A CAPTIVATING LANDMARK SERIES LOOKING BACK
THE SHAPING OF A TREASURED, WORLD-CLASS INSTITUTION

For over half a century, *The Australian Ballet* has evolved to become a treasured performing arts company and an international icon of dance. *And We Danced* is a landmark hour series, looking back to reveal what has shaped this wonderfully unique, world-class institution.

For the first time in its history ***The Australian Ballet* is opening up its remarkable archive. As well as rarely seen historical footage, this blue-chip series features interviews with artistic directors, past and present dancers, celebrity fans of the ballet and choreographers to tell the entertaining, and at times turbulent, story of the iconic national ballet company.**

Born at the beginning of the 1960's, at a time when the nation was searching for a new sense of identity, *The Australian Ballet* was at the forefront of an exciting new and evolving cultural landscape. But the early decades were far from smooth sailing. Financial trouble, over-worked dancers and industrial action threatened the fledgling company as it tried to carve out its own unique cultural identity.

It wasn't just the dancers' contracts that were being revolutionised. The early seventies saw the arrival of a new form of contemporary dance and the company's iconic production of **Rudolph Nureyev's** *Don Quixote*, an extravaganza that would herald the greatest ballet film of all time. Whilst the company's new edge pleased adventurous audiences, a division between the artistic direction and administration became glaringly apparent. But the tenacious company bounced back with youth and vitality. The early nineties brought daring, sexy and provocative ballets that pushed the limits of physicality and classical tradition. They also saw the arrival of highly regarded and innovative choreographer, Graeme Murphy and the company's first **collaboration with choreographer Stephen Page of** *Bangarra Dance Company*.

By the new millennium the days of the classic European ideal were well and truly over. Artistic Director **David McAllister's radical modern-day adaptation of** *Swan Lake* in 2001 was an unprecedented success, becoming a signature piece and securing the future of the company in his hands. Drawing on his own experience as a dancer, McAllister revolutionised the workplace culture of the ballet, instilling world-class health and rehabilitation programs and greater work life balance for dancers. Further collaborations with *Bangarra Dance Company* cemented the company's commitment to represent a diversity of stories and cultures that reflect national society more widely.

After twenty years at the helm of the company, McAllister propelled *The Australian Ballet* into the 21st century, both on and off the stage. In 2021, the Ballet looks ahead with the appointment of international superstar David Hallberg as successive Artistic Director and continues to evolve as one of our preeminent cultural institutions and a revered icon on the world stage.
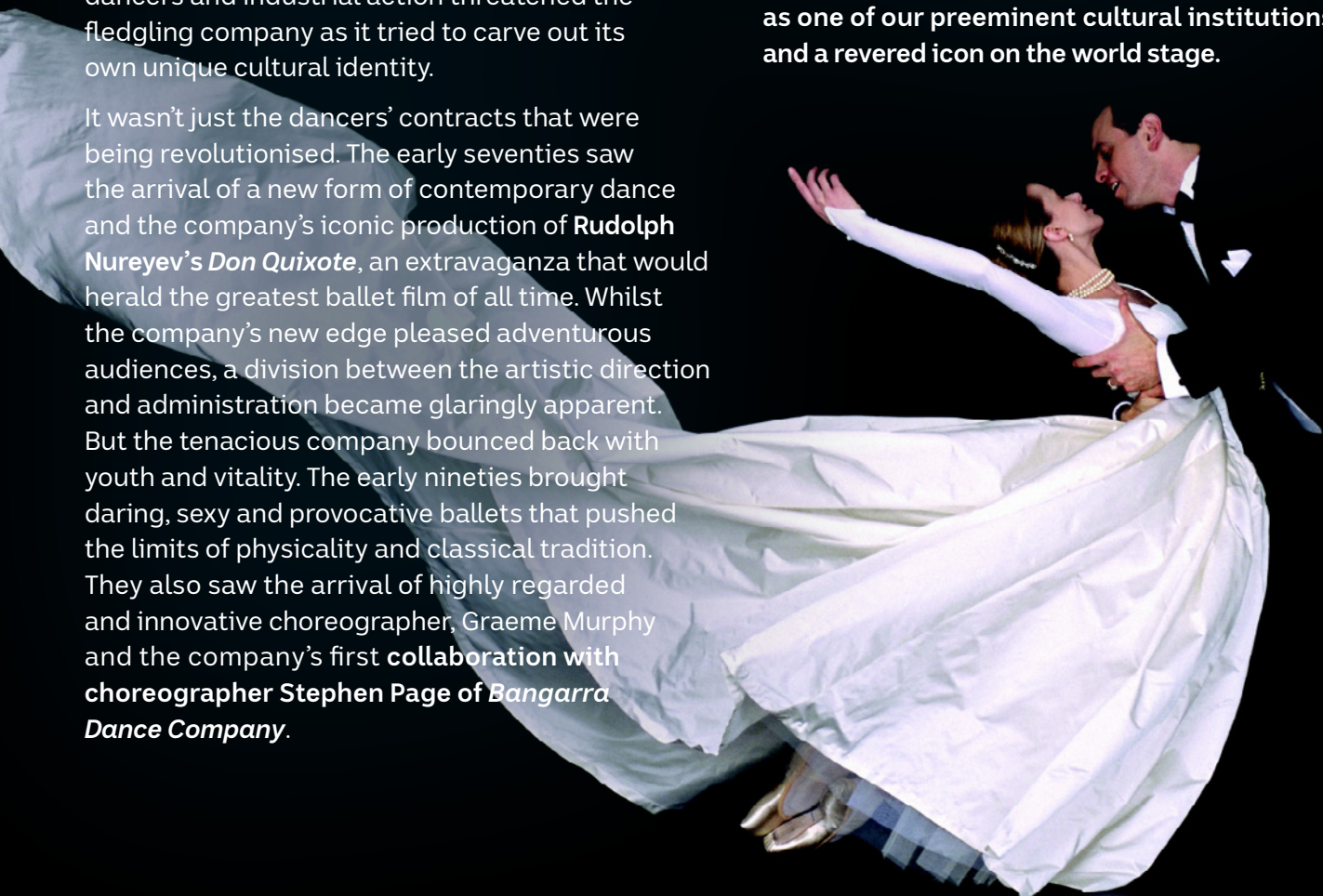
ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

