: Principal Artist Ako Kondo
Photos Kate Longley

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Davi Ramos
Photo Kate Longley

Philanthropy Director's welcome

Kenneth Watkins AM



“We are creating *beautiful art* together.”

Earlier this year, our Artistic Director, David Hallberg, brought the entire company together to celebrate achievements, honour professional milestones and to launch our new values: Ambition, Boldness, Inclusivity, Respect and Responsibility.

David spoke to us from the heart, acknowledging our collective power in creating beautiful art together. There are few endeavours more collaborative than staging a ballet and, in an art form requiring a collective effort of hundreds of people, everyone's contribution is invaluable.

At their core, these values encourage all of us to challenge ourselves and each other to innovate with confidence, to act with integrity and care, and to be accountable to each other. It's a sentiment that extends beyond our organisation and into the world around us, including our giving community.

This issue of *Talking Pointe* is a celebration of just that: the power of the collective in a time of innovation. The teams of people working tirelessly to produce performances and bring the joy of dance to the broadest possible audience; the devoted dancers who have dedicated their lives to perfecting their craft in their own unique way; and the generations of patrons, donors, bequestors, subscribers and audience members who are helping our national ballet company to keep doing what we do best: dance for you.

I recently had the pleasure of attending a performance of The Australian Ballet On Tour in my hometown of Whyalla. The buzz was incredible!

When the curtain came down at the end of the show, all the children who had been watching raced down to the stage and kept dancing. It was very moving and reinforced just how powerful these first encounters with The Australian Ballet and live performance can be.

As I reflect on our first two seasons in Melbourne's Regent Theatre, our temporary performance home, David's message rings truer than ever. Of course, the seasons have been spectacular, but I've seen first-hand the effort involved to put on productions of such a high calibre at the venue, not to mention the enormous cost of doing so.

Mercifully, we have the generosity of our greatest advocates and benefactors who are supporting our artistic vision and artistic operations during this critical time.

Major gift fundraising for The David Hallberg Fund for Artistic Aspiration is ensuring we can continue to invest in dynamic repertoire for our new era, that will shine on every stage. Meanwhile generous contributions to our Innovation Campaign are allowing us to evolve our business model and meet the financial demands of the company during this period of disruption. All of which are underpinned by our Annual Giving patrons and Planned Giving community, whose support continues to enrich our artists, elevate our art form and build a foundation upon which our company continues to thrive.

Each and every one of you are making a difference and making us stronger and, for that, we are all grateful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kenneth Watkins'.

Kenneth Watkins AM
Philanthropy Director

Company news

The Australian Ballet is concluding a dynamic year of dance with the exciting news of a well-deserved appointment, a talented artist captured on canvas and a harmonious anniversary.



Megan Connelly. Photo Pierre Toussaint

A new era at The Australian Ballet School

Megan Connelly, a well-respected and beloved member of The Australian Ballet, has taken on a new role at The Australian Ballet School as Artistic Director and Head of School.

Megan becomes the fifth director in The Australian Ballet School's 60-year history, building upon the legacy of outgoing director Lisa Pavane and esteemed predecessors, Marilyn Rowe AM OBE, Gailene Stock CBE AM and founding director Dame Margaret Scott AC DBE.

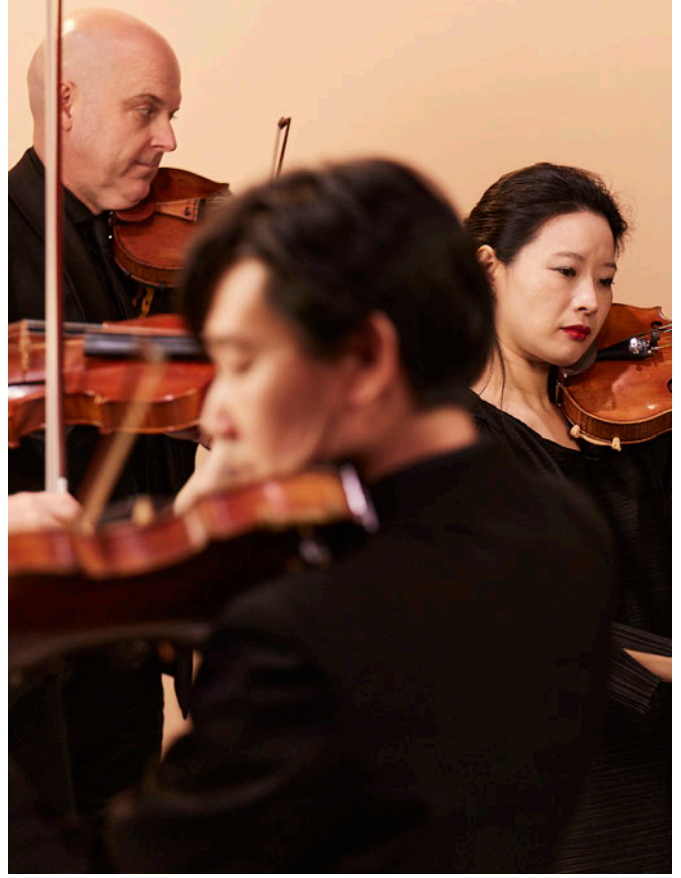
Megan's contributions to The Australian Ballet are extensive. After a career as a dancer, she joined the Artistic Team as David McAllister's Executive Assistant in 2001, before moving into an expanded Artistic Health position in 2009 as Rehabilitation Specialist. Over the following years, Megan has been a guiding light for many – supporting numerous dancers through pregnancies, injuries, surgeries and rehabilitations, and extending or saving the careers of hundreds more.

Artistic Director David Hallberg shared his thoughts on Megan's new position, "While Megan's keen eye for detail, deep knowledge of ballet technique and years on the Artistic Team will all serve her well in her new role, it is her ability to encourage every dancer to be their own unique artist that will bring an exciting new era for the school and for ballet in Australia.

"I am thrilled by Megan's appointment and for the work ahead as we strengthen even further the partnership between The Australian Ballet company and School. How fortunate we are to continue to be enriched by Megan's work as she moves on to train the next generation of dancers."



Principal Artist Callum Linnane by artist Marcus Wills



Orchestra Victoria. Photo Pierre Toussaint

A work of art

Principal Artist Callum Linnane has been immortalised in an oil painting by artist Marcus Wills.

