

AGM Message

Karen Kain, Artistic Director

When we reflect on the 2019/20 season, what inevitably comes to mind are the significant, ongoing challenges brought on by the pandemic. But nothing can diminish what The National Ballet of Canada achieved, both onstage and off, leading up to that unforgettable moment in March when our theatres closed. The performances of our 2019/20 season were some of the finest and most memorable of my career as Artistic Director. Knowing that so many of you – our donors and audiences – felt equally moved and inspired is the ultimate reward.

The season opened with *Giselle*, where many of our principal ballerinas gave exceptional performances in the title role. There were two mixed programmes in the Fall Season that showcased the diversity of our artists. The company performed Choreographic Associate Robert Binet's world premiere of *Orpheus Alive*, with a new score commissioned from Missy Mazzoli. This work shared an evening with Balanchine's *Chaconne*. The second mixed programme featured Harald Lander's homage to classical ballet training, *Etudes*, Jiří Kylián's exceptional *Petite Mort* and Alexei Ratmansky's *Piano Concerto #1*. 2019 concluded with our annual performances of James Kudelka's *The Nutcracker*.

In January, with very little time to prepare, the company travelled to the Kennedy Centre in Washington, D.C. where we performed a mixed programme of William Forsythe's *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude* and *Approximate Sonata 2016* with *Piano Concerto #1* and *Petite Mort*. The company also performed *The Sleeping Beauty* to rave reviews from critics and standing ovations from audiences. The company was acclaimed in a manner that I could have only dreamt of. Our artists and our staff really proved themselves as so talented and accomplished. They managed the workload and the complications of it all with great finesse. The National Ballet was truly praised – Sarah Kaufman, long-time and esteemed critic for The Washington Post, wrote: "I have seen many *Sleeping Beauties*, but never a finer one than this moving and beautiful production."

In March, a 10-year dream of mine came true with Crystal Pite's return to set a new work for the company. *Angels' Atlas* is as rich in beauty, mystery, and human yearning as anything that I have seen. I know that the whole company found Crystal's return to our studios a privilege, a pleasure and a revelation. *Angels' Atlas* was on a mixed programme with Wayne McGregor's always exciting *Chroma* and Sir Frederick Ashton's *Marguerite and Armand*, a classic and not-often performed work that the company acquired to celebrate Principal Dancer Greta Hodgkinson's retirement.

The National Ballet had just begun a run of performances of Alexei Ratmansky's *Romeo and Juliet* – some of the best performances of this work that I have seen

– when things came to a halt as performance venues closed and the world reacted to the escalating seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic.

You have all played a role in these successes – our talented dancers and musicians, our artistic and administrative staff, the production team, wardrobe personnel and, of course, our generous donors, volunteers and board members. Thank you so much for your time, commitment and passion for dance and for The National Ballet of Canada.

Thank you as well to Cornell C.V. Wright for your continued inspiring leadership as Chair. And to the Board of Directors, thank you for your passion, your wisdom, kindness and steady guidance through times of both prosperity and challenge.

As dancers and artists, we want nothing more than to connect with our audiences and to pursue our art form with ambition and creativity. Our digital programming will open up new opportunities to do so while we look forward to a time when our theatres reopen. Some of you will have already seen our Expansive Dances series. These dance films launched our 2020/21 virtual season. Created by our Choreographic Associates Robert Binet, Guillaume Côté and Alysia Pires with Director Ben Shirinian, Expansive Dances was filmed on location in the summer and released in September. I encourage you to visit our website to experience these wonderful dance films. Beautiful and inspiring digital programming such as these films is possible because of our partners and our community of support.

The 2019/20 season was so different from any other year that we have had to encapsulate. The world has changed, and we have been faced with challenges unforeseen and still unfolding. We don't know what the future holds and the way forward is not always clear, but I am so proud of this organization for the resiliency and spirit that everyone has brought to facing these challenges.

We will continue to use our passion for the National Ballet and for the work that we do to find creative ways forward so that we can continue to share this beautiful artform and to share our belief in the power of dance to enrich hearts and minds.

[More About Expansive Dances >](#)