

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

TALKING POINTE



WINTER 2026

The Australian Ballet acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise those who danced their own stories for millennia before us and their continued connection to land, waterways and culture.



Front Cover: Laura Griffiths
and Annabelle Watt at *Ballet*
Under the Stars, Horsham
Photo Marcus Thomson

Back Cover: Yaru Xu
Photo Sally Kaack

Above: Artists of The Australian
Ballet and Bangarra Dance
Theatre, *Flora* (Rings)
Photo Daniel Boud



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Amy Ronnfeldt and Jeremy Hargreaves, *This Moment* (Masukawa)
Photo Kate Longley



“This is a time of
great momentum”

It's my pleasure to introduce another packed edition of *Talking Pointe* – The Australian Ballet's twice-yearly magazine created especially for you.

As I reflect on the first half of Season 2026 and look forward to concluding another remarkable year for our national ballet company, I am reminded just how much energy, ambition and care sits at the heart of this organisation and within its devoted giving community.

This is a time of great momentum for the company. Many of you will already know that we have welcomed several new dancers, while a number of our talented artists have been promoted in recent months. It's always a joy to celebrate dancers stepping into new chapters of their artistic journeys and these moments have been no exception, bringing immense pride to all who support them.

We are also marking an important milestone in our leadership, with the beginning of David Hallberg's second term as Artistic Director. In the pages ahead, you'll read more about his thoughtful and ambitious vision – one that balances artistic excellence with relevance, care and connection.

This edition also shines a light on the powerful reach of our work beyond the major cities. Our year opened with *Ballet Under the Stars* in Horsham, where, by invitation of the Victorian Government, we shared the beauty of live dance with thousands at the local footy oval. From the youngest audience members – lovingly copying the dancers on stage – to older members of the crowd, there was something for everyone and an unmistakable sense of community.

The Australian Ballet On Tour, our annual tour to regional destinations, is another powerful expression of our commitment to bring great ballet to all. Now entering its 46th year, this much-loved fixture of our calendar continues to be a bright light for young people imagining a future in the performing arts, while offering communities a window into the beauty of dance in all its forms.

Looking further afield, and ahead to our next issue, October will see the company travel to the United States on an international tour, culminating in performances of Christopher Wheeldon's *Oscar* in Berkeley, California and New York City. In many ways, this moment brings David Hallberg's story full circle – returning his name to one of the world's great cities, where he trained and performed; only this time at the helm of our company.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Talking Pointe*, rich with stories, ambition and impact made possible through your generosity. You play such an important role in our journey, and we deeply appreciate the energy and passion your support brings to everything we do.

Kenneth Watkins AM
Philanthropy Director

Company news

With Season 2026 well underway, we're celebrating fresh starts, exciting promotions and a renewed commitment to creativity, inclusion and excellence. Here's a snapshot of the standout moments of the year so far.

10 artists celebrate promotions

2026 began on an inspiring high for ten of our artists, whose artistic excellence and embodiment of our company values – ambition, boldness, inclusivity, respect and responsibility – were recognised with well deserved promotions.

Davi Ramos was promoted to Principal Artist during his first season performing the title role in John Cranko's *Romeo and Juliet*. The announcement was made live on stage at the Sydney Opera House, in front of audience members, alongside his fellow dancers and company staff.

"Davi is an artist of extraordinary energy and strength," said Artistic Director David Hallberg. "While audiences experience his performances on stage, we witness the dedication and discipline he brings to his work every day. His debut as Romeo demonstrated not only impressive technical command, but a genuine ability to move audiences through storytelling."

Reflecting on his promotion, Davi said, "Coming from where I started in Brazil to standing on stage and receiving this recognition is incredibly meaningful to me. I am deeply proud to be the first Brazilian artist and the first Black male artist to reach this level with the company."



Davi Ramos Promotion
Announcement to Principal Artist
Photo Daniel Boud

Cameron Holmes and Maxim Zenin,
Circle Electric: Prologue (Lake)
Photo Peter Foster



Isobelle Dashwood,
The Sleeping Beauty
(McAllister)
Photo David Kelly



Maxim Zenin rose from soloist to senior artist, following powerful performances as Diaghilev in John Neumeier's *Nijinsky* and his commanding debut as the Prince in David McAllister's *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Isobelle Dashwood stepped up from soloist to senior artist, celebrated for her elegant debut as Aurora and her nuanced interpretation of the Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty*.

Cameron Holmes advanced from soloist to senior artist after delivering compelling debuts as the Prince in *The Sleeping Beauty* and as Lescaut in Sir Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon*.

Samara Merrick rose from coryphée to soloist, propelled by her captivating debut as Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty* and her acclaimed performance in the world premiere of Stephanie Lake's *Seven Days*.

Also rising from coryphée to soloist is **Larissa Kiyoto-Ward**, who delighted in her debut as the Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty* and transfixed audiences in Marco Goecke's *Morpheus' Dream* as part of the February showcase, *Signature Works*.

Grace Carroll was elevated from coryphée to soloist, recognised for her striking portrayals of Romola in *Nijinsky* and the title role in *Manon*.

Henry Berlin, Mio Bayly and Amy Ronnfeldt, were also promoted from corps de ballet to coryphée. Amy's promotion followed her radiant debut as the Generosity Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty*. Henry and Mio's promotions recognised their standout performances in 2025's *The Australian Ballet On Tour* and *DanceX* festival, as well as in *Signature Works*.

Congratulations to these exceptional artists. They not only shine on stage but also enrich the creative culture of The Australian Ballet. We look forward to witnessing the next chapter in their artistic journeys.

An exciting new chapter for an inspiring artist

After 11 years with The Australian Ballet, Principal Artist Callum Linnane is stepping into his next phase, joining Hamburg Ballet for their 2026/27 season.

Growing up in Ballarat, Victoria, Callum began his dance training at age seven at the Ballarat Centre of Music and the Arts. His remarkable talent soon became evident, and in 2008 he was accepted into The Australian Ballet School, where he later graduated dux with honours. He joined The Australian Ballet in 2015 and rose swiftly through the ranks, where he was promoted to coryphée in 2017, soloist in 2018, senior artist in 2021, and principal artist in 2022.

Callum's final Australian performances with the company were in the Melbourne season of *Romeo and Juliet*. He will, however, return to the stage with the company in October, reprising his acclaimed portrayal of Oscar Wilde during our 2026 U.S. Tour of Christopher Wheeldon's *Oscar*.

Announcing the news, Artistic Director David Hallberg celebrated Callum's impact on the company and the art form, "Callum has always been an inspired artist who in turn has inspired audiences and colleagues. His 2016 performances as Nijinsky, in only his second year in the company, were a turning point. And as Oscar in 2024 he continued that trajectory, opening our art form to new stories and ideas.