The painting, *Callum*, has earned Wills the honour of being named a finalist in the Archibald Prize – one of Australia's oldest and most prestigious annual art prizes, renowned for reflecting the stories of our times by highlighting notable figures from all walks of life.

Wills, an eight-time Archibald Prize contributor and winner in 2006, was initially drawn to Callum as a fellow artist originating from regional Victoria. "After seeing several photos and short videos featuring Callum, I had the idea for this painting," recounts Wills. "He has a particularly strong face. In all the paintings I've made of dancers – and I've made quite a few – they are never actually dancing, though you still get the sense that they are performing."

Being captured on canvas has been a real privilege, explains Callum. "It was an honour to be painted by Marcus, let alone be submitted for the Archibald Prize. So, for the piece to then be selected as a finalist has been incredible. I'm very grateful to Marcus for the opportunity."

The 2024 Archibald Prize Finalists' artworks are touring galleries across New South Wales until 31 August 2025.

In perfect harmony

Formally the Elizabethan Trust Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria has been a significant player in the ballet and the opera arena since 1969. Today the orchestra is renowned for bringing stories to life through their music – whether in ballet, opera, music theatre, film, video games, or concert repertoire.

July 2024 marked the 10th anniversary of The Australian Ballet's acquisition of Orchestra Victoria.

This musical milestone symbolises a journey of remarkable achievements and shared successes under the leadership of Nicolette Cheetham-Fraillon and Jonathan Lo. The two companies' significant contribution to the arts spans stunning productions, including David McAllister's *The Sleeping Beauty*, John Neumeier's *Nijinsky*, and the innovative *Kunstkamer*; ARIA and Grammy-nominated musical collaborations; the origin of ground-breaking, talent-nurturing initiatives including the Musical Chairs program and the Richard Bonyngé Fellowship; as well as a dynamic presence on the domestic and international touring circuit.

Reflecting on the landmark, David Hallberg commented, "These achievements only scratch the surface of who we are as organisations. Our strength lies in the joy of working closely, in partnership and collaboration. Together, we have created something truly special, and we have much to be proud of. As we look to the future, we can look forward to continuing to build on our solid foundation and achieve even greater heights together."

The importance of being earnest

The sincere storytelling at the heart of *Oscar*®

When The Australian Ballet's Artistic Director, David Hallberg, invited award-winning choreographer Christopher Wheeldon to create a new full-length ballet on the company, there was no hesitation. Christopher was eager to accept and get started.

An admirer of Oscar Wilde since childhood, Christopher had long entertained the idea of creating a work inspired by Oscar's colourful life, but the time and the place had never felt right – until now.

This time was different. David and Christopher were in agreement that audiences were ready to see Oscar's story and for it to be told in a way that challenged the conventions and perceptions of traditional ballet.

"Being gay men, we both have felt there's been a lack of representation of gay stories in more traditional narrative ballet, for obvious reasons," Christopher explains. "We're entering a new era of open conversation around sexuality and of being allowed to be who we are and embracing our uniqueness. It felt like the right time to dive into this story."

Telling a deeply nuanced human story with such societal and historic significance, brings great responsibility. "I believe we should be telling more honest stories in ballet, and I didn't want to be timid about telling this one," shares David. To ensure Oscar's story is conveyed with conviction and sincerity, David and the Artistic Team engaged a team of experts to guide the artists through their character development and elevate the company's storytelling on stage.



“I believe we should be telling more honest stories in ballet, and *I didn't want to be timid about telling this one*”

Artistic Director, David Hallberg



Historical scene-setting

The Australian Ballet's Learning Partner, La Trobe University, has been on the creative journey with the company since *Oscar*® was in its infancy.

As an institution that prides itself on creating real impact, La Trobe University played an instrumental role in the artistic process by preparing a bespoke research paper that explored the societal context of Oscar's lifetime.

Renowned experts in humanities and social sciences generously shared their extensive knowledge of 19th-century culture, identity and sexuality, as well as Oscar Wilde's life and works with the company in an interactive workshop led by Dr. Timothy Jones, Associate Professor, History.

Not only did the research provide an invaluable frame of reference for the entire company, but the insights greatly informed the dancers' artistic interpretations by adding integrity and depth to their individual performances.

Becoming Oscar

Tackling a role like Oscar Wilde is a career-defining and transformative experience. Joseph Caley, Callum Linnane, Jarryd Madden and Brodie James, four seasoned artists for whom the role of Oscar has been created, have approached the opportunity with an earnestness and vulnerability befitting the character.

Reflecting on the experience of exploring sexual identity in the creation, Jarryd shares, “It's super exciting that the company has had the opportunity to work with Christopher Wheeldon to tell a story like this, and humbling to portray something that you're not. Some of our closest friends are queer and, for the better part of their entire careers they've had to 'fall in love' with a gender that they weren't personally attracted to. So, to live in their shoes for once in our professional career and experience what they have, has been a really beautiful moment.”

Echoing Jarryd's sentiment, Callum adds, “It feels like there's a lot of responsibility to show a queer love story on stage and it be completely believable and relatable. It really needs to be honest and true. But that's also why I love this job; you get to play different characters and it's really a lovely challenge to play something that you're not.”

Guiding them through rehearsals was Intimacy Coordinator, Amy Cater, who has been leading the way in navigating sensitive scenes on stage since 2018.

In a move that is relatively new to the world of dance, Amy first worked with The Australian Ballet on *Carmen* earlier in the year, returning later in the season for *Oscar*® to support the dancers through scenes of intimate content.

Outlining Amy's role in the process, Alex Wyatt, Head of Artistic Coordination, explains, “The interesting thing about Amy's job is that she isn't there to stop intimate moments, but instead to help the artists bring depth, texture, intensity and integrity to them in a way that's safe to perform and safe to repeat.”



Amy's role becomes pivotal when the dancers are adding a further layer of nuance or meaning to a scene. By helping the dancers understand, create and communicate their boundaries to one another, they are able to establish a shared language and a playbook for consensual creativity.

Ultimately, this safe space allows everyone involved to explore the moment with comfort and confidence, building a performance that is powerful, individual to the artist and conveyed with conviction for the audience.

