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## 2020/21 SEASON REPORT

BalletMet serves Central Ohio as a cultural, educational and economic resource by engaging the best and brightest dancers and choreographers to live and work in Columbus, attracting regional audiences to our world-class performances, and educating the next generation of dancers, dance audiences and dance supporters.

Mission: To entertain, engage and educate through dance.

Vision: To create and foster world-class art and artists that inspire Columbus and beyond.

### 2020/21 SEASON: CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY IN THE PANDEMIC

Despite the season-long challenges of the pandemic, BalletMet continued to engage our community in all program areas, providing virtual and limited in-person artistic productions and effective hybrid Dance Academy training and classroom education programs. Generous support from government, corporations, foundations, board members and individual donors allowed BalletMet to continue operations during the 2020/21 season and prepare for the future.

When forced to close our studios, leave theaters and school classrooms and cancel live performances, including *The Nutcracker*, BalletMet pivoted immediately to engage our community through virtual performances, dance classes, and arts education programs. In 2020/21 we relied on these new platforms to deepen our relationship with our patrons.

- BalletMet shared videos of three past performances, available on our website without cost to audiences in Columbus and beyond: Edwaard Liang's *The Art of War*, Justin Peck's *In Creases* and Christopher Wheeldon's *Fool's Paradise*. Although not a substitute for live performances, they provided a powerful tool to stay connected with our patrons and to share our artistry with a national audience. Performances were viewed more than 2700 times.
- BalletMet's production of *The Nutcracker* has been a beloved tradition in our community for half a century. To address the loss of this holiday favorite, we created a free virtual celebration available through our website. A *Nutcracker Holiday* included a new video, *Clara's Nutcracker Prince*, featuring BalletMet performances of *The Nutcracker*, crafts, games and recipes—even a community scavenger hunt—enabling more than 30,000 individuals to participate in this treasured holiday event.
- BalletMet collaborated with the Kings Arts Complex to present a virtual performance of Donald McKayle's *Rainbow Etude*, followed by a discussion of the ballet, its history and significance. The program was part of *The HeART of the Protest*, an initiative created in response to the global movement for equity and racial justice. McKayle (1930-2018) was an award-winning choreographer noted for socially conscious work focused on the Black experience.
- BalletMet's digital presence became a primary tool for community engagement; videos shared on social media platforms were viewed more than 200,000 times.

### A RETURN TO LIVE PERFORMANCE

Sharing live performances with our community is why BalletMet exists. We were deeply grateful to end our season by returning to the theater. After 9 months on layoff, our professional Company dancers returned in January 2021 to begin dancing again. Following strict health and safety guidelines, they learned to

create and rehearse through Zoom before transitioning to dance in small pods in our studios. Their work became 6 World Premieres, performed live in 35 shows over 8 weeks.

- Unlocked included World Premieres by BalletMet Artistic Director Edwaard Liang (Piano Concerto, *Solace* and *A Soldier's Tale*), former dancer Gabriel Gaffney Smith (*What Is Your Neighbor Doing?*), and current dancers Karen Wing (*Verbena*) and Leiland Charles (*Figurines*). BalletMet's culture of nurturing artists to develop their talents and interests enabled us to create this "homegrown" production of world-class ballets with a striking variety of style and mood.
- Unlocked was presented in the BalletMet Performance Space to small audiences of no more than 33 people. While intimate, the impact of these performances on patrons and dancers alike was extraordinary, bringing home the beauty and power of sharing live performing arts.
- Critical response to Unlocked was enthusiastic: "killer performances . . . awash in grace and beauty" achieved a high "level of creativity and sophistication," "a winner by anyone's standards."

#### BALLETMET DANCE ACADEMY

BalletMet continued to offer the highest level of dance instruction to more than 800 students in over 200 classes, camps and workshops, ranging from introductory classes for children to pre-professional training.

- BalletMet was the only major US ballet company to offer in-person Summer Intensive training in 2020, following extensive research and the development of health and safety protocols. Classes were offered for 8 weeks, including a Company Repertoire Week, through a combination of online and socially-distanced in person instruction.
- BalletMet Dance Academy used the same hybrid instruction model to provide dance training throughout the 2020/21 academic year. Supplementing in-person studio classes with "real time" sessions on Zoom enabled Academy students to benefit from their teachers' personal attention, protecting cherished relationships between teachers and aspiring young artists.
- BalletMet provided more than \$243,000 in scholarships and financial aid to support dance classes for children from families with talent and interest. Discover Dance scholarships fund Academy tuition and apparel fees for students aged 8-11, most of them identified through our partnership with public schools.
- Final year-end performances highlighting the accomplishments of Academy students were filmed and shared with students and their families.

#### COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

BalletMet partners with schools and community organizations to educate and engage through dance.

- We provided Dance for All education programs in 50 area classrooms through in-person and virtual instruction, refining our teaching methods, digital tools and resources to reach approximately 2,700 young learners, their teachers and parents.
- BalletMet teaching artists developed a video version of our movement-based early learning program *The Wiggle Jig* to maintain relationships with area schools. One example is the partnership with Columbus City Schools, through which every preschooler in the district—all 1,600—had access to the research-based curriculum, in addition to a monthly family dance party.
- BalletMet's partnership with nearby Reynoldsburg City Schools provided dance and movement-based learning support classes to students in district schools at all levels, transitioning successfully to accommodate distance learning.