The Australian Ballet is the largest classical ballet company in Australia. Established in 1962, it's world-class heritage can be traced back to Anna Pavlova and stars of the *Ballets Russes*.

Throughout its history *The Australian Ballet* has continuously attracted the best international creative artists and leaders including Rudolf Nureyev, Dame Peggy Van Praagh and Australian-born global film star Sir Robert Helpmann.

The company performs traditional and contemporary works from 'ballet royalty' such as George Balanchine, Sir Fredrick Ashton, Twyla Tharpe, Christopher Wheeldon, Wayne McGregor, Kenneth MacMillan and Alexei Ratmansky – to name a few.

Today, *The Australian Ballet* is recognised as one of the world's major international ballet companies.

DAME PEGGY VAN PRAAGH

Born in Hampstead, London, Peggy (Margaret) van Praagh was the first Artistic Director of *The Australian Ballet*, and instrumental to its formation in 1962.

Peggy took her first dancing lesson at 4 years old, gave her first public performance in 1917, and went on to pursue a career in dance after her formal education was completed. She danced with the *Ballet Rambert* from 1933 – 1938, leaving to join the *London Ballet*, then moving to the *Royal Ballet* in 1941.

Peggy's stage career came to an end in 1946, when she was made ballet mistress and producer, signalling in an important new phase of her career as a future director.

In 1960 van Praagh received an invitation from Australia to act as artistic director of the *Borovansky Ballet*, following the death of its founder, returning to Europe after her one-year term. In 1962, with the support of the Australian government, Peggy became the founding artistic director of *The Australian Ballet*. The company opened its first season on 2 November 1962 with *Swan Lake* at *Her Majesty's Theatre*, Sydney.

From 1965 to 1974, until her retirement, Peggy shared the artistic directorship with Robert Helpmann. She then returned in 1978 as sole artistic director for that year.

The hallmark features of her directorship were her vision, perseverance and courage. She committed a third of the company's repertoire to maintaining the great ballet classics, a third to new works by the foremost contemporary choreographers, and a third to new Australian works.