Authentic design

A production of the complexity of *Oscar*[®] demands a designer of the highest calibre. Happily, Jean-Marc Puissant, a longtime collaborator of Christopher Wheeldon's, answered the call to create the multifaceted stage and costume designs that represent the authenticity of Oscar's story and actively bring the audience on his journey.

Jean-Marc's dramatic sets transport us to 1880s London in Act I and into a trio of more "abstract, operatic, imagined and contemporary" spaces in Act II. Anchored in three settings synonymous with Oscar's story, they include: the court in which his trial unfolded, the cell where he was detained for two years, and an easel representing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Adorning the dancers are Jean-Marc's costumes inspired by the Victorian era, meticulously produced by The Australian Ballet's Costume Atelier and designed

to help the audience differentiate and navigate between Oscar's life story and his fairytale world.

"All of these characters cohabit the same stage at the same time; sometimes in a rapid succession of scenes" explains Jean-Marc. "I wanted the audience to be very clear about what they're looking at. So, the costumes help the audience navigate the layers of storytelling."

This approach comes sharply into focus in Act II, when audiences see costumes featuring an innovative utilisation of a photo printing technique that transposes snippets of Oscar's actual manuscript onto the fabrics as a device to indicate that the characters of *Dorian Gray* are coming off the page.

Encapsulating his vision, Jean-Marc describes, "In a very simple way, we're trying to bring the audience onto the stage, by joining the scenic space with the audience space as much as possible and immersing the audience fully in the experience. The audience should be separate enough to understand the external story but enmeshed in the world at the same time. It is a complete experience of music, performance and storytelling."

***Oscar*[®] has been generously supported by Lady Potter AC CMRI and The David Hallberg Fund for Artistic Aspiration, and The Robert & Elizabeth Albert Music Fund.**

Above left: Jarryd Madden and Adam Elmes. Photo Daniel Boud
Above: Principal Artists Ako Kondo and Callum Linnane.
Photo Christopher Rodgers-Wilson

Leap

of

faith

Introducing the soloists who changed the course of their careers to realise their childhood dreams



In January of this year, we threw our doors (and arms) widely open to warmly welcome three talented new soloists into the fold.

As they conclude their first full season with the company, we caught up with Davi Ramos, Mia Heathcote and Victor Estévez to reflect on their inaugural year with The Australian Ballet and the unique paths they each took to get here.

Davi Ramos

Hailing from Brazil, Davi trained at The Royal Ballet School in London and was a semi-finalist in the Prix de Lausanne in 2016. Davi joined Het Nationale Ballet in Amsterdam in 2019, where he held the rank of grand sujet.

You've been in Australia since January. How has the experience been for you so far?

It's a very different atmosphere to anywhere I've worked before. People are working hard but also enjoying life – it's a healthy, balanced environment to be in.

As well, because everyone here works together so much, travels together and has fun together, it's like being in a big family. I've come from very competitive environments, so it's been a big change for me, but a very welcome one. I've been here less than a year, but it feels like I've been here for three (years) because everybody's been so lovely and welcoming.

Why did you want to join The Australian Ballet at this point in time?

One of the reasons was that I wanted to learn a different approach to my dancing. Instead of just being focused on 'work, work, work', I wanted to experience life. Now that I am, I'm noticing that it's really helping my ballet because I have greater perspective (from outside of the studio) which is giving me more focus when I'm in the studio.

Mainly though, it was because I've been admiring David Hallberg's work for a long time – in particular his work with the dancers and the repertoire he's bringing to the company – and I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to learn from him as a director.

Has your experience lived up to your expectations?

Yes, absolutely! I can't judge too much, as it's only my first year, but so far it's been great and exactly what I had hoped for.

Have there been any favourite moments for you?

The Australian Ballet On Tour has been such a high point for me. Getting to dance different repertoire with different dancers, guided by different coaches and to see so much of Australia... I was so happy! There were eight of us from the company and the tour brought us so close. We connected so well together and that was amazing because, for me, friends and family are everything.

Whyalla was a real stand out. The audience on the final night were incredible – out of this world. It was just completely different to anything I've ever experienced. To share that experience with our dancers and The Australian Ballet School students made it even more special.

Your eyes light up when you speak about repertoire. What's exciting you most about Season 2025?

Everything! Our next season is super exciting. I've danced *The Sleeping Beauty* before, and it's one of my very favourite ballets, but I'm *really* excited about *Manon*.

It's one thing to dance something that you've done before, because you're comfortable in the role and you can push yourself in a different way. But when you're learning something new and you're having that first experience... that's the feeling that I love. It's why I do what I do. It feels so good to put so much effort into something and then feel the satisfaction of that effort paying off. You feel so fulfilled.

“The repertoire that is being brought to us is *world class* and we're so, *incredibly lucky* to have the chance to dance it.”

Mia Heathcote

Mia Heathcote

Melbourne-born Mia has danced captivating lead roles including the title role in *Manon*. She graduated from The Australian Ballet School in 2013 and joined the Queensland Ballet in early 2014 before being promoted to principal artist in 2022.

How does it feel to be back in Melbourne at the Primrose Potter Australian Ballet Centre where it all began for you?

It's felt both very nostalgic and a little strange to be back where I grew up. There's a lot that has changed: the building, the era of dancers (to the ones I grew up watching) and I'm different too. But there's also so much that's familiar to me and the essence of The Australian Ballet remains strong, which is reassuring and means that it has also felt like coming home.

Why did it feel like the right time to take this next step?

It's funny, as a child I always felt like I wanted to be part of The Australian Ballet one day. And, while I was really enjoying my career at Queensland Ballet and knew I could be there for a long time, I was also mindful that I was potentially approaching the half-way point of my career.

While I've never had a concrete plan laid out for my life, I've also learned to follow my heart and I was feeling the pull to the company. While change really scares me, it's also a great motivator and it really drives me. I knew it was time for a new experience and to grow in a different way. There's just so much growth to be had by putting yourself out there and taking a leap.

What have been some of the highlights from your first year?

Without question, it would have to be the experience of creating new works with choreographers Stephanie Lake (The Australian Ballet's Resident Choreographer) and Christopher Wheeldon.

It was so nice to be in a room creating *Circle Electric* with Steph and a real bonding experience for the whole company, who were in the studio together day in, day out. Working with Steph is great because there are no rules in her rehearsals. Whatever you do is celebrated, which makes it a really encouraging environment to be in and it meant that I got to know people in a really safe, creative space.