Principal Artist Callum Linnane, *Nijinsky* (Neumeier)
Photo Kate Longley

"I applaud Callum's desire to stretch and grow and, while he will no doubt be missed by audiences and colleagues, I am thrilled for him and the journey that lays ahead. I know he goes into this next phase with everyone wishing him the best for the opportunity ahead."



Adam Elmes Award Announcement
Photo Cassandra Hannagan

Adam Elmes honoured with 2025 Telstra Ballet Dancer Award

Live on stage at the Sydney Opera House, following opening night of David McAllister's *The Sleeping Beauty*, Coryphée Adam Elmes was announced as the recipient of the 2025 Telstra Ballet Dancer Award.

Now in its 22nd year, the award continues The Australian Ballet and Telstra's long-standing partnership and commitment to nurturing emerging talent. It recognises exceptional artistry and meaningful contribution to the creative life of the company – marking an important milestone in a dancer's career.

Adam received the award and a \$15,000 cash prize, in celebration of the leadership, dedication and integrity he brings to the studio, the stage and the broader company culture.

Reflecting on Adam's accomplishment, Artistic Director David Hallberg said, "The Telstra Ballet Dancer Award recognises exceptional artistry, commitment and character, the qualities that allow a dancer to grow and inspire their peers. It is a pleasure to celebrate Adam's achievement and the incredible contribution he has made to the art form as well as our audiences."

Pride in every step

We were proud to walk alongside our colleagues from The Australian Ballet School and Orchestra Victoria in the Midsumma Festival Pride March this February.

Dancers and staff paraded together through St Kilda to the rhythm of samba drums, cheered on by jubilant crowds. The atmosphere, which was festive and full of colour, was a vibrant celebration of LGBTQIA+ arts and culture.

Our presence at the march reflects our ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, and to fostering a welcoming, supportive environment for all members of our community.





Ballet Under the Stars, Horsham
Photo Marcus Thomson

A night to remember

Horsham takes centre stage for Ballet Under the Stars

Against the majestic backdrop of Victoria's Wimmera Southern Mallee region, our 2026 season opened in a truly unforgettable way.

In partnership with Visit Victoria, we brought *Ballet Under the Stars* – a free, open-air, family-friendly celebration of dance – to ballet lovers in the area. And what a joyful way to begin the year it was!

Proud Taribelang woman, former artist of The Australian Ballet and much loved Yellow Wiggle, Evie Ferris, hosted the event with Artistic Director David Hallberg who guided the audience through a dynamic program of classical repertoire and contemporary works. Highlights included the world premiere of a new commission by choreographer Yuiko Masukawa, the ethereal *Kingdom of the Shades* from *La Bayadère*, and Act III highlights from David McAllister's *The Sleeping Beauty*.

More than 2,500 guests from the Horsham district, neighbouring regions and as far afield as South Australia and New South Wales gathered with picnic blankets, sampling from local food trucks and taking in the varied repertoire as the sun set and the stars came out.

The atmosphere was warm and vibrant, with children eagerly lining the front of the stage, delighted to experience the artists up-close and move along to the music.

The opportunity for autographs and photos at dedicated signing tents further enriched the experience, while large screens, Auslan interpreters and accessible pathways ensured the event was inclusive and accessible for all.



In the lead-up to the event, our dedicated Education and Outreach team delivered workshops and classes for pre-primary children, adults and seniors – bringing ballet directly to the community and building momentum for the big night. The team also collaborated with local students to create an original work incorporating the students' own ideas and choreography. Performing this piece as the curtain raiser before the performance, accompanied by company pianist Peter Brikmanis playing an excerpt of his own composition *Three Preludes*, was a truly memorable moment for these young dancers and a heart-warming one for the audience.

We were delighted to share this magical evening with so many passionate ballet lovers in Horsham. Connecting with the community, celebrating creativity and experiencing the beauty of ballet beneath the vast Wimmera Mallee sky made our first performance of the year truly memorable.



“It’s been an enormous learning experience, and full of contradictions. It’s been fast but slow, hard but easy, joyful yet challenging. All of those things, all at once.”

David Hallberg, Artistic Director

Finding balance

David Hallberg on artistic excellence, authenticity and learning to value the journey as much as the destination

As David Hallberg steps into his sixth year as Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet, reflection sits alongside a clear focus on what comes next.

In this conversation, David speaks openly about how experience has shaped his leadership, and the ongoing balance between progress and perfection.

He also reflects on the deep appreciation he holds for the dancers, audiences and philanthropic community who play distinct, yet equally vital, roles in bringing the company's vision to life, on stage and beyond.

You're stepping into your sixth year as Artistic Director – the first under your new contract. What feels clearer to you now, at this stage of your tenure?

What's really clear to me is the pride I feel for the dancers. The way they're attacking the repertoire, the technical precision they've developed, and the artistic freedom they've found.

I've also found a better sense of balance in the role. Not just work-life balance – although Australia is very good at instilling that – but balance in how I keep things moving, how I clarify the vision for the company, and how I balance different repertoire tastes for our audiences.

If you had to summarise your time so far with the company, how would you describe it?

It's been an enormous learning experience, and full of contradictions. It's been fast but slow, hard but easy, joyful yet challenging. All of those things, all at once.

How would you say your relationship with audiences has evolved over this time?

It's evolved significantly. When I began, our community had followed David McAllister for four decades – first watching him dance and then as Artistic Director. They were very comfortable with him and with what he presented.

Then I came along as an outsider. Some people knew me as a dancer, others didn't, but as a director I was introducing different repertoire and a different way of working. Over time, we've come to know each other more deeply. I'm listening and learning from our audiences, and they're growing to trust me in return.

What has remained at the core of who you are as a leader?

Standards, integrity and quality. This isn't about being self congratulatory, it's about a commitment to delivering the best possible work.

This has also required some self-reflection and learning. Sometimes I have to let things go, to ease the reins a little, reduce the pressure – on myself and on the company – so that we're all enjoying the journey as much as the destination.

“The community of supporters around The Australian Ballet is *genuinely unparalleled*.”

The collaborations you're facilitating are taking the company in exciting new directions. Why are they so important?

We're one of the largest performing arts companies in Australia, and with that comes responsibility to collaborate with other dance companies, designers, creatives and choreographers.

But collaboration isn't just about scale or novelty. It's about who we are as a company, what we stand for, and how we perform work with integrity. Collaborations like *Flora* with Bangarra Dance Theatre are enormously meaningful because they continue a lineage of shared artistic respect and cultural exchange established by those who came before us.