In 1965 Peggy received a Queen Elizabeth II coronation award from the *Royal Academy of Dancing*. She was appointed OBE in 1966 and DBE in 1970.
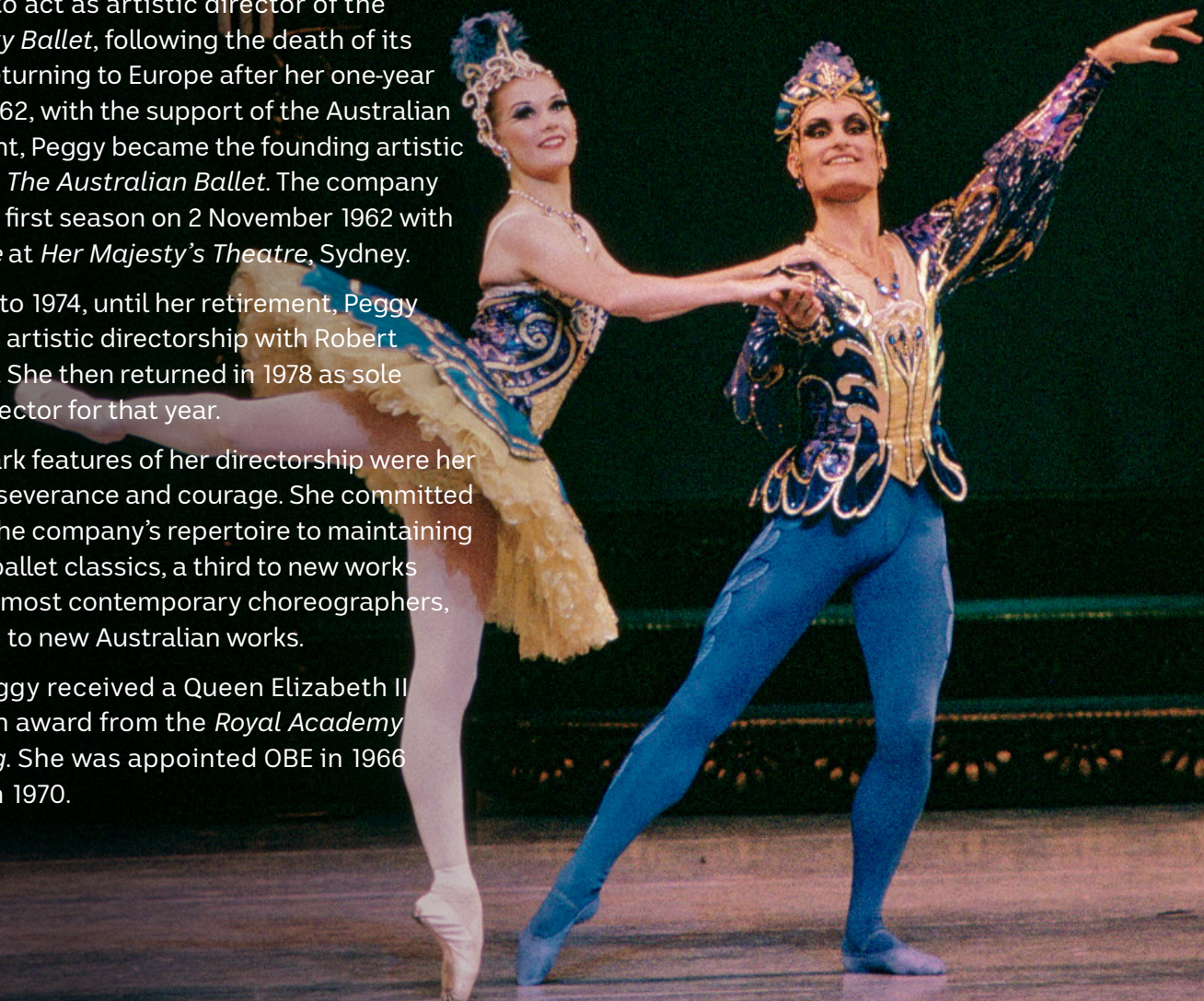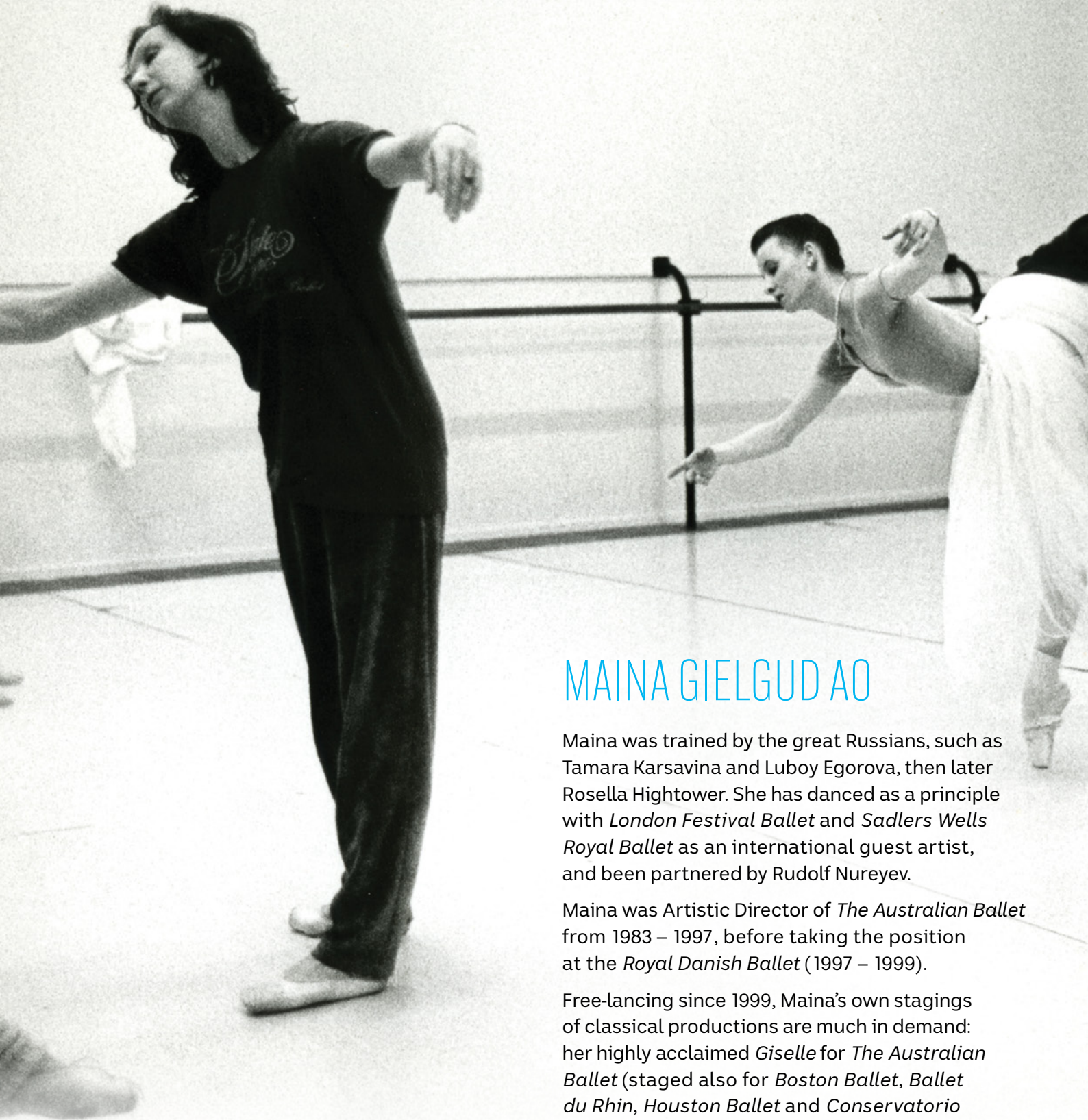
MAINA GIELGUD AO

