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MEDIA CONTACT:

Jacalyn Lawton
Public Relations Manager
JLawton@houstonballet.org
Press@houstonballet.org



HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES JENNIFER SOMMERS AS HOUSTON BALLET ACADEMY DIRECTOR

HOUSTON, TEXAS [September 24, 2021] — Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch AM is pleased to announce Jennifer Sommers as Houston Ballet Academy's new Director. In her new role, Sommers will oversee all educational programming for Houston Ballet and its Academy, including education, training and community engagement.

"I am honored that Stanton has chosen me for this important role and look forward to working even more closely with the talented faculty and staff that comprise Houston Ballet Academy," says Jennifer Sommers, Houston Ballet Academy Director. "Our work together will ensure that we deliver on Houston Ballet's mission to provide superb educational programming that inspires a lifelong love of dance."

Sommers has spent her entire career fostering a love of dance in her communities. In her more than a decade with Houston Ballet, she has served as the Director of Education for both the Education and Community Engagement Department and Houston Ballet Academy. Prior to joining Houston Ballet in 2010, she launched a dance program at KIPP Sharpstown College Prep while teaching and choreographing for the University of Houston, served on the faculty of the University of Minnesota Morris from 2005-2008 and served as the Associate Director of Raleigh Dance Theatre and on the faculty of Meredith College from 2000-2005. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in Dance, Performance and Choreography from Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Sommers has performed with Laura Dean Musicians and Dancers and the Albany Berkshire Ballet, where she also served as Ballet Mistress. Her dance honors include a scholarship to Jacob's Pillow Choreography Workshop, a Durham Arts Council Emerging Artist Grant and a Lake Region Arts Council grant in support of new work.

Since its founding in 1955, Houston Ballet Academy has provided the highest quality ballet training for those enrolled. It trains more than 1,000 students every year, producing more than 64 percent of the elite athletes that comprise Houston Ballet's current professional company. Houston Ballet's Education and Community Engagement program reaches more than 70,000 individuals in the Houston area annually.

Houston Ballet and its Academy look forward to Sommers' continued success in her newly appointed position. To learn more about Houston Ballet, its Academy or its leaders, visit houstonballet.org.

ABOUT HOUSTON BALLET

With more than 50 years of rich history, Houston Ballet returns to its home stage at the Wortham Theater Center for its 2021-2022 season with a company of 59 dancers. With a budget of \$33.9 million and an endowment of \$79.2 million (as of June 2019), it is America's fifth largest ballet company. Its \$46.6 million state-of-the-art performance space, Houston Ballet Center for Dance, opened in April 2011. 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 64 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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