When you're curating a season, how do you know what's right for the company at a given moment?

When I started in the role I was guided largely by instinct. Now that instinct is more consciously balanced with commercial reality. We're running a ballet company and I can't ignore what audiences want; I don't want to. It's about balancing my experience with repertoire that Australian audiences love, alongside works they may not have seen before. That balance is essential to the company's vitality.

A major highlight for the second half of this year is the U.S. Tour. How does it feel to be having that full circle moment: to be returning to one of the cities where you trained and performed, now at the helm of your own company?

It's enormously exciting. The Australian Ballet has a long history in New York, and I'll be so proud to present the company there and share the fruits of our collective labour.

It'll be a real homecoming taking *Oscar* too – a work we can truly call our own and a critically acclaimed collaboration with Christopher Wheeldon, who is so well known in New York. It will be a particularly meaningful moment.

Speaking of homecomings, 2026 marks our final season at the Regent Theatre before returning to the Ian Potter State Theatre. Does that feel significant?

Very much so. The Regent Theatre has been a really fruitful space for us. *Oscar* was created there, and many recent seasons were shaped by our time in that theatre, and Orchestra Victoria have really shone in their custom-built orchestra pit.

At the same time, the Regent has imposed certain limitations and Melbourne audiences haven't been able to experience some of our larger scale works.

Returning to the Ian Potter State Theatre will allow us to present full length narrative ballets again, including *The Nutcracker* later this year – much to the delight of both our audiences and dancers.

Support from our philanthropic community has been transformative during our time at the Regent Theatre. What has it meant to feel the Ballet family behind you in such a tangible way?

The community of supporters around The Australian Ballet is genuinely unparalleled.

Throughout our years at the Regent Theatre, their belief and generosity have strengthened the company and allowed our art form to flourish during a time of change.

I can't overstate how impactful this support has been. Not only for the company's success, but for the global standard we continue to set. It's truly unique.



David Hallberg and Bangarra Dance Theatre Artistic Director and *Flora* Choreographer, Frances Rings
Photo Daniel Boud



David Hallberg, backstage at
the Sydney Opera House
Photo Pierre Toussaint

MOVING AS ONE

The impact of philanthropy in 2025

Read on to learn more about how your generosity
is shaping our today and into the future.



Artists of The Australian Ballet, *La Bayadere*
(*The Kingdom of the Shades*) (Petipa)
Photo Kate Longley

“Your support is
*tangible, visible and
transformative. You
make everything
we do possible.*”

Kenneth Watkins AM, Philanthropy Director

After a year of both challenge and opportunity in 2024, 2025 brought renewed stability, momentum and ambition for our national ballet company. This progress was made possible by the belief, generosity and shared purpose of our Ballet family – a community that spans countries, states and generations.

Philanthropic support in 2025 contributed 21% of The Australian Ballet’s total income, with \$14.1 million received from donations and bequests. Beyond income alone, philanthropy played a critical role in sustaining the company, funding almost one third of The Australian Ballet’s annual operating costs.

This support was multidimensional in its impact: driving artistic excellence, enabling innovative productions, strengthening organisational resilience and positioning our dancers to reach new heights.

This is the largest philanthropic contribution to the company’s operating activity in our history and a powerful testament to the fervour of our community.

Through a careful balance of funds received and funds stewarded over time, our supporters’ steadfast commitment - through highs and lows alike - is securing a sustainable future for The Australian Ballet as a proud cultural leader.

“It is such a joy to witness the many forms our giving community takes,” reflects Philanthropy Director, Kenneth Watkins AM. “Foundation Board and Philanthropy Committee members, chaired by Jane Freudenstein AM; loyal subscribers and periodic ticket-buyers; time-honoured attendees of regional *The Australian Ballet On Tour* performances and international tours; and, of course, participants in our Education and Outreach programs. Every member of our Ballet family is contributing to our future.”



Annual Giving

Flexible, untied funding remains indispensable to our work. In 2025, Annual Giving – supported by President of Annual Giving, Natasha Bowness – contributed \$4.4 million, sustaining the company's daily artistic life.

These important gifts enrich our dancers' development, safeguard the traditions that define us and expand the reach of ballet across the nation.

Gifts in Wills

Gifts in Wills continued to provide a vital source of long-term security, too. In 2025, realised bequests and gifts in wills totalled \$1.9 million from the estates of devoted ballet lovers.

Almost 50 supporters also confirmed, updated or notified us of their intentions – strengthening the foundations upon which our future artistic ambitions will be built.



Yaru Xu
Photo Sally Kaack



Artists of The Australian Ballet, *Seven Days* (Lake)
Photo Kate Longley

The Innovation Campaign

Established in 2024 to meet the financial pressures of our temporary residency at the Regent Theatre while upholding our artistic aspirations, The Innovation Campaign continues to be transformative.

In 2025, a further \$2.1 million in untied major gifts was raised by visionary supporters, alongside \$1.8 million directed to The David Hallberg Fund for Artistic Aspiration – endowed by Lady Potter AC CMRI and dedicated to accelerating Artistic Director David Hallberg's creative vision.

In Season 2025, The David Hallberg Fund enabled the restoration of sets and costumes for *Manon* and made the sector-leading dance festival *DanceX* possible for a second year, together with support from the Hansen Little Foundation, Linda Herd and The Linda Herd Fund for Contemporary Work.

Endowment funds

In addition to specific purpose major gifts, The Australian Ballet's endowment funds – built over decades by visionary supporters – continue to be the bedrock of the company's financial strength.

Comprising gifts in wills, and both specific-purpose and general funds under investment, this corpus generates a critical stream of income each year.

In 2025, our endowment funds supported a wide range of strategic priorities, including: Education and Outreach programs; international guest artists; livestream broadcasts; piano and conductor fellowships; touring; dancer positions and retraining; and the upkeep of our Production Centre.

The temporary closure of Melbourne's State Theatre and the resulting relocation to the Regent Theatre has had an unprecedented financial impact on the company, even greater than during the pandemic. During this period, general funds and accumulated growth have been drawn on to ensure the company can continue to thrive without compromise.

Without this crucial support, it would not have been possible to navigate this period while continuing to present seasons in Melbourne, create dynamic new repertoire and retain our exceptional talent.

The rich tapestry of creativity, resilience and aspiration that we are so fortunate to inhabit has been woven by people united in their belief in the power of dance.

We are deeply grateful to every donor that forms the enduring thread through our work – sustaining our vision, enriching our artistry and anchoring our organisation. Your generosity connects our present to the vibrant future we are building together.