Working with Chris has been a dream too. I really thrive in that kind of narrative, neo-classical space and I love creating new movements and telling stories, so it's been a fantastic experience to be involved in.

Looking at our repertoire for Season 2025, are there any works or roles that you're most excited about dancing?

Personally, I've always loved the really dramatic roles. The ones that you can let loose on stage and allow the story to take over. So, I'm very excited to revisit *Manon*, which has been such a special ballet to me. That said, I've never danced Jerome Robbins' work and I've never worked with William Forsythe, so I'm so excited to have that opportunity as well.

I think it's so incredible that David's able to attract these amazing creators and collaborators and I feel very lucky to be here right now. The repertoire that is being brought to us is world class and we're so, incredibly lucky to have the chance to dance it.





Victor Estévez

Cuban dancer Victor danced with the National Ballet of Cuba before joining the Queensland Ballet as a principal artist in 2016. Victor has gone on to dance many leading roles across the classical and contemporary repertoire, including Romeo in Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Prince Siegfried in Ben Stevenson's *Swan Lake*.

What attracted you to The Australian Ballet at this point of your career?

Interestingly, I've been following The Australian Ballet for as long as I can remember, since before I joined Queensland Ballet. I feel like if I really rewind, I've always had an interest in the company. But, as a kid growing up in Cuba, it always felt a little out of reach...

When I moved to Australia and joined Queensland Ballet, I had a great time. I fell in love with the company, I fell in love with the people, and I had an opportunity to create my home there while progressing my career. After eight years though, it felt like it was the time to try and realise my dream of dancing with The Australian Ballet. Especially after seeing the great impact David Hallberg was having on the company.

So, how has it been to realise that dream?

I grew up looking up to David. The leadership he brings to the studio, the way he takes care of the next generation coming up through the company and the values he inspires in his artists has been great to experience. It's what I was looking for and has been what I needed, in terms of growth.

What have been some of the highlights from your first season with the company?

The biggest personal highlight has been the change to how I feel inside. This change has reminded me of what it felt like when I was starting out in my career – that fire you have as a kid. Sometimes along the way, that fire fizzles out, but this move has brought it back.

As well, the repertoire that I've been exposed to since joining the company. Working with Christopher Wheeldon twice in one year has been a huge highlight. I've been wanting to work with him for such a long time. The company operates under a very demanding schedule with such a contrasting repertoire. It's taking time to get used to it all but, with that said, it's just what I wanted and needed!

What was the experience like working with Christopher on creating the production, and the characters within *Oscar*®?

Amazing. He had such a clear vision of what he wanted in every single aspect, he combined the music to the movement while also seeing the other technical side of the work in his mind already. Chris facilitates a very creative environment but, deeper down, I feel like he also really understands the dancer. It's special to work with a choreographer who understands the individual artists and how to make them look their best with the unique qualities they have to offer.

Looking ahead to 2025, what are you most looking forward to dancing?

Manon is going to have to be my highlight. This work came into my career at a time where I was going through a very hard time. I danced the role of Des Grieux the following year after losing my dad. I was struggling and feeling artistically stuck. It's only now, when I reflect on the time, that I can see I was waiting for a role like Des Grieux to unlock me.

I danced this production with Alina Cojocaru as Manon in 2022. Since then, something shifted. *Manon* opened new artistic avenues, emotions and helped me move through the hardest time of my life. I believe the role of Des Grieux and the experience I had with this ballet has reshaped who I am today as an artist. I have very fond memories of this ballet and my heart sings to know I'll get to revisit it in 2025.

Courageous

The artistic avenues
being forged in 2025

Strap in—Season 2025 is set to take us on an artistic adventure with a thrilling program of ballet that will be both memorable and transformative for audiences and artists alike.

Featuring revivals of beloved full-length narrative ballets, *Manon*, *Nijinsky* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, alongside the striking, contemporary retelling of *Carmen*, and *Prism* – a triple bill exemplifying the pinnacle of choreographic vision – the repertoire promises to showcase the versatility and depth of the company's growing artistic talents.

Leading us on this journey is David Hallberg, the company's eighth Artistic Director. Now in his fourth year, David is feeling more assured than ever in his artistic direction, which, he says, has “refined and sharpened” through his deepening connection with the organisation, artists and audience.

A woman with dark hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a long-sleeved, shimmering fishnet dress. She is looking slightly to her left with a neutral expression. Her right arm is raised, with her hand near her head, and her left hand is resting near her chest. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the fishnet and her skin against a dark background.

creativity

Artistic design

In curating the program for the year ahead, David has devised a diverse season to honour both our company's past and future. A repertoire that celebrates the lineage of traditional ballet, while simultaneously exploring new creative horizons.

"I'm always aware of creating a season that's equally as satiating for the audience as it is for the dancers," explains David, "and I feel like I've achieved that for 2025."

"Every season needs a balance and we're fortunate that a company of our size and influence can deliver the full arc of storytelling and style. In 2025, we're bringing a full repertoire featuring substantial works of the highest quality that complements the power of storytelling with the beauty of movement," David continues.

"It's a broad and diverse palette for the company's dancers. They'll be created on; they'll be stretched dramatically, mentally and technically; and they'll be demanded of classically, but they're so ready for it."

Below: Yaru Xu with Resident Choreographer Stephanie Lake
Right: Artistic Director David Hallberg with Drew Hedditch
Photos Kate Longley



“They’ll be created on; they’ll be stretched dramatically, mentally and technically; and they’ll be demanded of classically”

Artistic Director, David Hallberg





Dancer enrichment

One of the most fulfilling elements of David's role is dancer development and direction. For the past three years, he has been building the confidence and technique of the next generation of principal artists, by selecting repertoire that gives dancers of all ranks the chance to shine.

Moving into 2025, David's attention will be turning to the senior ranks of the company and, with a stellar season to sink their teeth into, it's the perfect time to make this gear shift.

It's been close to a decade since the company last performed *Manon*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Nijinsky*, meaning many of the artists will be encountering the formative opportunities of dancing the leading roles for the first time. "Looking at the principal roles in our 2025 repertoire – Princess Aurora, Prince Désiré, Manon, Des Grieux, Carmen, Don José, Nijinsky – they're all amazing creative and vehicles for whoever's dancing them," David explains.

