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**HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES MELISSA BOWMAN
AS THE NEW HOUSTON BALLET ACADEMY DIRECTOR**

HOUSTON, TEXAS [February 26, 2018] — Houston Ballet Artistic Director Stanton Welch AM and Houston Ballet Academy Director Vicki Attard are pleased to announce that the Academy's own Lower School Principal Melissa Bowman has been named as Houston Ballet Academy's next Director, overseeing a variety of programs designed to take students from their first introduction to movement through a full course of ballet study. Mrs. Bowman will immediately step into her new role within Houston Ballet Academy as Deputy Director, while working hand in hand with Director Vicki Attard. The transition will continue through the summer and on June 4, 2018 Mrs. Bowman will assume the title of Academy Director.

Welch stated "Houston Ballet Academy is the very foundation of Houston Ballet, where we develop our future company. From performing with prestigious companies all over the world to her tremendous work as a dance educator, Melissa has an impressive resume but even more importantly, she is passionate about Houston Ballet's dedication to developing young dancers."

Bowman began her classical ballet training at age six with Lois Ellyn, formerly of New York City Ballet and at age eleven began training with Stanley Holden and Margaret Graham Hills, both from The Royal Ballet in London. At age fifteen, she was invited by Mikhail Baryshnikov to join the corps de ballet of American Ballet Theatre, where she danced for the next seven years. During her storied performance career, she founded her own ballet company, the Emerson Dance Theatre, and danced with the Bern Ballet in Switzerland and in Leipzig where she would launch her career as an Arts Administrator. Returning to the United States in 1999, she has since been a choreographer for Pittsburgh Youth Ballet, the Assistant Principal of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at America Ballet Theatre and, with her husband Richard, established Danse Conservatory and California Dance Theatre Youth Ballet where she served as the Artistic Director for five years before joining Houston Ballet as the Academy Lower School Principal.

Mrs. Bowman expressed, “Every step in my career has led me to this extraordinary opportunity. It is an incredible honor to lead the prestigious Houston Ballet Academy to even greater heights and to play an even larger role in preparing tomorrow’s dancers.”

About Houston Ballet

Houston Ballet has evolved into a company of 59 dancers with a budget of \$33 million (making it the United States’ fifth largest ballet company). With a state-of-the-art performance space built especially for the company, which is the largest professional dance facility in America, Houston Ballet’s \$46.6 million Center for Dance opened in April 2011, with an endowment of just over \$74.1 million (as of July 2017).

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 makers such as Christopher Bruce, Alexander Ekman, William Forsythe, Jiří Kylián, Trey McIntyre, Julia Adam, Edwaard Liang and George Balanchine. Executive Director James Nelson serves as the administrative leader of the company, a position he assumed in February 2012 after serving as the company’s General Manager for over a decade.

Houston Ballet has toured extensively both nationally and internationally. Over the past fifteen years, the company has appeared in London at Sadler’s Wells, at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, Russia, in six cities in Spain, in Montréal and Ottawa, at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in New York at City Center and The Joyce Theater, at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, at The Arts Center Melbourne State Theatre in Melbourne, Australia, in Los Angeles at The Music Center's Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and in cities large and small across the United States. Houston Ballet has emerged as a leader in the expensive, labor-intensive task of nurturing the creation and development of new full-length narrative ballets.

Writing in *Dancing Times* in June 2012, dance critic Margaret Willis praised Houston Ballet and highlighted the fact that “During his own tenure, (Stanton) Welch has upped the standard and Houston Ballet now shows off a group of dancers in splendid shape. With fast and tidy footwork, they are technically skillful and have strong, broad jumps and expansive, fluid movements. The dancers’ musicality shines through their work, dancing as one with elegance and refinement – and they are a handsome bunch too!...if ballet were an Olympic sport, see Houston Ballet well on the way to achieving gold.”

Houston Ballet Orchestra was established in the late 1970s and consists of 61 professional musicians who play for Houston Ballet's performances at Wortham Theater Center under Music Director Ermanno Florio.

Houston Ballet's Education and Community Engagement Program reaches over 60,000 individuals in the Houston area annually. Houston Ballet Academy teaches over one thousand students every year, and approximately 50% of the current company was trained by the Academy.

For more information on Houston Ballet visit houstonballet.org.

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