Principal Artist Davi Ramos and Grace Carroll, *Manon* (MacMillan)
Photo Kate Longley

Moments made possible by you

2025 marked several significant philanthropic anniversaries and achievements:



20 years of Ken Reed AM's landmark \$1 million gift, which continues to generate income supporting new work, from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2017) to *Circle Electric* (2024).



The International Touring Fund celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2025. Endowed by Frances Gerard AM after our London opening of *Swan Lake*, this fund now underpins our global touring program, enabling us to represent Australia on the world stage.



10 years since David McAllister's *The Sleeping Beauty* became our first large-scale, community-enabled production – a work that continues to enchant audiences today.



10 years of Storytime Ballet. Introduced by former Executive Director Libby Christie AM, this beloved program has now reached children through more than 600 performances nationwide.



The Ballet Ambassador Program marked its 10th anniversary, having grown into a nationwide network of passionate ballet advocates and supporters.



Five years of David Hallberg's leadership and The David Hallberg Fund for Artistic Aspiration. With \$14.1 million raised to date – more than half from Lady Potter AC, CMRI herself – the fund has enabled *Jewels* and *Don Quixote* (including the 2025 Tokyo tour), the world premiere of *Oscar, DanceX*, and the refurbishment of *Manon*. In 2026, it continues to elevate our artistry through support for *Flora* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

From bump to beyond



Inside The Australian Ballet's approach to supporting dancers through pregnancy and parenthood

Across its 64-year history, The Australian Ballet has watched generations of dancers grow, first as artists and later as parents.

For much of that time, stepping into parenthood often meant stepping away from the stage. In recent years, however, thanks to directional leadership and the expertise of our sector-leading Artistic Health team, that once-assumed pathway is no longer the norm.

We sat down with our newly appointed **Director of Artistic Health, Laura Hillenius** – who began her physiotherapy career in 2002 under the visionary direction of Dr Sue Mayes AM – to explore how the company's deep cultural commitment, paired with world class health expertise, is reshaping what parental support looks like for dancers through pregnancy, postpartum and beyond.

How has The Australian Ballet's culture of supporting parenthood evolved in recent years?

It really has been quite a journey. I was lucky enough to be here at the beginning of it when I first worked under Sue Mayes (former Director of Artistic Health), who was a real pioneer in this space. I remember working closely with (then-Principal Artist) Kirsty Martin on what a supported pregnancy and safe return to work would look like. It began with thorough medical support through the entire pregnancy into the period when dancers can no longer perform on stage.

We know it's incredibly important for women's mental health and sense of identity to continue working during pregnancy. When it's no longer safe or realistic for them to be performing on stage – often around the 12-14 week mark – we help them transition into 'safe' duties in another area of the organisation that interests them.

Why is this pathway so important?

It becomes a real moment for dancers to explore a different identity beyond the stage, which becomes important as they embark on this new chapter as a parent. It helps them diversify and gently prepare for the idea that they are more than a ballet dancer. It also allows them to recognise skills that may serve them later in life. So, when – and if – they return to the stage, that return comes from a place of autonomy and choice.

At what point does the Artistic Health team typically become involved?

We're usually involved very early. We often support dancers through their pre-fertility and fertility journeys, and I've been the first woman many dancers have told about their pregnancy. From that moment on, it's all about supporting them through a healthy pregnancy – ensuring they're supplementing appropriately, maintaining good nutrition and feeling well supported physically and emotionally.

No two dancers' pregnancies are the same. How do you tailor a care plan from pregnancy to return to stage?

We always begin with a framework, which I love because it helps you understand when and why you might deviate from it. Our model is structured around three prenatal trimesters and three postnatal trimesters, but every component is tailored to the dancer's unique physiological and psychological needs.

How does each phase of care look?

Simply speaking, the **first trimester** covers the first 12 weeks, when dancers are generally still performing. During this stage, my team works closely with our onsite GP to ensure they're medically and physically supported.

During the **second trimester**, dancers may continue taking class and stay physically active for up to two to three hours a day. Outside the studio, we work with them on functional strength, cardiovascular fitness, cross-training and addressing any pre-existing injuries that could affect their eventual return. At this stage, many dancers also transition into 'safe' duties, supporting other areas of the company. Principal Artist Sharni Spencer, for example, worked with our Company Management team to help them prepare for touring while expecting her baby.

Our focus shifts in the **third trimester** to preparing the dancers for postpartum. We help them gradually step back from dancer-level physicality, teach them how to assess abdominal separation, provide safe postpartum exercise guidance and help them to recognise emotional risk factors.

Postpartum, while we're always available, we hope not to see the dancers too much in the first 14 weeks after birth, aside from linking them with a specialist women's physiotherapist for pelvic floor assessment. This period is about bonding with their baby and developing an identity outside ballet. The more connected they are at home and the more mentally detached from the pressure of dance, the healthier they are in the long-term.

The **second postnatal trimester** is our "fit for ballet, but no ballet" phase. During this time, we focus on cross-training, cardiovascular conditioning, musculoskeletal strength, strength and conditioning and Pilates-based work to rebuild deep stabilising muscles that are associated with ballet.

Finally, in the **third postnatal trimester**, we support the dancers as they return to ballet. This phase involves returning to class, getting their pointe shoes back on, moving into the rehearsal period and setting up their life as a performer again. Everything from establishing support networks and milk supplies, programming and planning for the reality of being a performer who is also a parent.



"Welcoming my beautiful baby boy into the world last year was an incredibly special and transformative time. I feel so lucky to have become a mum and grateful to be part of *a company that genuinely supports dancing parents*. It's a space we're encouraged to bring our little ones into while we find our feet again."

Sharni Spencer, Principal Artist

“It was a huge challenge to put my dancer-self back together after the birth of my beautiful little boy, but *I am loving being back with a fresh perspective, greater empathy and a new identity as a mother.*”

Dimity Azoury, Principal Artist



How do you know when a dancer is ready to return?

The dancer tells us when they're ready, and then every member of their care team must clear them. The GP, the Pilates therapist, the strength and conditioning coach, the ballet rehab coach, and the physiotherapist all provide clearance.

Just as crucially, a specialist women's health physiotherapist must clear pelvic floor and abdominal control. The research is clear: pelvic floor recovery can take six to nine months, so we take that time.

When does repertoire enter the conversation, for dancers' return to the stage?

Once we enter the third postnatal phase and begin discussing the return to ballet, that's when I encourage dancers to sit down with David (Hallberg) to discuss repertoire that aligns with both their readiness and the company's seasons.

We've just seen two Principal Artists, Sharni Spencer and Dimity Azoury, return to the stage after having their babies. It was perfect timing for their third postnatal trimester and for the company's February repertoire, in *Ballet Under the Stars* and *Signature Works*.

