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HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES SIMON THEW AS NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR

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HOUSTON, TEXAS [October 23, 2023] — The 2024 – 2025 season at Houston Ballet begins with Australian Conductor Simon Thew’s appointment as Music Director and Chief Conductor, effective July 1, 2024. Arriving in the fall of 2022 as associate conductor, Thew has made a tremendous impact as a steady source of support and symphonic consistency, conducting the Houston Ballet orchestra with Maestro Ermanno Florio across all productions.

Thew gained a Master of Music Performance, majoring in conducting, from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. In 2007 he was the first, and only, conductor to be awarded the prestigious Dame Joan Sutherland/Richard Bonyngue Travel Scholarship from the Australian Opera Auditions Committee, which enabled further study in Europe. He served as an assistant conductor on various productions with Opera Australia between 2007 and 2010. In 2010, he held the Hephzibah Tintner Fellowship, giving performance and mentoring opportunities with The Australian Ballet, Opera Australia and the Sydney Symphony.

In 2011, Thew was The Australian Ballet’s Conducting Fellow, and in that year was also awarded the renowned Churchill Fellowship launching further study and professional development opportunities with world leading Ballet Companies, Opera Houses, and Orchestras in London, Birmingham, Vienna, Berlin, and New York. As a regular guest conductor with The Australian Ballet between 2013 and 2016, he conducted performances in most of the company’s seasons during that time. In 2017 he accepted an invitation to become The Australian Ballet’s assistant conductor, a position he held until mid-2022. In this position, Thew conducted an average of half the company’s performances working with orchestras across Australia. He has also worked as a guest conductor for the English National Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet and Houston Ballet.

In 2016, Houston Ballet traveled to Australia to present Stanton Welch’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Accompanied by Orchestra Victoria, Thew joined Ermanno Florio as a guest conductor marking the beginning of his working relationship with Houston Ballet.

"I've had the pleasure of working with Simon previously, and I know that his expertise and passion for music will undoubtedly elevate our artistic journey and deepen the connection between the dancers and the orchestra," says Artistic Director Stanton Welch. "Julie [Kent] and I look forward to having the Houston Ballet Orchestra under his baton as we enter the next era."

Originally beginning his musical journey as a tuba player, Thew knew he wanted to conduct from an early age. Embracing every opportunity he could to jump on the podium, Thew even convinced his conservatory to allow him to take a course in conducting as an undergraduate, an elective not usually offered. Working with The Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra (now Opera Australia Orchestra) shortly after graduating was instrumental in his falling in love with dance as an art form, and its relationship with music.

"We are a major player of world class content," Thew says on living in Houston. "I appreciate being in a city where the arts are such a valued fabric of life and where there is also so much connection internationally. I am excited and honored to be continuing to work with this amazing company and orchestra in this new position. Working with young or early career musicians is also especially important to me. Alongside working with established instrumentalists, composers, and conductors, I hope to continue fostering in the next generation of artists that reflect the cross-culturalism of this multinational city."

ABOUT HOUSTON BALLET

With over 50 years of rich history, Houston Ballet has evolved into a company with a budget of \$37.6 million and an endowment of \$97.5 million (as of June 2023), making it the country's fourth-largest ballet company. Its \$46.6 million state-of-the-art performance space, the Houston Ballet Margaret Alkek Williams Center for Dance, opened in April 2011. In addition, 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, Tokyo and more.

Australian choreographer Stanton Welch AM has served as Artistic Director of Houston Ballet since 2003, raising the level of the Company's classical technique from dance legends such as Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, Sir Kenneth MacMillan, John Neumeier, and Jerome Robbins. Continuing the legacy of being a choreographic eden, Houston Ballet has also commissioned new works by Aszure Barton, Trey McIntyre, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and Justin Peck. Julie Kent joins Welch as Artistic Director in 2023, after serving as Artistic Director of The Washington Ballet from 2016 – 2023, where she commissioned over 26 world premieres from a diverse range of choreographers as well as several full-length classical ballets. Kent retired as a Principal dancer in 2015 as the longest-tenured dancer in American Ballet Theatre's 84-year history and is deeply committed to positively impacting artists, audiences, and communities through the transformative power of dance. 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 85,000 individuals in the Houston area annually. Houston Ballet Academy trains more than 1,000 students every year, producing more than 60 percent of the elite athletes that comprise Houston Ballet's current Company. For more information on Houston Ballet, visit houstonballet.org

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