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**HOUSTON BALLET PROUDLY ANNOUNCES ITS 2021-2022 SEASON ROSTER**

**HOUSTON, TEXAS [August. 11, 2021]** — Houston Ballet proudly announces its 2021-2022 roster and the return of its professional company to Houston Ballet's Center for Dance this week. Fans of Houston Ballet can get a behind the scenes look at the dancers' first week back via Houston Ballet's Instagram, where Principal Dancer Connor Walsh will take over [@houstonballet](https://www.instagram.com/houstonballet) on Thursday, August 12.

Houston Ballet's professional company consists of 59 dancers for the 2021-2022 season. The roster features 51 returning dancers and eight new additions: Corps de Ballet member Neal Burks and Apprentices Jindallae Bernard, Emma Forrester, Eli Gruska, Jordan Lovelace, Zoe Lucich, Jackson Miles and Yu Wakizuka.

**Neal Burks** joins Houston Ballet's Corps de Ballet from Houston Ballet Academy. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, Burks began classical ballet training at 9 years old. In 2016, he placed first in Senior Men's Classical at YAGP Regionals in Tampa, Florida and fourth in Senior Men's Classical at American Dance Competition. Burks trained with Next Generation Ballet prior to joining Houston Ballet Academy's Professional Program in 2017. He danced with Houston Ballet II, Houston Ballet's second company, from 2019 to 2021.

**Jindallae Bernard** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from Houston Ballet Academy. Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, Bernard began classical ballet training with Allegro Academy of Dance at 3 years old. She joined Houston Ballet Academy's Pre-Professional Program in 2009 and in 2019, Bernard earned a position in Houston Ballet II, where she danced prior to joining Houston Ballet this season.

**Emma Forrester** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from Houston Ballet Academy. Raised in Houston, TX, Forrester began dancing at 2 years old and classical ballet training at 4 years old. She joined Houston Ballet Academy's Pre-Professional Program in 2011 and danced with Houston Ballet's second company, Houston Ballet II, from 2019 to 2021.

**Eli Gruska** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from the American Ballet Theatre Studio Company. Born in Los Angeles, California, Gruska received ballet training from the American Ballet Theatre Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School, the San Francisco Ballet School, Paris Opera Ballet School and Marat Daukayev School of Ballet before graduating from the The Royal Ballet School in London in 2018.

**Jordan Lovelace** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from the San Francisco Ballet School. Born and raised in Dallas, Texas, Lovelace has also trained with the Dallas Conservatory, Booker T. Washington High School, the Washington School of Ballet and various top Summer Intensive programs.

**Zoe Lucich** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from the San Francisco Ballet School Trainee Program. Born in Marin County, California, Lucich received her training from Marin Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet School.

**Jackson Miles** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from Houston Ballet Academy. Born in Denver, Colorado, Miles began classical ballet training at 11 years old. After first attending Houston Ballet Academy's Summer Intensive Program

in 2015, he joined the Professional Program the following year. Miles earned a position in Houston Ballet's second company in 2019, where he danced prior to joining Houston Ballet this season.

**Yu Wakizuka** joins Houston Ballet as an Apprentice from the San Francisco Ballet School. Born in Japan, he began training at a young age at the Homura Tomoi Ballet School. In 2017, he won scholarships to numerous ballet schools around the world at the 3rd Annual Beijing International Ballet and Choreography Competition. He then studied ballet at the Hungarian Dance Academy for a year while continuing to perform in competitions.

New promotions for the 2021-2022 season include: Soloist Ryo Kato and Demi Soloists Yumiko Fukuda, Chae Eun Yang, Chandler Dalton, Naazir Muhammad, Elivelton Tomazi and Andrew Vecseri.

The full company, listed by rank, for the 2021-2022 season includes: **Principals** Soo Youn Cho, Jessica Collado, Karina González, Yuriko Kajiya, Melody Mennite, Connor Walsh and Charles Yoshiyama, **First Soloists** Christopher Coomer, Mónica Gómez, Oliver Halkowich and Allison Miller, **Soloists** Tyler Donatelli, Christopher Gray, Ryo Kato, Bridget Kuhns, Jacquelyn Long, Mackenzie Richter, Aaron Sharratt, Alyssa Springer and Harper Watters, **Demi Soloists** Chandler Dalton, Aoi Fujiwara, Yumiko Fukuda, Estheysis Menendez, Naazir Muhammad, Luzemberg Santana, Elivelton Tomazi, Natalie Varnum, Andrew Vecseri and Chae Eun Yang, **Corps de Ballet** members Simone Acri, Henrique Barbosa, Gretel Batista, Magnoly Batista, Neal Burks, Jaci Doty, Caleb Durbin, Danielle Esposito, Syvert Garcia, Rafaela Henrique, Kellen Hornbuckle, Kirsten Hunsberger, Danbi Kim, Fernando Martin-Gullans, Riley McMurray, Caroline Perry, McKhayla Pettingill, Samuel Rodriguez, Madison Russo, Song Teng, Matthew West and Jack Wolff, and **Apprentices** Jindallae Bernard, Emma Forrester, Eli Gruska, Jordan Lovelace, Zoe Lucich, Jackson Miles and Yu Wakizuka.

To learn more about Houston Ballet's 2021-2022 Company, please visit [houstonballet.org/explore/artists/](https://houstonballet.org/explore/artists/).

## 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](https://houstonballet.org).

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