



# HoustonBallet

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## HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES COMPANY ROSTER FOR THE 2017-18 SEASON

**HOUSTON, TEXAS** – Houston Ballet has announced their 2017-18 Season company roster. The company has steadily grown, now reaching 59 dancers. Continuing to attract top talent, the company will welcome new dancers from multiple renowned US and international companies and schools.

“I am thrilled to see the growth of our company over the past 14 years. We can now welcome many talented and diverse dancers to Houston Ballet.” – Stanton Welch AM

**Chun Wai Chan** has been promoted to First Soloist following his debut as Solor in Houston Ballet’s performances of *La Bayadère*. Mr. Chan was a member of Houston Ballet II before joining the Corps de Ballet in 2012. He was promoted to Demi Soloist in 2015 and Soloist in 2016.

“I will work very hard as a First Soloist and will always stay humble. I am very excited for our upcoming season and look forward to working with all of Houston Ballet’s talented dancers.” – Chun Wai Chan

Houston Ballet is pleased to welcome **Nozomi Iijima** back to the company. Ms. Iijima will return as a Soloist after spending several years abroad performing with Ballet Zurich. Born in Osaka, Japan, she trained at Houston Ballet’s Ben Stevenson Academy prior to joining the company in 2008.

“Houston Ballet is my starting point. I owe what I am to Houston Ballet and feel very lucky that I can return to that origin. I’m excited to be challenged and experience many things here again.” – Nozomi Iijima

Houston Ballet Apprentices **Alexandra Burman, Chandler Dalton, Nina Fernandes, Thays Golz, Samuel Rodriguez, Andrew Vecseri** and Houston Ballet II dancer **Caroline Perry** have been promoted to the Corps de Ballet. Houston Ballet II dancers **Naazir Muhammad** and **McKhayla Pettingill** have been promoted to the rank of Apprentice.

Joining Houston Ballet’s Corps de Ballet this season are **Ryo Kato**, a former Soloist with Hong Kong Ballet, and **Estheysis Menendez** and **Adrian Masvidal**, both former Principal dancers at National

Ballet of Cuba. **Yumiko Fukuda** (Hong Kong Ballet), **Kathryn McDonald** (Boston Ballet), and **Emilie Gallerani-Tassinari** (Dutch National Ballet) will also join the company as Corps de Ballet members.

“It feels really good to be a dancer at Houston Ballet. This is a great company and I know I will learn a lot and love dancing here.” – Ryo Kato

“Houston Ballet is one of the best companies in the world! I feel very inspired to pursue the art of dance and to continue growing professionally.” – Estheysis Menendez

**Gloria Benaglia**, senior women first place winner at the 2017 YAGP, will join the company as an Apprentice along with fellow Ellison Ballet students **Austen Acevedo** and **Shaelynn Estrada**, **Joshua Guillemot-Rodgerson** (The Julliard School) and **Fernando Martin-Gullans** (The Royal Ballet School).

Please join us in congratulating company promotions and welcoming our new company members. We look forward to continued growth in the both the size of the company and the level of talent representing Houston Ballet.

### **About Houston Ballet**

Houston Ballet has evolved into a company of 59 dancers with a budget of \$33.2 million (making it the United States' fifth largest ballet company by number of dancers), a state-of-the-art performance space built especially for the company, the largest professional dance facility in America, Houston Ballet's \$46.6 million Center for Dance which opened in April 2011, and an endowment of just over \$70 million (as of January 2017).

Australian choreographer Stanton Welch has served as artistic director of Houston Ballet since 2003, raising the level of the company's classical technique and commissioning many new works from dance makers such as Christopher Bruce, Alexander Ekman, William Forsythe, Jiri Kylian, 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 55 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 currently consists of 61 professional musicians who play all ballet performances at Wortham Theater Center under music director Ermanno Florio.

Houston Ballet’s Education and Outreach Program has reached approximately 45,884 Houston area students (as of January 2017). Houston Ballet’s Academy has over a thousand students and has had five academy students win awards at the prestigious international ballet competition the Prix de Lausanne, with one student winning the overall competition in 2010.

For more information on Houston Ballet visit [houstonballet.org](http://houstonballet.org).

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