How does your team care for secondary parents?

This has been a major growth area recently, recognising the very real challenges all new parents experience. Take Principal Artist Chengwu Guo, who recently took 14 weeks of parental leave while his partner, Principal Artist Ako Kondo, had their second child. You can't simply step away from ballet for 14 weeks and return without support, so we've worked closely with Chen to ensure he can take that time fully and safely, without guilt or fear of losing momentum in his career.

What message does this work send to the company?

That parenthood and a performing career can coexist, and that the company is committed to supporting dancers through every phase of their lives, not just their time on stage. The support from leadership, Artistic Health and the wider organisation demonstrates to our dancers that they don't have to choose between their family and career – we'll walk with them through both.

Principal Artist Dimity Azoury, *La Bayadere*
(*The Kingdom of the Shades*) (Petipa)
Photo Kate Longley



Fresh faces

Get to know our newest dancers

Season 2026 brings an abundance of new talent to The Australian Ballet. Eleven dancers across multiple ranks have joined the company following international auditions and recruitment from The Australian Ballet School.

Let's find out more about some of these exciting new artists.



Precious Adams

Senior Artist

Where did they grow up?

Canton, Michigan, USA.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

Precious trained at some of the world's most prestigious ballet schools, including the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow, the Princess Grace Academy in Monte Carlo, and Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto.

Which companies, theatres or stages have shaped their career so far?

Precious joined the English National Ballet in 2014 where she rose to the rank of first soloist and performed many notable lead roles across the company's repertoire.

What achievements or recognitions have been especially meaningful to them?

A highly awarded artist, Precious received top honours in the Prix de Lausanne in 2014, where she won two coveted prizes.

What's something you might be surprised to learn about them offstage?

Precious is always studying something new. Outside dance, she enjoys running, reading, and crocheting unexpected creations – all for the joy of learning and the connections that come from sharing interests beyond the stage.

Marko Juusela

Soloist

Where did they grow up?

Naantali, Finland.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

Marko began his dance training at Raija Lehmussaaren Balettikoulu. In time, his training took him from the Ballet School of the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki to the prestigious Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet in St. Petersburg. At just 15, he moved to Russia to study under renowned teacher Nikolay Tsiskaridze, graduating from one of the world's most rigorous classical ballet institutions.

Which companies, theatres, or stages have shaped their career so far?

Marko began his professional career at the Mariinsky Theatre in 2019, becoming the first Finnish dancer to join the company. He later performed with the Polish National Ballet, where he was appointed soloist in 2022, before joining The Australian Ballet at the end of 2025.

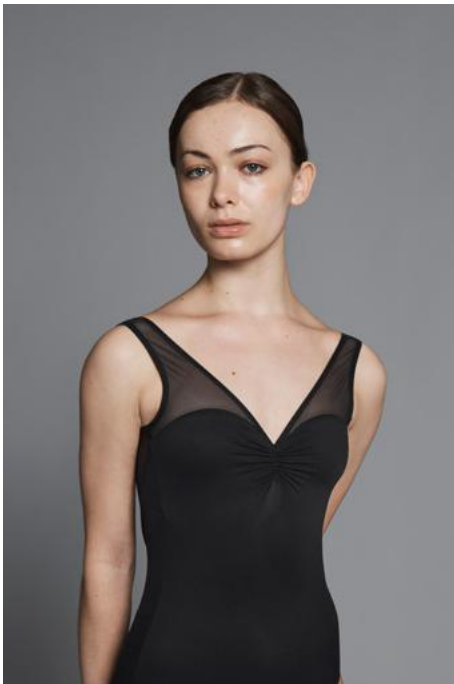
What's something you might be surprised to learn about them offstage?

Beyond the stage, Marko is deeply invested in the future of dance in Finland. He is a founding member of the Finnish ballet association Ruusuilla Tanssijat and serves as the artistic director of Turku Dance Camp, mentoring and inspiring the next generation of dancers.

Photos Pierre Toussaint

Estelle Crompton-Lamb

Corps de Ballet



Where did they grow up?

Sydney, Australia.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

Estelle – known as Essie – began dancing at four years old, discovering a love for ballet early that would shape her path forward before joining The Australian Ballet School in 2022.

Which companies, theatres, or stages have shaped their career so far?

Essie joined The Australian Ballet during the company's 2025 Tokyo Tour of *Don Quixote*, initially on a short-term secondment, before officially becoming a corps de ballet member in 2026.

What achievements or recognitions have been especially meaningful to them?

In 2025, Essie was awarded the NSW Ballet Society Scholarship in recognition of both her talent and promise as a young artist.

If they weren't a dancer, what career might they have pursued?

Essie's passionate about nutrition and holistic medicine, alongside Pilates instruction and physiotherapy for dancers, and would have explored one of these paths.

LilySophia Dashwood

Corps de Ballet



Where did they grow up?

Toowoomba, Queensland.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

LilySophia moved to Melbourne at the age of six where she began her ballet training at The Jane Moore Academy of Ballet. In 2022, after competing in the Prix de Lausanne, she received an offer to continue her studies at The Royal Ballet Upper School in London where she completed her training.

Which companies, theatres, or stages have shaped their career so far?

While in London, LilySophia performed with both The Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet, appearing in productions at The Royal Opera House and the Royal Albert Hall. After graduating in July 2025, she joined The Australian Ballet as a corps de ballet member.

Are there any roles, milestones, or onstage moments that stand out in their journey?

A particularly special milestone was LilySophia's first performance with The Australian Ballet in *The Sleeping Beauty*, where she shared the stage with her sister, Senior Artist Isobelle Dashwood, during Isobelle's Aurora debut in Brisbane.

What's something you might be surprised to learn about them offstage?

LilySophia could swim before she could walk and, when she's not in the studio, she spends most of her spare time at the beach.

Naylson Guimarães

Corps de Ballet

Where did they grow up?

Teresina Piauí, Brazil.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

Naylson began his dance journey at Centro de Dança Mariana Alves. Aged 15, he moved to Goiânia to train with Cia Jovem Basileu França, further developing his passion for ballet. He later relocated to New York where he trained at the American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School, before graduating in 2025.

Which companies, theatres, or stages have shaped their career so far?

Naylson joined The Australian Ballet in 2025 and made his professional debut during our Brisbane season of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

What's something you might be surprised to learn about them offstage?

Offstage, Naylson is known for his love of Brazilian funk music and never misses an opportunity to share it with friends.



Isabella Howard

Corps de Ballet

Where did they grow up?