- BalletMet 2 is a group of six accomplished pre-professional artists who serve as the organization's community ambassadors, sharing their talent and passion for dance in schools and venues across our region.
- Movement Makers, BalletMet 2's lecture-demonstration program, transitioned to a virtual format, including a pre-recorded video of BalletMet 2 performing followed by a live Question and Comment session with the dancers. This integrated experience was very well-received by students and teachers.
- In June 2021, BalletMet 2 performed live to capacity crowds at Franklin Park Conservatory as part of the free Community Days Program.

#### COMMITMENT TO ANTI-RACISM AND EQUITY

BalletMet's 2020-21 season was an unprecedented and challenging year, due not only to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to the incendiary incidents around George Floyd's death that ignited a greater awareness of racism and its impact on our country and its citizens. In response to these events, BalletMet's leadership realized that a long-term, continuous effort was required to examine and address racial inequities across the organization. In 2020, BalletMet began an Anti-Racism and Equity initiative, prioritizing institutional change by designating a senior level position to lead the initiative, holding staff/board trainings, and forming an Anti-Racism and Equity Coalition of staff and community leaders to help BalletMet develop an action plan for equity and accountability.

All Staff and Board members participated in trainings with Dr. Hasan Jeffries of The Ohio State University; affinity learning groups for staff met January-June and will continue next season. We are committed to transparency in our Anti-Racism and Equity work and have published progress updates on our website every three months.

#### FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND STABILITY: A FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE GROWTH

Despite deep losses in earned revenue, BalletMet successfully maintained operations. Our 2020/21 expense budget was reduced to \$4.5M from the \$7.3M originally approved by our Board of Trustees in January 2020 before pandemic closures. Reduced expenses included decreased production expenses, fewer contract weeks for Company dancers and staff furloughs. Without \$2M in anticipated income from ticket sales and with Dance Academy tuition reduced due to limits on class size, increasing contributed revenue from all sources was our highest priority. Thanks to the generosity of our board, individual donors and community partners, as well as new opportunities for securing relief funding at all levels of government, BalletMet raised a record \$3M. The resulting year-end surplus is essential to meeting on-going challenges from the pandemic in 2021-22 and returning to pre-pandemic operations in the future.

- Keep Us Dancing became a call to action across all fundraising communication and platforms.
- Contributed income increased by \$524K (20%) over FY20 and made up 60% of total income.
- A successful matching campaign, supported by \$275K in donations from Denise Littlefield Sobel and the Harold C. Schott Foundation, was enthusiastically supported by individual donors, many of whom were first-time donors to BalletMet. In total, we had 329 new donors this season (up 44% from FY20).
- A fully virtual special event, THE PREMIERE, launched A Nutcracker Holiday and raised \$240K from individual and corporate sponsors and patrons.
- Funding from the federal CARES Act provided \$235K.
- The mortgage debt on our Dance Centre and Performance Space, purchased for \$6.15M in 2005, was fully retired in June 2021.

## INSPIRING OUR COMMUNITY, INSPIRED BY OUR COMMUNITY

Words of appreciation from our community speak to the value of the arts in our lives and our world.

### Performances

#### Unlocked

- “We were brought to tears by the sheer beauty of the performance and also by something less tangible. Watching the ballet was like hugging your best friend after a fourteen-month social drought. You have no idea how much it is missed until you experience it once again. Every piece was a soothing balm for the soul.”
- “Thank you for all the creativity, passion, and resilience it required to bring live ballet back to Columbus. It was indeed a herculean effort.”
- “The performance was stunning—a must see!”
- “Each performance premiere and each dancer was extraordinary!”
- “So, so happy that the arts are back on stage!”
- “We saw the show last weekend, and it was such a joy! Wonderful new choreography and excellent dancing. We were so excited to see these beautiful artists back on stage and to support BalletMet. It is such an important part of our arts community!”

#### *Clara’s Nutcracker Prince*

- “Thank you so much for offering BalletMet Nutcracker Holiday tradition!”
- “Thank you for sharing. My family and I have seen the performance each year and this is, traditionally, our start for the season of Christmas.
- “Thank you!! You put in such an amazing production. I have taken my family to see you every year and was sad to think we would miss out this year! Very happy that you do this!”
- “We will miss the live performance & festivities this year. Thankful for this.”

### Dance training

- “I wanted to send an email thanking BalletMet for the scholarship given to [my daughter] this year!! She understands the enormity of the financial impact Covid is having on BalletMet and the arts in general. We are extremely humbled and incredibly grateful for the generosity—investing in her future with dance!”
- “Mila is looking forward to this [camp] and especially enjoys this format. Thank you and to BalletMet for all the safeguards that are in place and also allowing this opportunity for her to be in studio and dance.”

### Education and Engagement

- “Through the Wiggle Jig program, children lit up with joy as their imagination was ignited, while stretching, balancing, pretending, in impromptu dance as they followed the lead of dance teachers. Through movement and dance, children gained fine and gross motor control, built vocabulary, and benefited from positive social expression as they entered into creative play with teachers and classmates.”
- “I have gotten so much positive feedback from the students and staff [about BalletMet 2’s Movement Makers program]. The dancing seemed stronger, and I liked the variety of dances. There was something for all grades to connect with.”
- “Thank you so much for this class! [My daughter] enjoyed it so much and it ended up being a great fit for her personality...she’s a bit too reserved to do an in-person class, so she actually really enjoyed the virtual nature of it.”