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HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES AN EXCITING PROMOTION DURING ITS 2018/19 SEASON

PHOTOS & VIDEO: <https://bit.ly/2UtxBHT>

HOUSTON, TEXAS [April 11, 2019] — Houston Ballet announces Artistic Director Stanton Welch AM has promoted Nozomi Iijima to the rank of Principal. Formerly a First Soloist, Iijima was promoted on the evening of March 1, 2019 after dancing the title role in Welch’s *Sylvia*. This well-deserved promotion adds to the continued excitement of Houston Ballet’s whirlwind of spring productions during its 2018/19 season.

“There are many Principal Dancers I look up to here,” says Iijima. “I’m happy and honored to become a Principal, but this is just the beginning. I will learn and do my best to get closer to those amazing Houston Ballet Principal Dancers.”

Not even a week after her *Sylvia* bows, Iijima took the stage for the first full production run as a Principal. Performing the role of Novice in *The Cage* as part of ROBBINS: A Centennial Celebration, Iijima danced this first-time production for Houston Ballet with fierce execution. She earned high praise from critics and fans alike, starting off her career as a Principal on a very high note.

Iijima’s journey with dance is paved with her ever-growing skills and repertoire. Born in Osaka, Japan, she trained at Soda Ballet School in Japan. She continued her training at Houston Ballet Academy, landing her a spot with the Company in 2008. In 2013, she made Dance Magazine’s “25 to Watch” list following a promotion to Demi Soloist. The last stop on her path to becoming a Principal was in 2017, when she became a First Soloist. In her 11 years with Houston Ballet, Iijima has danced lead roles in productions such as Stanton Welch AM’s *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker* and David Bintley’s *Aladdin*. Welch created lead roles on her for his *The Rite of Spring*, *Sons de l’âme* and *Just*. Her performance in *Just* during the Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival earned her recognition on Pointe Magazine’s “The Standouts of 2018” list.

ABOUT HOUSTON BALLET

Houston Ballet has evolved into a company of 60 dancers with a budget of \$33 million, making it the country’s fifth largest ballet company. With a state-of-the-art performance space built especially for the company—also 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 more than a decade.

Houston Ballet has toured extensively both nationally and internationally. Over the past fifteen years, the company has appeared in renowned theaters in Dubai, London, Paris, Moscow, Spain, Montréal, Ottawa, Melbourne, New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and in cities large and small across the United States.

Houston Ballet's Education and Community Engagement Program reaches more than 60,000 individuals in the Houston area annually. Houston Ballet Academy teaches more than one thousand students every year, and approximately 50 percent of the current company was trained by the Academy. For more information on Houston Ballet, visit www.houstonballet.org.

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