Sydney, Australia.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

Isabella began her ballet training with Davidia Lind Dance Centre, later continuing her development at Classical Coaching Australia before relocating to London to study at The Royal Ballet School.

Which companies, theatres, or stages have shaped their career so far?

In 2018, Isabella joined the Birmingham Royal Ballet, where she spent seven years performing the company's extensive repertoire. In September 2025, she returned to Australia to join The Australian Ballet as a member of the corps de ballet.

Are there any roles, milestones, or onstage moments that stand out in their journey?

During her time at Birmingham Royal Ballet, Isabella performed memorable roles including one of the leading swans in Sir Peter Wright's *Swan Lake* and the Fairy of Beauty in Wright's *The Sleeping Beauty*.

What inspired them to start dancing?

Aged three, after watching the movie *Centre Stage*, Isabelle told her parents she was going to be a ballerina and she grew up loving to dance along to the movie, complete with outfit changes.



Nanami Inoue

Corps de Ballet

Where did they grow up?

Aichi, Japan.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

Nanami began ballet classes at the age of five at Ballet Studio Plier in her hometown. In 2016, she relocated to Canada to continue her training at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School.

Which companies, theatres, or stages have shaped their career so far?

Following her participation in the 2018 Japan Grand Prix International Ballet Competition, Nanami was offered a position with Tulsa Ballet, joining Tulsa II in 2020. She later danced with State Opera Ruse in Bulgaria before arriving at The Australian Ballet in 2025.

If they weren't a dancer, what career might they have pursued?

If Nanami wasn't a dancer, she'd have loved to have competed in the Olympics or made ballet costumes.

Stephanie McQuire

Corps de Ballet

Where did they grow up?

Sydney, Australia.

What did their training journey look like, and where did it take them?

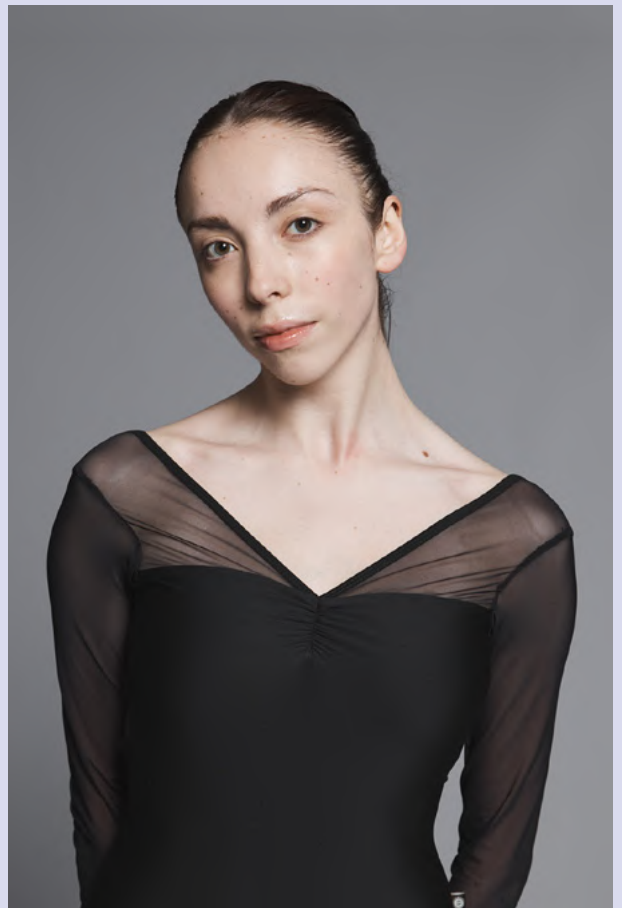
Stephanie trained at The Australian Ballet School, where she was awarded the Igor Zambelli Scholarship in her graduating year and was seconded to The Australian Ballet in 2025.

Are there any roles, milestones, or onstage moments that stand out in their journey?

During her secondment to the company in 2025, Stephanie performed across a wide range of productions, including *Nijinsky*, *Manon*, *Don Quixote* on our Tokyo Tour and *The Sleeping Beauty*.

What's something you might be surprised to learn about them offstage?

When she's not dancing, Steph loves a good coffee, browsing op shops, and – by her own admission – buying leotards she probably doesn't need.



The Australian Ballet Principal Artist Jill Ogai and
Bangarra Dance Theatre dancer Daniel Mateo, *Flora* (Rings)
Photo Daniel Boud



BEHIND THE CURTAIN

with Annabelle and Drew



Jill Ogai and Daniel Mateo on the beauty and power of co-creating *Flora*

In our first trip behind the curtain in 2026, Philanthropy Ambassadors Drew Hedditch and Annabelle Watt sit down with The Australian Ballet Principal Artist Jill Ogai and Bangarra Dance Theatre dancer Daniel Mateo to explore the rich creative journey behind *Flora* – a bold, new production that has brought the two companies together once more.

In an expansive and deeply enriching collaboration, our companies have reunited for the fourth time in 30 years to create our first full-length work together – representing not only an artistic milestone, but a shared exploration of storytelling, movement and cultural exchange.

In this conversation, the dancers reflect on the fertile ground cultivated for this unique partnership, and the lifelong lessons, friendships and art born from the making of the work.

Drew: Can you give us a little insight into what it's been like bringing the two companies together to create *Flora*?

Daniel: Coming together to collaborate and work with The Australian Ballet has been a journey. It's been a ride of sharing language, body movement, stories and friendships that we've all created throughout the year.

Jill: One of the biggest differences I noticed was the depth of research Bangarra brings to the creation process. I was amazed at the amount of time we spent talking about our stories and where we've come from, as well as Australia's flora itself. We also did a lot of work on different sections of the piece, researching as groups and individually.

At the beginning your brain is so full of information, but over time it starts to filter into the choreography or how you might approach a step. It's given the work so much depth. That level of exploration is something Bangarra are used to, but it was new and incredibly enriching for me.

Drew: Do you think that experience will influence how you approach more classical repertoire in the future?

Jill: Definitely. I've already started researching Juliet for *Romeo and Juliet* differently compared to how I've approached roles like this in the past. I usually let the music guide me and trust my instincts, but after working on *Flora*, I've wanted to fill my mind with context about the era Juliet is in, the language she's speaking, the religion at the time... I know that all of this will filter into my body and shape my interpretation.

Drew: Dan, did *Flora* feel different from a typical creation process at Bangarra, without the influence of The Australian Ballet?

Daniel: I felt like it was easier almost – having the fresh ears and eyes come into the space. It was almost like we were guiding the dancers through how we put on a show: how we approach and attack it, to then put it into movement.

