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Ballet Austin II Presents *Trail of Tears: Walking the Choctaw Road*

In Collaboration with the Pollyanna Theatre Company and Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, Ballet Austin II Exposes Elementary Students to the Arts through Dance, Dialogue and Sculpture

AUSTIN, TX – December XX, 2004 – Ballet Austin, Pollyanna Theatre Company and the Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum present *Trail of Tears: Walking the Choctaw Road*, a dance drama based on Tim Tingle's book *Walking the Choctaw Road* (Cinco Punto Press), winner of the 2005 Oklahoma Book of the Year Award. Choreographed by Gina Patterson and written by Emily Cicchini, this dance drama combines ballet with dialogue to explore the stories of the Choctaw Indians and the Indian Removals of 1830. This work debuts to the public on January 22 at 3:00 p.m. at Texas School for the Deaf. For tickets, please contact Ballet Austin at (512) 476-2163.

"This work conveys an important message on tolerance, and teaches the audience about empathy for others," said Michelle Martin, associate artistic director, Ballet Austin. "The arts have a special ability to provoke emotions through multiple senses, opening the mind to experience powerful feelings."

This production marks the sixth project produced through the Arts Blitz program. The Arts Blitz, is a multi-arts program that provides free arts workshops and performances to students from at-risk elementary school campuses in the Greater Austin area. This project is anticipated to reach 3,500 students in grades 3-5 during the 2005/2006 season.

"Though the *Trail of Tears: Walking the Choctaw Road* is our most ambitious Arts Blitz to date, the collaboration itself began more than six years ago with my Project InterAct production of *Degas' Little Dancer*," recalls Judy Matetzchk, Ph.D., artistic director, Pollyanna Theatre Company. "As I began to work with the actors, I realized that the project needed the additional dimension of dancers and sculptors to give the work context. The Arts Blitz partnership has been incredibly satisfying for both the students and the actors, dancers and artists who participate each year."

In addition to the production, fourth grade students will have the opportunity to participate in post-performance workshops. Artists and educators from each of the three collaborating arts organizations will conduct movement, creative drama and sculpture workshops on-site at each campus. Developed in conjunction with teachers from the Leander ISD, the workshop curriculum is designed to enhance the students' appreciation of the *Trail of Tears*. The workshops also become a valuable tool for teachers in the classroom and help both students and teachers find connections

between this project and their own experiences. All participating teachers will receive a Teacher Resource Guide prior to the beginning of the Arts Blitz.

Arts Blitz is sponsored by Applied Materials, Seawell Elam Foundation, 3M, Texas Commission on the Arts, and the Dell Foundation.

Ballet Austin

Under the leadership of artistic director Stephen Mills, Ballet Austin has uniquely combined classical dance with innovative style and movement. Ballet Austin presents five productions each year in Austin, tours nationally and is a financially stable \$4 million organization. The Company employs 21 professional dancers from around the world to live in Austin for 34 weeks each season. Ballet Austin II and the Ballet Austin Academy serve as educational arms that strengthen the organization's core purpose. The Ballet Austin Academy is one of the largest in the United States, serving more than 900 students annually. Ballet Austin has established itself as a world-class company that makes ballet accessible to all and enhances Austin's reputation as a city that thrives in the arts.

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