

# NEWS RELEASE

The logo for Ballet Austin's 50th anniversary. It features the word "BALLET" in a tall, thin, sans-serif font, with "Austin" in a cursive script below it. To the right, a large "50" is displayed, with "YEARS" written inside the zero. The entire logo is in a gold or brown color.

Ballet Austin Celebrates Golden 50th Anniversary Season.

**AUSTIN, TEXAS (DATE)** - During its 2006-2007 Season, Ballet Austin, one of the preeminent dance companies in the United States, will celebrate 50 years of dance productions to Central Texas audiences.

Ballet Austin is the only performing arts organization in Austin with a full time resident company. It's a \$4.5 million company, with both an operational reserve and a Foundation. With dancers that are recruited from a 29-city audition tour, Ballet Austin has 22 full-time professional dancers on a 34-week contract. Ballet Austin was the first professional ballet company to produce *The Nutcracker* in the state of Texas, and has produced this work every year since 1962 for a collective audience of over 1 million central Texans.

"Ballet Austin has a 50-year history rich with character, culture, growth and sustainability," said Cookie Gregory Ruiz, Executive Director, Ballet Austin. "We are proud to run the fourth largest classical ballet school in the United States and one of the few that contributes income to the annual campaign. Our 50-year history represents a sustainable business model in the arts that we hope sets a standard that other organizations can follow to make a positive impact in their communities and on the world."

## Awards

- Ballet Austin is currently ranked the number one arts institution by the City of Austin Cultural Contracts funding program.
- Austin Business Journal named Ballet Austin one of the "Top 25 Non-Profit Organizations" for the past six years.
- Ballet Austin was awarded the Trailblazer Award by the Texas Commission on the Arts for the most innovative program in the state and the Austin Community Foundation's Merriweather Award for the Outstanding Project of the year.
- For the last three years, Austin American Statesman awarded Ballet Austin's Fete with the title "Best Black Tie Event of the Year".

Ballet Austin's rich history began in 1956 when it was founded by Barbara Carson, a soloist with the New York Civic Opera Ballet. The company's first performance was at the City Coliseum in December of that year, with excerpts from *The Nutcracker* performed with the Austin Symphony Orchestra. Nine years later, Maria Tallchief, the famous Native American Indian ballerina paid a visit to the school accompanied by Eugenia Orusso, Executive Director of the American School of Ballet. As a result of their visit, Barbara Carson attends a choreographer's workshop conducted by George Balanchine and later became a consultant to the Ford Foundation.

In 1968, the late Stanley Hall, a UT professor and dancer who had performed with the Metropolitan Ballet of England and Les Ballet des Paris, takes the helm. In 1971, the dance company changes its

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name to the Austin Civic Ballet. At this juncture, the organization still operated as a non-profit organization managed by a volunteer board of directors and staffed by a small group of dedicated individuals.

1973 Eugene Slavin and Alexandra Nadal become co-artistic directors. Together they took the company from a civic organization to a professional company.

Mikhail Baryshnikov wows Austin audiences in 1981 in a sold-out performance of *'Le Corsaire'*. In 1983, the Austin Civic Ballet transitioned to a professional company, changing its name to Ballet Austin.

In 1989, Lambros Lambrou was appointed artistic director, expanding the company from 14 to 24 dancers, recruiting from across North America and Eastern Europe. In 1995, Stephen Mills became resident choreographer and Cookie Ruiz took the helm in 1997 as General Manager.

In 1999, Ballet Austin produced a world premiere of Stephen Mills' choreographed version of *The Nutcracker*. Also that year, Ballet Austin II, its apprentice company, was introduced with Michelle Martin as the program's founding director. After a nationwide search, the Board of Directors names Stephen Mills the organization's fifth artistic director in 2000 and in 2002, Ballet Austin performs Mills' adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

In 2004, Ballet Austin returned to the Kennedy Center to perform Mills' adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which the Center commissioned. The Washington Post, in its review of the performance, called the company, "one of the nation's best kept ballet secrets."

This year, during the ballet company's golden 50th anniversary, Ballet Austin received the Humanitarian Award from the Anti-Defamation League for Mills' groundbreaking *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project*, the largest collaborative project in the company's history.

## The 2006 / 2007 Season

Ballet Austin will illuminate the stage on October 27, 28 and 29 with *Classic Beauty*, the third act of one of Tchaikovsky's masterpieces, *The Sleeping Beauty* and George Balanchine's *Serenade*.

The season will continue from December 9 through 23 with *The Nutcracker*; February 15 through 18 with *Director's Choice / Golden*; April 6 through 8 with *The Taming of the Shrew*, and May 10 through 13 with *A Special Evening with Stephen Mills*.

In mid-May 2007, Ballet Austin will culminate the dance company's Golden 50th Anniversary season as they inhabit the Butler Dance Education Center located at 3rd and San Antonio Streets. The building's

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34,000 total square feet will house the entire Ballet Austin Company including professional dancers, administrative staff and Academy and Box Office operations.

### **About Ballet Austin**

Ballet Austin is one of the preeminent dance companies in the United States. Under the leadership of artistic director Stephen Mills, whose experience includes choreography and directing both classical and contemporary ballets, Ballet Austin has adopted a unique blend of classical dance with innovative style and movement. Ballet Austin Academy, the Company's classical ballet school and the 4th largest classical ballet academy in the United States, teaches students from 3-years and older. Ballet Austin Academy rehearses and administers the twenty-three-member professional company, which is employed thirty-four weeks a year, to dance in five different main-stage productions under Stephen Mills' direction.

For additional information, visit [www.balletaustin.org](http://www.balletaustin.org).

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