Now that David is on the other side of the curtain, he is attracting globally revered guest coaches and répétiteurs to complement his Artistic Team, and rolling up his sleeves in the studio too. "I love coaching and guiding the dancers and giving them the agency to be the star of their performance. Ballet's very good at telling dancers what to do, and I'm trying to break that down a bit.

"I find great fulfillment in giving the principal dancers, or those dancing principal roles, a sense of control in terms of how they want to interpret their roles," shares David. "It's not something that I manifested much myself and I wish I had, because the dancers I was most attracted to watching and dancing with were the ones who had their own voice and made their own choices."

"I see my role as a guiding one. Not telling the dancers what to do, but helping them to find and listen to their inner voices, letting them make their own decisions, and encouraging them to explore limits that they maybe don't know how to reach yet. I'm very excited to see what the year ahead brings."

Above: Principal Artists Benedicte Bemet and Joseph Caley
Right: Principal Artist Callum Linnane
Photos Kate Longley



Creative partnerships

Season 2025 will be punctuated by “collaborations with esteemed creatives who I greatly admire, and whose partnerships will empower our dancers to blossom in new and exciting ways”, reveals David.

Working with new artistic influences fosters growth in dancers, the expansion of their creative horizons, and an exploration of new styles and techniques that lead to unique and inspiring performances across all styles of dance.

“Take John Neumeier, for example,” adds David, “He’s a prolific storyteller – globally regarded as one of the greats. His work (*Nijinsky*) demands a great deal from the dancers and his approach always brings the best out of them.”

Also driving this creative and technical swell is *Prism*, a showcase of three extraordinary choreographic talents, encompassing the spectrum of contemporary dance. The triple-bill features two premieres: William Forsythe’s expansion on his *Blake Works* series, *Blake Works VI: The Barre Project*, and a new work from Resident

Choreographer Stephanie Lake. *Prism* also sees the Australian debut of American dance master Jerome Robbins’ *Glass Pieces*, more than four decades since its creation.

Through rehearsing works of such range, dancers can push the boundaries of their art, and create memorable and impactful experiences, which ultimately contribute to the enrichment of the cultural landscape and the evolution of dance.

William Forsythe is another distinguished visionary who will be working with the company in 2025. “There’s no-one still living today that has pushed ballet into a new vocabulary quite like William Forsythe. So, to have him – one of the geniuses of ballet – coming to Melbourne to work with the dancers is going to be incredible,” David comments.

“He has iconic status and is an amazing creature of the studio: so inspirational, so positive, such a motivator, and someone who gives you total autonomy as an artist. I’m really looking forward to seeing the dancers dive deep into these creative processes. It will be a phenomenal experience for our dancers, and ultimately our audiences too.”

Community spirit

Harnessing collaboration to create
deeper community connections



Larissa Kiyoto-Ward and Mason Lovegrove
Photo Jonathan van der Knaap

As Australia's national ballet company and a cultural leader with a far-reaching footprint, we are deeply devoted to bringing the joy of dance to communities across the country, beyond our capital cities.

This ambition has been a commitment of The Australian Ballet's for more than 40 years and is delivered by two independent but complementary and increasingly intertwining bodies of work: The Australian Ballet On Tour and our suite of Education and Outreach initiatives.

Generously funded by members of our philanthropic community, both programs have coexisted to offer important artistic experiences across the country. However, increased efforts are being made to align them more closely to deepen connections within the communities we work with.

Central to this evolution are Education and Outreach Producers, Jasmin Dwyer and Kennedy Patch and Touring Producers, Hannah Denison and Becky Ruffell – four colleagues and keen collaborators with a shared passion for social impact and a brilliant team around them.

Driven by a desire for increased, purposeful integration, Jasmin explains, "Dance has the power to bring people together but, when we visit these locations, we know that not everyone is going to come into the theatre. We've been actively looking at ways to better engage the community as a whole. We want to meet the residents where they're at and, in doing so, try to find a way to make dance relevant to them."



“We’re all there for the same reason: *to share the joy of dance*, and that’s incredibly special.”

Associate Touring Producer, Hannah Denison



Photos supplied by The Australian Ballet On Tour and Education & Outreach touring parties

Better together

Ultimately, a range of factors dictate the various touring paths both programs take around the country. Yet, in the locations where The Australian Ballet On Tour and Education and Outreach activities coincide, every effort is taken to create a fully accessible, inclusive and immersive experience for residents, all in full consultation with community leaders.

In 2024, The Australian Ballet On Tour crossed paths with the Education and Outreach team in Bendigo, Tanunda, Whyalla, Goulburn, Newcastle and Wagga Wagga. In addition to delivering performances of the highest quality as part of the Tour, our Education and Outreach team members delivered hundreds of workshops, creative residencies and performances to schools, theatres and communities, reaching 6,300 people in the six overlapping areas.

Reiterating the collective effort at the heart of the company's community engagement, Jasmin emphasises, "Our teaching artists, who specialise in facilitating these community-engaged dance programs are the unsung heroes here. They bring staggering amounts of enthusiasm, expertise and energy to all they do. We couldn't realise a fraction of our aspirations without them."

A highlight in recent years has been an initiative where a local dance group is invited to open a performance of The Australian Ballet On Tour with their own 'curtain-raiser' performance. In 2024, the Barradambang Dancers opened a performance in Wagga Wagga with their work *Barradambang Wattle*, choreographed by Ella Havelka, Wiradjuri artist and former dancer with The Australian Ballet, in collaboration with local Wiradjuri Elders and First Nations composer Tristan Field.

Sharing the spotlight

"Through collaborations like the curtain raiser, we've been able to use our platform to showcase young local talent in a professional arena. Not only has this built huge camaraderie between our touring company and the curtain raiser dancers, but it's also created an authentic, shared space and elevated the profile of local talent and dance groups in their immediate community," explains Jasmin.

A hard-working partnership has been paramount in driving the success of the two programs' integration. "We're always mindful of wanting to offer relevant, attainable and respectful experiences to the communities we're

spending time with who have their own unique arts cultures. So, we make a concerted effort to consult with the communities in advance and ask if our programs will be useful and valuable to them."

