

# AGM Message

Barry Hughson, Executive Director

Good evening and welcome to the 67th Annual General Meeting of The National Ballet of Canada.

Artistic achievement and global attention were at the centre of a remarkable year at the National Ballet. The 2017/18 season was also a time of institutional progress in many areas, along with national and international advocacy to contribute to and strengthen our field.

I must begin by thanking all of you, along with the 3,867 donors from Toronto, Ontario, and across Canada, who make our work possible. Under David MacDonald's volunteer leadership, supported by our brilliant Director of Development Diana Reitberger and her team, the Soaring Campaign for the National Ballet has reached \$94,000,000 of its \$100,000,000 goal. This transformational campaign has strengthened our Endowment Foundation, and provided vital resources to fuel Artistic Director Karen Kain's vision, including the commissioning of new work, supporting our orchestra, expanding our community reach, improving healthcare for our artists and bringing the National Ballet to the world. We expect to complete the Soaring Campaign over the next few months, and the campaign's impact will be felt for generations to come.

Year to year, the ebbs and flows of box office performance are driven largely by programming. Coming off a record setting year at the box office last season, driven by the world premiere of Will Tuckett's *Pinocchio* and the return of James Kudelka's *Swan Lake*, we saw a normalizing of box office results in 2017/18 with one less full-length ballet and one additional mixed repertoire production. Once again, *The Nutcracker* set a new box office record, selling out all 25 performances.

Director of Communications Julia Drake and her team continue to focus their efforts on building and leveraging a comprehensive digital strategy, including aggressive online and social media initiatives, and are working closely with the Development team in moving toward a more "patron-centric" approach to our work.

This season, the company took its first major step in this new alignment with the restructuring of our telesales and Audience and Donor Services teams, which will streamline communications with patrons and build more opportunities for bespoke management of our relationships with donors, subscribers and single ticket buyers.

Our Technology department has continued to make progress in building and leveraging our technological capacity. Director of Technology Christopher Sonnemann has been working collaboratively with peers in the field to leverage new technology funding now available through the Canada Council. Specifically, he has been instrumental in bringing together the Canadian Opera Company,

the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and several other peer institutions and union partners to begin exploring and leveraging the richness of digital technology - a deeply transformative opportunity that will positively impact all aspects of the performing arts ecosystem.

In Finance, our Chief Financial Officer Ray Forzley partnered closely with the senior leadership team to ensure that we met important financial goals, including delivering an operating surplus, improving the company's cash position and managing costs associated with large scale international tours and our collaboration with Robert Lepage's Ex Machina and the National Film Board of Canada in the creation of *Frame by Frame*. Ray's leadership in his first full year as CFO has reverberated across the organization and I'm grateful to have his partnership and counsel.

Our Production and Wardrobe teams, under the leadership of James Thornley, were outstanding as always. On the road, our production team encountered many challenges, from extremely tight schedules to language barriers and through it all, managed to make the National Ballet shine as a world-class institution at home and around the world. In London, the team transformed a decommissioned newspaper print facility into a dramatic and unique performance space in collaboration with The Royal Ballet for Robert Binet's *The Dreamers Ever Leave You*, and back at home, they managed a complex collaboration with Guillaume Côté, Robert Lepage's Ex Machina and the National Film Board, bringing a remarkable work to life that combined technology and dance in exciting new ways. Despite very different ways of working, the National Ballet, Ex Machina and the National Film Board successfully collaborated on *Frame by Frame* and it was an artistic success and came in on budget and on time.

The 2017/18 season was also a year of engagement with our community, with our industry and with our Government. Toward the end of last season, we joined a cohort of Toronto-based arts organizations in a program titled "Staging Change." Facilitated by EMC Arts and supported by the Mellon Foundation, "Staging Change" tackles the question of adaptability in the arts – our ability to evolve as the environment changes. The "Staging Change" team for the National Ballet is focusing its work on our reach into the broader community, from our education programs, to unique partnerships, performance venues, and digital opportunities that will bring our work to more Canadians. I will have more to report on this important work at our next AGM and thank our team, led by Associate Director of Development, Major Gifts Kate Halpenny, for their commitment to this effort.