The Australian Ballet dancers came in so open and ready to learn, ready to take what we had to offer. It's been beautiful having these two companies collaborate in the time that we're in. Bangarra audiences may now feel like they can come and watch a ballet, and vice versa. The knowledge and storytelling is bound to grow from here.

Annabelle: Jill, as you mentioned, the ballet world doesn't often allow much time for research. So much of our development happens in the studio. Can you talk more about how research worked specifically for *Flora*?

Jill: It was so interesting and personal. We were all guided by what we connected to in the research and then layered

in with what others had to say. With *Lungs of Country*, for example, which is a group section Dan and I dance in together, we were inspired by the root system, while some people connected to the earthiness, and others were using the response to light to guide them. Fran (Choreographer Frances Rings) would then inject her own energy and perspective, which we all absorbed and layered into our movement.

Annabelle: I've spoken to family and friends who've seen the show, and many of them felt that *Flora* isn't simply a stage production; some moments feel so powerful they could exist in a gallery. How has the audience response felt for you?

Jill: Something I've heard a lot is how you can't tell which dancer is from which company, and I think that's the sign of a great collaboration. It's been so lovely to be dancing in these big group sections together...

Annabelle: And it's so powerful to witness from the audience.

Drew: Yes, when you start to feel that pulse and the drive with everyone around you, you almost don't want it to stop.

Jill: Exactly. You see the different dancers around you and the way they've interpreted a movement, and you take little elements of that to infuse what you're doing. It keeps the work alive and constantly evolving.

Annabelle: It's been such a joy to watch that connection unfold on stage. Thank you all for creating such an uplifting, thoughtful and beautiful work. We've felt incredibly lucky to experience it from the audience, front of house for a change!



The Australian Ballet Principal Artist Jill Ogai, Artists of The Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre, *Flora* (Rings)
Photo Daniel Boud

“It’s been a ride of sharing
language, body movement,
stories and friendships...”

Daniel Mateo, Bangarra Dance Theatre dancer



Bangarra Dance Theatre dancer Daniel Mateo,
artists of The Australian Ballet and Bangarra
Dance Theatre, *Flora* (Rings)
Photo Daniel Boud

Flora was generously supported
by Lady Potter AC CMRI and
The David Hallberg Fund for
Artistic Aspiration.



Great ballet is for everyone

How our national ballet company is putting the ‘all’ in ‘ballet’

For nearly as long as the company has existed, The Australian Ballet has held a simple but powerful belief: geography should never be a barrier to experiencing great ballet.

Through our much loved Australian tour, we have proudly shared the wonder of ballet – and dance in all its glory – with communities across the country for decades.

Formalised 46 years ago under The Dancers Company banner by then-Artistic Director Marilyn Jones OBE, in collaboration with The Australian Ballet School's founding Director Dame Margaret Scott DBE AC, domestic touring began with a clear national vision. Today, now known as *The Australian Ballet On Tour*, the program remains a highly anticipated fixture of each season and a defining expression of our role as a truly national company.

The founding intent still holds true. *The Australian Ballet On Tour* ensures audiences beyond the bright lights of our major cities can experience ballet of the highest standard, while also offering graduating students from The Australian Ballet School their first professional performances alongside company dancers.

Made possible through visionary support from donors and valued corporate partnerships, this commitment to meaningful connection continues to grow in momentum and reach with every year – bringing joy, inspiration and opportunity to communities right across Australia.

Ballet beyond the stage

This winter, *The Australian Ballet On Tour* will present a diverse program of repertoire to audiences in Narre Warren, Albury, Ballarat, Horsham, Mildura, Adelaide, Darwin and Alice Springs. The power of the art form will live beyond the stage too, with a rich suite of engagement and learning opportunities designed to welcome people of all ages, abilities and experience levels.

Class on Tour invites audiences behind the scenes of daily training, with artistic staff showcasing the discipline, preparation and artistry that underpin each performance.

Young dancers can take part in **Youth Masterclasses**, led by Artistic Staff from The Australian Ballet and The Australian Ballet School that deliver high quality training and mentorship directly to the communities we visit.

Our Education and Outreach team will also present a suite of inclusive and immersive programs for all ages, including **Dancing Story** (for young dancers, ages 3–5), school incursions, youth workshops, adult and seniors' classes and professional development for educators.

Reflecting on the significance of the program, Artistic Director David Hallberg shares, "One of the most exciting things about this program is getting to bring ballet directly to the communities we visit. Sharing live performance, inspiring young dancers and welcoming new audiences – that's what makes touring so special."

A celebration of Aussie voices

Complementing excerpts from the company's extensive classical repertoire, including *The Nutcracker* Act II, this year's *The Australian Ballet On Tour* program also champions contemporary Australian creativity, featuring new works by two of the nation's most exciting choreographic voices: Stephanie Lake and Sandra Parker.

Stephanie Lake, The Australian Ballet's Resident Choreographer – a position generously supported by The Geraldine Anne Lawton Foundation – is creating *Chrysalis*, a brand-new work, with students of The Australian Ballet School. Featuring music by long-time collaborator, composer and sound artist Robin Fox, this new commission will deepen the creative connection between Australia's national ballet company and its school. With striking designs from costumier Kate Davis and lighting designer Bosco Shaw, this new work will harness the vitality of the ensemble of dancers locked in step.

"I'm delighted to have the opportunity to create this new work with The Australian Ballet School," expresses Lake. "I love the ferocity and energy of young dancers and really look forward to pushing them, and myself, into new territory. The piece will be infectiously rhythmic, driving and dreamlike. We'll build a world together – a world of irrepressible energy and release."

Sandra Parker is a leading Australian choreographer whose 2026 Green Room Award-winning work *Safehold* was created during her residency as the inaugural recipient of The Australian Ballet's Residency Program. Her new commission for the company, *We Dance*, a work inspired by the power of people moving and being together, quietly sets out to recognise dance as the powerful, defiant and rebellious lifeblood that it is. Parker's rigorous choreographic approach is accompanied by Emily Collett's 'everyday' inspired costumes in this awe-inspiring piece, in partnership with a score by composer Lawrence Harvey.

See it for yourself

It's not too late to experience *The Australian Ballet On Tour* this winter.

Scan to secure your tickets.



Growing up on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, Parker's formative years at her local ballet school ignited a passion for choreography. "I loved choreographing dances," she shares, "and I fully appreciate the vital role that exposure to professional live performance plays in building a sense of what's possible."

"I still remember what it felt like as a young person to see something that completely expanded my understanding of what dance could be. So, to now come full circle as a professional choreographer, invited by David Hallberg and The Australian Ballet to share my work in *On Tour*, is really exciting. I hope *We Dance* opens up a physicality that feels engaging and inspiring for everyone who experiences it."