Of course, the enthusiasm of the dancers from The Australian Ballet and The Australian Ballet School goes a long way towards creating a wholeheartedly positive and reciprocal environment at each stop on the tour, and this comes in droves. "Sharing dance can be so powerful," says Jasmin. "The dancers can see how valuable this community engagement is, and in many cases, they can see themselves in some of these kids."

Reflecting on her first professional dancing experience, Zoe Horn, The Australian Ballet School House Captain and 2024 Touring Company Dancer, shares, "Wagga Wagga was a real highlight for me. We got to share in the joy of the young Barradambang Dancers who were onstage dancing the curtain raiser and then participate in a traditional smoking ceremony with them too. It was such a beautiful moment of connection with the local community, with the touring company and with the Education and Outreach team. All working together to close off the amazing tour as one."

A path to progress

It's been three years since Hannah, Jasmin, Kennedy and Becky started working together in this format, and their efforts are taking the program from strength to strength. "When we stepped into our roles, we wanted to bring a cohesive and collaborative way of working to build stronger relationships within the communities we engage with," shares Hannah.

"We're now seeing the result of increased consistency and continuity on the impact of our work, and it's invaluable. The results speak for themselves when you experience them firsthand. When the lights go down and the curtain goes up, and you've got a group of local people doing what they love with a full audience supporting them all the way, it really hits home. We're all there for the same reason: to share the joy of dance, and that's incredibly special."

The visionary philanthropic support from contributors to The Regional Touring Fund, The Ballet Society Victoria, the James & Diana Ramsay Foundation, Sir Andrew and Lady Fairley Foundation, Graf Family Foundation, James N Kirby Foundation, Cory Charitable Foundation, Dr Lee McCormick Edwards Charitable Foundation, Colonial Foundation, DECJUBA Foundation and many generous individual donors across Australia allow these programs to be delivered at no cost every year.



Drew Hedditch, President of Annual Giving Natasha Bowness and Annabelle Watt

“The Australian Ballet *will be in lights!*”

Philanthropy Ambassadors, Drew Hedditch and Annabelle Watt,
behind the scenes at the Regent Theatre

Photos Simon Eeles

It's been nearly a year since Coryphée Drew Hedditch and Corps de Ballet dancer Annabelle Watt stepped into their roles as Philanthropy Ambassadors, serving as the special link between our talented dancers and the extraordinary community of supporters surrounding the company.

Ahead of the world premiere of *Oscar*®, Natasha Bowness, President of Annual Giving, met with Drew and Annabelle for an exclusive look 'behind the curtain' of the company's temporary new residence in Melbourne: the Regent Theatre.

Reflecting on the power of the collective when creating a new work, the dancers' enthusiasm for their new performance space, and the diverse repertoire in store for 2025, Annabelle and Drew couldn't hide their excitement for the direction The Australian Ballet is taking.

How has it been working with one of the world's leading choreographers, Christopher Wheeldon, on the creation of *Oscar*®?

Drew

It's been a really fulfilling experience. Chris knows what he wants to work on and what he wants to achieve, and he's so well prepared on every front: musically, choreographically, from a storytelling perspective. Every element is there and ready to go.

Of course, there is still the trial-and-error process that we often find when we're creating new works, but there are also so many layers to his genius that really translate and land with the company.

Can that be challenging, because you don't know what's coming next?

Annabelle

I've found that you just have to lean into the process. It's not just about the steps that you're dancing; it's about the way the sets are positioned, how the music comes into play, and how the costumes move when we do. It takes an absolute village to make a production of this scale possible.

Drew

Yes, and Chris is at the epicentre of it all. He's hyper-aware of every aspect of what's happening on stage, for example: where the set is going to move to, and at what count in the music. His brain is holding all the information, and it's amazing to witness, because we know that it will all tie together when we step into the theatre and onto the stage.

That's fascinating. So, is it a significant change for you when you move into the theatre?

Annabelle

It is. The technical rehearsal process can be really complex and quite slow with a new work like this. It's for a good reason though, because there are so many moving parts to bring together. Especially in this case, in a theatre where we haven't performed before.

Drew

The music will also sound completely different once the orchestra plays it, so that will take some time to adjust to as well.



How have the dancers felt about moving to the Regent Theatre?

Annabelle

We've had the privilege of being at the State Theatre for so long, which has been wonderful - it's lovely having a home and knowing what to expect when you go out on stage every time. At the same time, to be in the city, right at the heart of the action... it's going to be great!

Drew

What I love too, is that the Regent is one of those theatres that has the lights out the front. So, that whole thing where people say 'you'll have your name in lights', we actually will. The Australian Ballet will be in lights!

You've had a fabulous program of repertoire to dance in 2024 and Season 2025 looks like it will offer you even more wonderful opportunities as artists. What are you most looking forward to?

Drew

Manon was the first ballet I ever did with The Australian Ballet, and I've been waiting for it to come back ever since. I think it has one of the most incredible stories in ballet, so it'll be really special to revisit that one as a more experienced dancer.

Nijinsky holds a special place in my heart too. It was the first production I had a featured role in. I played Stanislav, Nijinsky's elder brother, and it was a role that really pushed me. It's a confronting, at times brutal ballet, so going back into that world John Neumeier created will mean a lot as an artist.

Annabelle

I'm really excited for *The Sleeping Beauty*. I had the opportunity to dance some of the repertoire from it when I was at The Australian Ballet School and, again, in this year's The Australian Ballet On Tour, so it's been an important thread throughout my career so far.

The opulence of the show and the number of performances we get to give really suits my personality. I loved the scale of the *Swan Lake* season in 2023 and this is similar. I think it's the endurance element of the season that I thrive on - it's so rewarding to bring the work to so many people.

At the opposite end of the scale, I can't wait for William Forsythe's *Blake Works VI: The Barre Project*. It's ballet in its most extreme form, which I absolutely love. I'm so excited for the challenge.

What's that experience like for you as artists? Is it energising?

Drew

It's great. It's good to be pushed, and to have the peace of mind that we have the support of everyone in the company (and around it!) leading into it. Working together to realise a new work like *Oscar*® really highlights how much of a team we are.

Annabelle

And how fantastic to be bringing in this brand-new production at our new performance home in Melbourne!