The National Ballet was also part of a national cohort of organizations and union partners to respond to the #MeToo movement. In January of 2018, the National Ballet hosted arts and union leaders from across Canada at The Walter Carsen Centre to launch this important work. Facilitated by Canadian Equity and the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, the Anti-Harassment Summit led to a series of recommendations, including the need to create a national, cross-

disciplinary Code of Conduct for the live performing arts. I volunteered to lead a working group in the development of the national code, which is now moving through a process of consultation with artists and organizations across Canada. At home, our Human Resources team, led by Kathleen Matatya with support from our HR consultant Nikki Johnston, reviewed more than two dozen existing policies and, in conjunction with the Governance Committee of the Board, developed a new Code of Conduct for the National Ballet. The Code of Conduct, along with several other related policies, were approved by the full board in June and have been rolled out across the organization. I personally met with every dancer in the company, individually and in small groups, to ask for their input on things we can all do together to improve and enhance our workplace culture, and their feedback helped to shape the new Code of Conduct. My thanks to the dancers, who took the time to engage in these important conversations and brought an inspiring level of openness, ideas and positivity to the process.

Another initiative that began last year was the National Ballet's participation in The Equity Project. This cohort of 22 mid to large scale North American ballet companies is led by DanceUSA, Dance Theatre of Harlem and the International Association of Blacks in Dance. Over three years, the cohort will explore ways to ensure that there is more diversity in our field on stage, in our audiences, behind the scenes, and at the Board table. I am partnering with Associate Artistic Director Christopher Stowell in representing the National Ballet and look forward to reporting our progress as this important project moves forward. In addition, we have engaged Charles Smith and Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario, who will be leading us through the development of an institution-wide Equity, Diversity and Inclusion plan for the National Ballet, which we expect to roll out in 2019.

We continue to work closely with our partners at Global Public Affairs in Ottawa to ensure that government stakeholders are aware of our work. Over the past season, we have engaged with the government in several unique initiatives.

In collaboration with the Banff Centre, the National Ballet led a cohort of 11 organizations in advocating for the elimination of the \$15,000,000 cap on the Endowment Incentives component of the Cultural Investment Fund through the Department of Canadian Heritage. The Endowment Incentives program leverages private philanthropy with government matching funds to build arts endowments across Canada. The National Ballet would have reached the \$15,000,000 cap this year. Just last week, Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez announced that the cap has been eliminated. I'm grateful to my colleagues across Canada who came together to illustrate the impact of the program and to use our collective voices to protect this transformational funding program.

In March of 2018, I testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade as part of their study on international cultural diplomacy and in April, represented the National Ballet as a delegate on the Cultural Trade Mission to China with Heritage Minister Melanie Joly. I was joined by Principal

Dancer Xiao Nan Yu, who served as my “celebrity interpreter” as we met with officials from several Chinese presenting organizations, including Beijing’s National Centre for the Performing Arts and Shanghai’s Grand Theatre. Progress was made on planning for a National Ballet tour to China in 2021 or 2022, along with new relationships forged with Chinese colleagues and organizations.

Over the course of last season, new applications were submitted for multi-year funding from the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council and the City of Toronto. I’m pleased to report that the National Ballet received increases from all three levels of government, for which we are deeply grateful.

It was a busy and productive year at the National Ballet and none of it would have been possible without the vision and leadership of Karen Kain. Karen is a remarkable partner and friend and it continues to be my profound honor to do everything I can to help fulfill her vision for this institution. I’m also grateful to our Board Chair Cornell Wright, who provides calm, warm and wise counsel to Karen, myself and our Board.

Thank you all for being here this evening. Thank you for your continued support and belief in the importance of the arts and your National Ballet of Canada.