Artists of The Australian Ballet and The Australian Ballet School, *The Nutcracker* Act II (Knobloch)
Photo Kate Longley

Partners en pointe

Two of our longstanding and valued partners, Telstra and Qantas, have recently expanded their support of the company, introducing initiatives that run alongside *The Australian Ballet On Tour* to further increase accessibility and deepen the tour's impact within the communities it reaches.

Telstra Let's Dance

Now in its third year, Telstra Let's Dance reflects Telstra and The Australian Ballet's shared commitment to breaking down barriers such as cost and location and creating meaningful cultural opportunities in regional and rural Australia.

Through the program, students in *The Australian Ballet On Tour* communities attend studio sessions with company teachers, enjoy special backstage visits, observe dancers in rehearsal and experience live ballet at their local theatre.

For many children in these areas, it is a rare opportunity to step behind the scenes and witness everyday life as a professional dancer. The program has engaged hundreds of students to date and received enthusiastic praise from educators who have seen firsthand the confidence, curiosity and joy it inspires.

The Australian Ballet Boarding Pass

Boarding Pass is an initiative born of Qantas and The Australian Ballet's joint desire to take ballet beyond the theatre and inspire the next generation.

Introduced in 2025, the program opens the world of ballet to high school students in outer suburban and regional communities, offering many an unforgettable first experience of live performance.

Each participating school group receives premium tickets to a performance, return transport to the theatre, and a tailored suite of educational materials to support their experience, including a video introduction to ballet, pre-performance resources exploring story and design, and post-performance guides to encourage reflection and discussion back in the classroom.

Gemma Crighton, Oak Flats High School Head Teacher, Creative and Performing Arts, explains: "We are fortunate to work with many highly talented young people, many of whom come from backgrounds marked by significant challenges and disadvantage. Experiences such as this can have a profound impact on their lives and overall wellbeing."



“Every young person,
no matter where they
live, should feel that
ballet, and the arts,
belong to them.”

David Hallberg, Artistic Director

Ballet Family events



(L-R) Front row: Igor Zambelli OAM, Treena Brown, Don Mercer, Angela Mercer, Alane Fineman, Susan Harlow, Mervyn Keehn
Back row: Douglas Brown, Claire Spencer AM, Angie Carter, Andrew Wright, Colin Carter AM, Mark Houston, Val Houston, Max Anderson, Paul Cross AM, Barry Janes AM, Catherine Scott and Robert Scott at the atrium staircase aboard Seven Seas Explorer® in Melbourne.

Regent Seven Seas Cruises Patrons Experiences

24 January 2026, Melbourne
26 January 2026, Sydney

Photo Andrew Wright

More than 30 patrons were welcomed aboard the magnificent Seven Seas Explorer® in January for an exclusive experience hosted in partnership with The Australian Ballet's ultra-luxury travel partner, Regent Seven Seas Cruises.

These immersive events in both Melbourne and Sydney treated guests to a gourmet onboard dining experience, along with a guided tour of one of the world's most luxurious vessels. Patrons explored the ship's unrivalled suites, specialty restaurants, serene spa and expansive open air spaces – a true glimpse into the elegant world of Regent cruising.

Flora World Premiere

12 March 2026, Melbourne

Photos Cameron Grant

Melbourne's Regent Theatre was alive with excitement in March as audiences gathered for the world premiere of *Flora*, an extraordinary new collaboration between The Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre.

Celebrated alongside our closest friends and supporters, Opening Night marked a powerful moment of artistic unity, rich cultural storytelling and bold creative vision.



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- 1 (L-R) Bangarra Dance Theatre Artistic Director and *Flora* Choreographer Frances Rings and The Australian Ballet Artistic Director David Hallberg
- 2 (L-R) Ellie Hauge and His Honour Judge L Johns OAM
- 3 (L-R) Janet Stevenson and Linda Herd
- 4 (L-R) Andrew Wright, Louise Topple, Barry Janes AM, Paul Cross AM, Kenneth Watkins AM

4



Ballet Lover Morning Teas

20 March 2026, Bowral NSW

Photos Sonia Brennan

Our Ballet Lover Morning Teas launched Season 2026 in style, bringing together supporters from across the Southern Highlands of New South Wales at the regional art gallery Ngununggula in Bowral.

These seasonal events provide a valued opportunity to connect with our giving community beyond the major cities, uniting ballet lovers to share their passion for the art form and hear the latest news from the company.

Keep an eye out for a Morning Tea near you.

- 1 Southern Highlands ballet lovers enjoy lunch at Ngununggula café, Hearth by Moonacres
- 2 Ballet Lover Morning Tea guests take a tour of Ngununggula

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Philanthropy Events

Throughout the year, we invite our supporters to intimate in-season events that offer rare insight into the company's artistic world.

To discover more, please reach out to our team.
1300 752 900
philanthropyevents@australianballet.com.au

THE PHILANTHROPY TEAM

We love to hear from you.

If you ever have any questions about your support of our national ballet company or would like to know more about anything you've read in this issue of *Talking Pointe*, please feel free to get in touch.

Kenneth Watkins AM

Philanthropy Director
03 9669 2780
kennethw@australianballet.com.au

Sharyn Gilham

Interim Foundation Board Manager
& EA to Philanthropy Director
03 9669 2785
sharyng@australianballet.com.au

Adam Santilli

Head of Philanthropy &
Patrons Manager – SA
03 9669 2784
adams@australianballet.com.au

Andrew Wright

Philanthropy Manager –
VIC, TAS & WA
03 9669 2735
andreww@australianballet.com.au

Jane Harris

Planned Giving Manager –
VIC, TAS, SA & WA
03 9669 2782
janeh@australianballet.com.au

Elle Carter

Philanthropy Manager –
NSW, ACT & QLD
02 9253 5309
ellec@australianballet.com.au

Sonia Brennan

Planned Giving Manager –
NSW, ACT & QLD
02 9253 5316
soniab@australianballet.com.au

David Wynne

Ballet Ambassador Program
02 9253 5311
davidw@australianballet.com.au

Kate Horwood

Grants Manager
kateh@australianballet.com.au

Kasey Lack

Senior Philanthropy Coordinator
kaseyl@australianballet.com.au

Rachel Webb

Senior Philanthropy Coordinator
rachelw@australianballet.com.au

Holly Cook

Philanthropy Services Coordinator
hollyc@australianballet.com.au

General Enquiries

1300 752 900
philanthropyservices@australianballet.com.au



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support makes a difference
at The Australian Ballet

***Talking Pointe* written and edited by**

Hannah Cheale

Graphic Design

Claire Rubira

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