Speaking of being challenged, David Hallberg has brought some of the greatest names in ballet into the studio this year to stretch you and build you in different ways. How has that been for you?

Annabelle

To have people like Sylvie Guillem and Isabelle Guerin (former Étoiles of Paris Opera Ballet) in the studio opens your eyes to how ballet is taught and danced in each company. It's so different, the way people approach technique... You'd think ballet is a one-size-fits-all thing, but it's not – their approaches are so different and their ideas are so fresh.

Drew

What I think has been so special about having the guest coaches come in and complement the work our Artistic Team does, is the way that it keeps our passion alive and ignites us further. Their influence drives us to be better dancers which translates through rehearsals and onto the stage.





Planned Giving Ambassador and bequestor, David McAllister AC on creating a legacy of love

“Ultimately, it’s about *helping to pave the way for the next generation*, and I can’t help but say ‘yes’ to that.”

David McAllister stepped away from The Australian Ballet in late 2020, retiring after an astonishing almost 40-year career with the company, first as a dancer and then as Artistic Director.

At the time he planned to embrace his retirement wholeheartedly, but the pandemic (and his undeniable connection to the art form and sense of duty) had other ideas. He hasn’t stopped.

Working around the world, first in Finland on a production of *Swan Lake* with the Finnish National Ballet, which he describes as “an 18-month odyssey”; guiding Royal New Zealand Ballet through a period of transition between Artistic Directors; writing his second book, *Ballet Confidential: A personal behind-the-scenes guide*; and now returning to his Perth roots as Guest Artistic Director for West Australian Ballet.

Yet, throughout this period, David couldn’t stop himself from returning to the Primrose Potter Australian Ballet Centre along the way. First in 2021 to be involved with the creation of a new ballet, *Butterfly* by Lucas Jervies, on the students of The Australian Ballet School; returning in 2022 to stage the choreography of *Swan Lake Variations* for the company’s Regional Tour; before dusting off his ballet flats for Alice Topp’s *Paragon*, a highlight of the company’s 60th anniversary season in 2023, in which he “rediscovered my great joy of ballet and felt like that seven-year-old kid again.”

In 2025, David McAllister will reunite with The Australian Ballet for the return of his enchanting ballet, *The Sleeping Beauty*. “It was such a thrill when David (Hallberg) rang me to ask if I could come back and help to reinstate the production. To know that this ‘thing’ – the first big thing I did – will have a life beyond my directorship is very special,” says David. It’s been a decade since our philanthropic

community enabled the work to be created and McAllister is looking forward to seeing the “generational shift in the dancers and to see new artists tackle the roles.”

The evolution of the art form and company under David Hallberg’s directorship is a source of great excitement for David McAllister. “Ballet has constantly evolved from the court of Louis XIV and ballet companies are no different. They’re innately kinetic environments – not just the physical movement, but the people who are moving and changing too, and that’s so exciting to me. I think one of the great legacies of The Australian Ballet is the evolution that comes with every generation’s artistic exploration and the risk taking to reflect the community of the day. We’re seeing this with David Hallberg’s leadership too, and it’s terrific.

“I love being an audience member now. It’s such a privilege to be on the other side of the curtain, paying witness to the company fully becoming David Hallberg’s. Take *Kunstkamer*, for example. It was simply amazing, and it really signalled a fresh outlook for the company. To see his taste and his coaching reflected in the performances has been beautiful.”

David’s passion for the advancement of The Australian Ballet is one of the reasons he cherishes his continued involvement with the company as Planned Giving Ambassador. “I’m very much a product of The Australian Ballet and it’s a place that will always be very close to my heart. Much like my decision to support the company by including a bequest in my will, when I was invited to take on the ambassadorial role, I knew I wanted to because it’s another way I can help to ensure the future of the company.”

Speaking of his decision to include The Australian Ballet in his will, David reflects on the company’s standing in the country’s cultural landscape. “Arts organisations can be quite ephemeral, but I think The Australian Ballet is such an important artistic institution and it’s up to all of us to ensure that it continues in this way, by making the company both artistically and financially strong. As dance lovers and as arts lovers, if we want these vital companies to exist in all their glory in the future, we have to support them.”





The beauty of a bequest, explains David, is that it doesn’t require you to be able to make a financial contribution in your lifetime. “Not everyone has the capacity during their lives to be able to support at the level that they might like to. With a gift in your will, it’s a way that you can make a huge difference to the organisation and create a meaningful legacy as well.”

So, what’s next for David after *The Sleeping Beauty* in 2025? “I keep saying that 2026 will be my year to reconnect with retirement, but I haven’t stopped since I left the building so... It’s just been so great to draw on all the experiences I’ve had with The Australian Ballet – one of the benchmark companies in the world – and to share some of that knowledge with other organisations. Ultimately, it’s all about helping to pave the way for the next generation, and I can’t help but say ‘yes’ to that.”

How to remember The Australian Ballet in your will

Discuss your plans: We encourage you to discuss your estate with your loved ones and to seek legal advice.

Consider your options: After these important conversations, decide how you would like to include The Australian Ballet in your will.

-  **Percentage**
You can leave a percentage of your entire estate.
-  **Residual**
You can leave the balance of your estate, once you have looked after your loved ones.
-  **Fixed**
You can specify an amount to gift the company.
-  **Specific**
You can nominate other items of value, including real estate or shares.

Incorporate your gift: Add your chosen gift to your will and remember that our team is available to help with the appropriate wording. Further information is also available on our website.

Confirm your commitment: Contact our team to confirm your commitment, so we can welcome you into our Planned Giving community.

Since 1990 many devoted members of our community have chosen to remember The Australian Ballet in their wills. These heartfelt gifts of all sizes have laid a strong foundation, *ensuring that our national ballet company and the magic of the art form will continue to thrive.*

Contact us to learn how your love of ballet can create joy and inspiration into the future.



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In our winter issue of *Talking Pointe*, we mistakenly attributed an incorrect image to the story featuring our supporter, Emilia Cross (pictured). We sincerely apologise for this error and any confusion it may have caused.



Ballet without barriers

Making the magic of dance accessible to all

Anybody who has been fortunate enough to sit in the audience to watch a live ballet performance will appreciate how special it is.

It is a formative and wholly unique experience, shared only with the performers and audience members who were present in that moment with you. An energetically and emotionally charged environment that captivates and inspires, creates lasting memories, and compels those who are able to do so, to come back time and time (and time) again.

