



## **Ballet Austin Board Announces Leadership Plan Artistic & Executive Directors Sign 10-year Contract Renewal & Honored with Studio**

**WHO:** Ballet Austin  
**WHAT:** Stephen Mills & Cookie Ruiz Accept 10-year Contract Extensions  
**WHEN:** 10-year contract begins with 2011/12 Season

**AUSTIN, Texas**— Today Ballet Austin's Board of Directors announces that Artistic Director Stephen Mills and Executive Director Cookie Ruiz accepted 10-year extensions to their employment agreements. Beginning August 1, 2011, the new contracts will ensure the continued leadership of this successful management team at the top of the nationally-recognized dance company through 2021.

Dan Byrne, Ballet Austin Board President said, "These two leaders have assembled a team that has taken this organization to extraordinary heights over the last 10 years, both locally and nationally. Given the commitment to the mission that they have exemplified, it was only natural that the Board offer a long term commitment to them. We are delighted that they have accepted."

Under their collaborative management Ballet Austin has grown from an organization with a \$2M operational budget to \$6M annually. Mills and Ruiz also led the organization through the \$10.3M capital campaign and innovative redevelopment project (The Butler Dance Education Center); a 38,000 square-foot facility with 8 studios and community meeting space in the epicenter of Austin's growth and redevelopment.

### **New Studio Named for Mills and Ruiz**

In a unanimous vote, the Board has also named its newest studio at the Butler Dance Education Center for Mills and Ruiz, in recognition of the accomplishment their leadership has brought the company. The Mills/Ruiz Legacy Studio has been officially named in honor of the joint achievements of Mills and Ruiz during their tenure.

The 2010/11 Season celebrated Mills' 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the Company and marked Ruiz's 13<sup>th</sup> year as Executive Director.

Byrne adds, "It is fitting that the final studio that completes the full vision of the Butler Dance Education Center will bear Stephen and Cookie's names. The Ballet Austin Board of Directors values the opportunity to support the work of these exceptional leaders."

### **Stephen Mills, Artistic Director**

Mr. Mills has created more than 40 works for companies in the United States and abroad. His ballets are in the repertoires of such companies as The Atlanta Ballet, Washington Ballet, Cuballet in Havana, Cuba, BalletMet Columbus, The Dayton Ballet, The Sarasota Ballet of Florida, Ballet Pacifica, Dallas Black Dance Theater, The Louisville Ballet, The Nashville Ballet, Fort Worth/Dallas Ballet and Kaleidoscope. He has worked in collaboration with such luminaries as the eight-time Grammy Award-winning band, Asleep at the Wheel, and Shawn Colvin. In addition to his work as a choreographer, Mr. Mills is committed as a master teacher to developing dancers. He has been a teacher at many pre-professional academies including Goucher College; Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing Arts in Dallas; The Virginia School of the Arts; The New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts; Stephens College and Point Park College in Pittsburgh. Mr. Mills also serves on the Board of Trustees of the national dance service organization, Dance USA. The 2011/12 season marks Mr. Mills' 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Artistic Director of Ballet Austin.



### **Cookie Gregory Ruiz , C.F.R.E., Executive Director**

Ms. Ruiz has more than 25 years' experience in the areas of strategic planning, program development and non-profit fund-raising/management. In 2002 she was awarded the professional designation of Certified Fund Raising Executive (C.F.R.E.) by the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Her community honors include Austin Business Journal's "Profiles in Power" award, Austin Community Foundation's Beverly S. Sheffield Award/Excellence as Nonprofit Executive, The American Red Cross "Clara Barton Medal of Honor," Volunteer of the Year for the Austin Independent School District and the Lone Star Girl Scout Council "Women of Distinction" Award, she is also a former President of The Junior League of Austin. Ms. Ruiz is a member of the Mayor Lee Leffingwell's Citizen's Cabinet and is a graduate of Austin's City Works Academy. Ms. Ruiz is the past Chair of the national Board of Trustees of Dance/USA, and is a member of the national board of the Performing Arts Alliance (Washington DC) and is a member of the Board of Texans for the Arts. Her city-focused leadership roles include Chair of CreateAustin, the Citizens Advisory Task Force of Imagine Austin, President of the Board of Directors of Con Mi Madre, the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), and as Community Advisor to the Young Women's Alliance (YWA). As a graduate of Leadership Austin, Ms. Ruiz co-founded the diversity/principle-based curriculum for the Teen Leadership Austin program and served four years as a member of the Leadership Austin Board of Directors. Additionally, Ms. Ruiz provided the research and development for the nationally recognized Junior League of Austin Hispanic Mother/Daughter Program (Con Mi Madre), as well as three other nationally replicated social service programs. Ms. Ruiz has served as a speaker, facilitator and presenter for a variety of leadership conferences, including the National Conference on Community Leadership, the National Performing Arts Conference, The Governor's Women's Business Leadership Forum and the Texas Commission on the Arts. In 1996 Ms. Ruiz joined the staff of Ballet Austin as development director, became general manager/executive director in 1997.

### **About Ballet Austin**

As distinctive and dynamic as the city it calls home, Ballet Austin welcomes audiences near and far to participate in its "classically innovative" vision for the democratization of dance. With a rich history spanning five decades, acclaimed productions, a commitment to creating access to programs and one of the nation's largest classical ballet academies, the organization is poised for an even greater future. From their new home at the Butler Dance Education Center & Community School in downtown Austin, Ballet Austin and artistic director Stephen Mills actively engage the community, dancers, and audiences alike. *The New York Times* proclaims Ballet Austin "a company with big ambitions" originating work that is "absorbing."

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