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HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES UPDATES TO ITS 2020-2021 SEASON

Nonprofit reimagines season and rallies community support

HOUSTON, TEXAS [July 20, 2020] — Houston Ballet joins the ranks of many performing arts groups as it announces changes for its 2020-2021 season. The nonprofit reimagines its fall offerings and launches efforts to ensure its future.

Due to the ongoing pandemic and recovery forecasting, the schedule for Houston Ballet's fall in-theater performances has changed. Season package repertoires, *Love Letters* (September 11-20, 2020) and *Mayerling* (September 24 – October 4, 2020) will not be held in person during their regularly scheduled times. Subscribers will receive fulfillment for this portion of their investment via to be determined digital fall programs and/or rescheduled in-person performances in 2021. *The Nutcracker* (November 27 – December 27, 2020), which generates \$5 million in revenue, will not be performed as planned. The organization hopes to hold its first in-theater performance with the Margaret Alkek Williams Jubilee of Dance on December 4, followed by a limited number of performances of a holiday special. Subscribers will receive more information about these changes via email.

The nonprofit, which lost \$1.3 million in revenue over three canceled ticketed productions alone, filled the remainder of its canceled 2019-2020 season with an abundance of digital content. It upheld its promise to season subscribers and single ticket holders through *Brunch with Houston Ballet*, delivering exclusive on-demand videos of 16 previously recorded ballets. *HB at Home*, a social media series of videos, welcomed viewers daily to new dancer generated content. The well-established *Dance Talks* lecture series reached new audiences through digital Zoom conversations entitled *After the Curtain Falls* and *The Dancer Perspective*.

"We are not finished creating," says Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch. "We've demonstrated that time and time again. While the future is uncertain, this is not. We can and will bring high-quality art to this city through dance, whether you see it from the house of a theater or your living room couch."

Houston Ballet's staff members are diligently preparing solutions for multiple scenarios in a reimagined 2020-2021 season. They hope to know more in the coming months about alternative programming, after further discussions with artists unions and healthcare partners.

"This pandemic is not the first time we've had to get creative behind the scenes so our dancers and production staff can make magic happen onstage," says Houston Ballet Marketing and PR Director Angela Lee, who is well-seasoned from canceled and reshuffled performances from natural disasters such as Hurricane Harvey. "We are considering all options for the future, from how to create a safer theater to optimizing technology for virtual experiences."

While many arts organizations were forced into resource conservation early on, Houston Ballet's full-time employees and professional dancers remained employed and received full pay and benefits throughout the interrupted 2019-2020 season. Leadership made this promise in late March and upheld it through the season's end in late June. With the dramatic toll to the fall lineup, the 2020-2021 season will show greater hardship. Approximately 30 percent of full-time staff, largely in positions where they are unable to perform normal duties during the pandemic, are laid off until further notice. Those remaining will see decreased wages, handled in tiers with the greatest pay cuts at the top of the organization. Dancers and orchestra members' regularly scheduled layoff will extend without a specific return date.

"We've had to make difficult decisions for the season ahead, because of the prolonged COVID-19 crisis," says Houston Ballet Executive Director Jim Nelson. "Every member of our Houston Ballet family will be affected at some point during the season. It's paramount that we make these changes to safeguard the longevity of our organization."

To ensure Houston Ballet successfully emerges from this pandemic with its world-renowned ballet company and staff who support them intact, it will take more than budget cuts. To address the devastating loss of ticket revenue, Houston Ballet has launched a \$5 million fundraising campaign to restore its artists and staff.

"With strong support from the Board of Trustees, we have already raised more than \$1 million towards this campaign goal, which includes a generous dollar-for-dollar challenge grant from The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts," says Houston Ballet Chief Development Officer Angela Lane. "Even so, the pandemic presents the most significant financial challenge Houston Ballet has ever faced, and we need community-wide support to emerge from this crisis."

The campaign is spearheaded by a committee of Houston philanthropists who are eager to keep this artform a part of the city's community. Many of these Houstonians are longtime supporters of Houston Ballet and have watched it grow into the prestigious 61-dancer company it is today.

"Houston Ballet's dancers comprise many of the world's finest balletic talent, right here in our backyard," says Jay Jones, campaign co-chair. "The devastating loss of ticket revenue threatens our ability to retain these dancers as part of our Houston community. We're calling on the community to help us retain our dancers and the talented staff that support them through this unprecedented time."

Beyond the art it brings to the community onstage, Houston Ballet needs support to continue its other programs while not performing. Its Education and Community Engagement (ECE) initiative offers 17 programs, 88 percent at no cost to its participants. In the 2019-2020 fiscal year alone, ECE visited 264 schools, served 30 districts and touched more than 70,000 individuals. It brings movement and expression through programs such as Adapted Dance and Dance for Parkinson's and awarded \$312,655 in Chance to Dance Scholarships, educating and inspiring generations of creatives to come.

"Houston Ballet has become quite skilled at turning adversity into creative inspiration," says Shawn Stephens, campaign co-chair. "Even during this time of isolation, our talented dancers and creative teams continue to set new artistic standards, creating clever, hilarious and gorgeous ballets and connecting with audiences and our community in new ways. Our world-class performing arts are part of what propels Houston's international reputation and makes it such a great place to live and work. I know the community will help ensure the ballet remains the pride of Houston."

Individuals can ensure Houston Ballet's return to the stage and the continuation of its many community programs by committing to donating at give.houstonballet.org/donate.

Houston Ballet's reimagined 2020-2021 season is generously supported by Houston Methodist Hospital.

ABOUT HOUSTON BALLETT

In 50 years, Houston Ballet has evolved from a Company of 16 dancers to one of 61 dancers with a budget of \$33.9 million and an endowment of \$79.2 million (as of June 2019), making it the country's fifth largest ballet company. Its Center for Dance is a \$46.6 million state-of-the-art performance space that opened in April 2011 and remains the largest professional dance facility in America. Houston Ballet's reach is global, touring in renowned theaters in Dubai, London, Paris, Moscow, Spain, Montréal, Ottawa, Melbourne, New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and more.

Houston Ballet attracts prestigious leaders in dance. Australian choreographer Stanton Welch AM has served as Artistic Director of Houston Ballet since 2003, raising the level of the Company's classical technique and commissioning works from dance legends such as Julia Adam, George Balanchine, Aszure Barton, Christopher Bruce, Alexander Ekman, William Forsythe, Jiří Kylián, Edwaard Liang, Trey McIntyre and Justin Peck. Executive Director James Nelson serves as the administrative leader of the organization, a position he assumed in February 2012 after serving as the Company's General Manager for more than a decade.

Beyond its stage presence, Houston Ballet maintains a strong foothold in continuing to foster a love for dance in future generations. Its Education and Community Engagement program reaches more than 70,000 individuals in the Houston area annually. Houston Ballet Academy trains more than 1,000 students every year, producing more than 50 percent of the elite athletes that comprise Houston Ballet's current Company.

For more information on Houston Ballet, visit houstonballet.org.

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