Unfortunately, for a myriad of reasons, many of our most devoted supporters are not able to attend live performances as often as they would like.

As Australia's national ballet company, our goal is to give dance lovers from all walks of life the chance to share the joy of live ballet. Now, thanks to the generosity of Metal Manufacturers Pty Limited and the support of our partners Telstra and Arcare Aged Care, we are advancing this commitment with two new initiatives.

Livestream screenings

One of Australia's leading residential aged care providers, Arcare Aged Care, is presenting special screenings of The Australian Ballet's livestreamed performances for residents across its 53 communities.

For those with a lifelong love of the arts, this partnership is fostering an uplifting source of connection, wellbeing and inspiration for people who once enjoyed visits to the theatre and cherish special memories of such occasions, but who are no longer in the position to attend as frequently.

"Regular access to the arts is a vital part of ensuring long lasting health and wellbeing," explains Colin Singh, Arcare CEO. "As those responsible for the care of circa 5,000 individuals across Australia, we are proud to be working with The Australian Ballet to livestream their world-class performances into every one of our residences."

Livestream on Ballet TV is generously supported by Metal Manufacturers Pty Limited and the Dr Lee MacCormick Edwards Charitable Foundation.

Telstra Ballet Ballot

In a bold new initiative, The Australian Ballet and Telstra are giving all Australians the opportunity to experience world-class ballet for just \$40.

The \$40 Telstra Ballet Ballot celebrates our remarkable 40-year partnership with Principal Partner Telstra – one of the longest-running arts collaborations in the country.

To mark this milestone, the ballot is offering 10 tickets to each mainstage performance for \$40 each. So, whether you are a dance aficionado or simply curious about the art form, you can dive into the dynamism, joy and beauty of ballet.

Artistic Director David Hallberg says, "The \$40 Telstra Ballet Ballot is a significant step towards making the enchanting world of ballet accessible to a broader audience. We believe that ballet should be accessible to everyone, and this initiative is vital to breaking down financial barriers and allowing more people to enjoy the beauty and artistry of our performances," adds David.

The \$40 Telstra Ballet Ballot will continue in 2025 with eligible performances including *Carmen*, *Manon*, *Nijinsky*, *Prism* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.



Scan the QR code
for more information

Ballet Family events

Ballet Family Lunch

8 August 2024

Garden Restaurant,
National Gallery of Victoria

Photos Holly Osborne

In August, our Ballet Family Lunch brought together supporters from across Victoria to celebrate the company's ongoing and evolving commitment to create meaningful, inspiring connections with communities around regional Australia.

Set against the inspiring backdrop of the National Gallery of Victoria, guests enjoyed a beautiful three-course lunch, a luxury raffle, and a lively fireside chat between Philanthropy Manager Andrew Wright and Corps de Ballet artist and Philanthropy Ambassador Annabelle Watt. The event successfully raised close to \$60,000 to support The Australian Ballet On Tour as well as the company's wide-reaching and inclusive community engagement initiatives.



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1. (L to R) The Ballet Family Lunch Committee: Sarah Alder, Cara Elsley, Regina Levine (Co-Chair), David Wynne, Cecilia Rosenberg (Co-Chair), Lisa Bolte, Ann Wilde, Penny Barlow

2. (L-R) Briana Voltz, Helena Dowers, Georgia Pelicano, Nadine Rosham, Sesil Arzadian, Vicky Zaparas, Sally Dreaver, Ricardo Merlo

3. Philanthropy Manager, Andrew Wright in conversation with Corps de Ballet dancer, Annabelle Watt

4. Jonathan Lo, Music Director and Chief Conductor, addresses guests

5. (L-R) Lisa Bolte, Katrina Holmes A Court, Kia Sadler

6. Lady Potter AC CMRI, President Emeritus of Annual Giving

Ballet Lover Morning Teas

We like to stay connected with our patrons all year round, and especially during the winter when it can feel like a long time between performances.

This year, Planned Giving Managers Sonia Brennan and Jane Harris hosted a series of Ballet Lover Morning Teas in Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle and Canberra as well as many of the surrounding suburbs, inviting patrons to get together with likeminded supporters from their local area to share their ballet stories and to hear the latest news from the company.



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1. (L-R) Canberra supporters Caroline Ross-Smith, Suzanne Swensson, Carol McNally, Carolyn Norrie with Planned Giving Manager Sonia Brennan
2. (L-R) Supporters Fiona Razavet, Patricia Boyle, Verity Mathews, Pamela Behncke, Sonia Brennan, Elizabeth Swanton and Shirley Hedditch in Canberra
3. (L-R) Sonia Brennan with supporters Bryony Cox, Ava Emdin, Rosemary Barnard, Tim Cox and Pamela Whalan in Newcastle
4. (L-R) Sonia Brennan, Rod Diamond, Mary Molloy, Wendy Hackney and Susan Green

Oscar® World Premiere and Opening Night

13 September 2024
The Regent Theatre, Melbourne

Photos Getty and The A Lister Photographers

September saw the world premiere of *Oscar*®, The Australian Ballet's bold and beautiful new ballet created by Christopher Wheeldon. Our inaugural opening night at Melbourne's illustrious Regent Theatre was attended by the who's who of the city's cosmopolitan arts scene, celebrating the luminous legacy of one of the world's greatest literary talents.



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1. (L-R) Joby Talbot, Christopher Wheeldon, David Hallberg and Jean-Marc Puisseant
2. Lady Potter AC CMRI* and David Hallberg
3. (L-R) Sam Hupert, Jacky Hupert
4. (L-R) Rob Cassen, Brooke Cassen
5. (L-R) Barbara Duhig*, Barbara Bedwell*
6. (L-R) James Lake, Andrew Henderson, Jane Greenslade and Robert Greenslade
7. (L-R) Philip Aiken AM, Deborah McMurtrie*, Fran Aiken, Sue Chisholm, Kenneth Watkins AM
8. (L-R) Adam Santilli and Igor Zambelli *

*Contributors to The David Hallberg Fund for Artistic Aspiration, which made the production of *Oscar*® possible.

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

1300 752 900
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Scan this QR code to learn more about the power of philanthropy at The Australian Ballet.

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