Maina was trained by the great Russians, such as Tamara Karsavina and Luboy Egorova, then later Rosella Hightower. She has danced as a principle with *London Festival Ballet* and *Sadlers Wells Royal Ballet* as an international guest artist, and been partnered by Rudolf Nureyev.

Maina was Artistic Director of *The Australian Ballet* from 1983 – 1997, before taking the position at the *Royal Danish Ballet* (1997 – 1999).

Free-lancing since 1999, Maina's own stagings of classical productions are much in demand: her highly acclaimed *Giselle* for *The Australian Ballet* (staged also for *Boston Ballet*, *Ballet du Rhin*, *Houston Ballet* and *Conservatorio Annarella*), *The Sleeping Beauty* (*The Australian Ballet*, *Jo'burg Ballet*), as well as *Coppélia*, and *Cinderella* in her own choreography.

SIR ROBERT HELPMANN

Born in Mount Gambier, South Australia, Robert was taught ballet at an early age, and first appeared on stage in 1922 at the *Theatre Royal*, Adelaide as a solo dancer. He toured Australia and New Zealand with Anna Pavlova's company before beginning his professional career in 1929. Robert travelled to London in 1933 joined the *Vic-Wells Ballet*.

More familiarly known as 'Bobby' by his theatre colleagues, he was ambitious, flamboyant and out to make an impression. It was suggested to him to add the additional 'n' to his surname in 1934 to give it more European exotic appeal

Robert was made principal male dancer at the *Vic-Wells Ballet* in 1935, a position he held until 1950 when he resigned. He had an incredible dramatic presence, and was described as having 'unrivalled quality of moving an audience' and 'a wild poetry about his dancing'.

During World War II, Robert toured with the *Sadler's Wells Ballet* (now *Royal Ballet*) on behalf of the armed services, where his humour and grit was credited for helping to keep the company going.

In the 1950's he focused increasingly on directing for the dramatic stage and opera, with many titles to his name. After 22 years abroad, Robert returned to Australia in 1955 to lead, with Katharine Hepburn, a Shakespearean company sent by the *Old Vic* company. Over the following decade he returned to Australia on several tours, also with *The Royal Ballet*.

In 1964 Robert Helpmann choreographed and produced *The Display* for *The Australian Ballet*, then a fledgling company, then in 1965 was appointed co-artistic director of the company with Dame Peggy van Praagh.

A collaboration with Rudolf Nureyev in 1970 saw him stage and dance *Don Quixote*, then mount the popular production of *The Merry Widow* in 1975, leaving a very significant legacy to Australian ballet.

RUDOLF NUREYEV

Rudolf Nureyev transcended the dance world, capturing the imagination of the globe with a force that is reserved for rock stars. Born on the Trans-Siberian railway, Nureyev possessed a gift that was too prodigious to be shielded from the west. On a tour of Paris with the *Kirov Ballet* in 1961 he became the first dancer to defect to the Soviet Union. His was a life spent in exile (or more precisely, fleeing from exile) and ultimately it was ballet that enabled him to leap to freedom.

Nureyev helped raise the profile of many international ballet companies. Sir John Tooley of the Rudolf Nureyev Foundation describes Nureyev's arrival in England in 1961 as a godsend for ballet generally, commenting on his ability to help dancers find another dimension for their performance, and praises him for breathing new life into 19th century ballets.

1962 saw his first performance of *Giselle* with Margot Fonteyn and the *Royal Ballet* at Covent Garden. Rudolf became a guest artist with the *Royal Ballet* which continued until 1977.

In 1964 Nureyev danced with Margot Fonteyn in Sydney and Melbourne in *The Australian Ballet's* performances of *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*, generating huge excitement in Australia. The first of many collaborations with *The Australian Ballet* both at home and overseas.

DAVID MCALLISTER AM
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR 2001 – 2020
THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

A graduate of *The Australian Ballet School*, Perth-born David McAllister began his training with Evelyn Hodgkinson and joined *The Australian Ballet* in 1983. He was promoted to senior artist in 1986 and to principal artist in January 1989.

During his time with the company, he danced many principal roles, including those in *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Don Quixote*, *Coppélia*, *Manon*, *La Sylphide*, John Cranko's *Onegin* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and Jiří Kylián's *Stepping Stones*; in 1985 he won Bronze at the Fifth International Ballet Competition in Moscow.

Throughout his career, David made numerous guest appearances worldwide, dancing with *Bolshoi Ballet*, the *Kirov Ballet*, the *Georgian State Ballet*, *The National Ballet of Canada*, *Birmingham Royal Ballet*, *Singapore Dance Theatre* and, in 1992, as part of a Royal Gala performance in London in the presence of the Princess of Wales. In 2000, he completed a Graduate Diploma in Arts and Entertainment Management and in 2001, took his final bow as a dancer after a performance of Albrecht in *Giselle* at the Sydney Opera House, partnering Miranda Coney. In July of that year, David became artistic director of *The Australian Ballet*. He was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia in the 2004 Australia Day Honours List.

Over the next two decades, on his way to becoming *The Australian Ballet's* longest-serving artistic director, David invigorated the company's repertoire with a series of new commissions from the world's foremost choreographers, including Alexei Ratmansky, Graeme Murphy and Wayne McGregor. He appointed two new resident choreographers, Tim Harbour and Alice Topp, and, through co-productions with leading international companies, secured major works such as Christopher Wheeldon's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*© and Yuri Possokhov's *Anna Karenina*. As a director/choreographer, he gifted the company with a lavish and widely acclaimed new production of *The Sleeping Beauty*, funded largely through donations from philanthropic supporters, and three works in the *Storytime Ballet* series, made especially for young children.

In 2019, David announced that the 2020 season would be his last with the company.

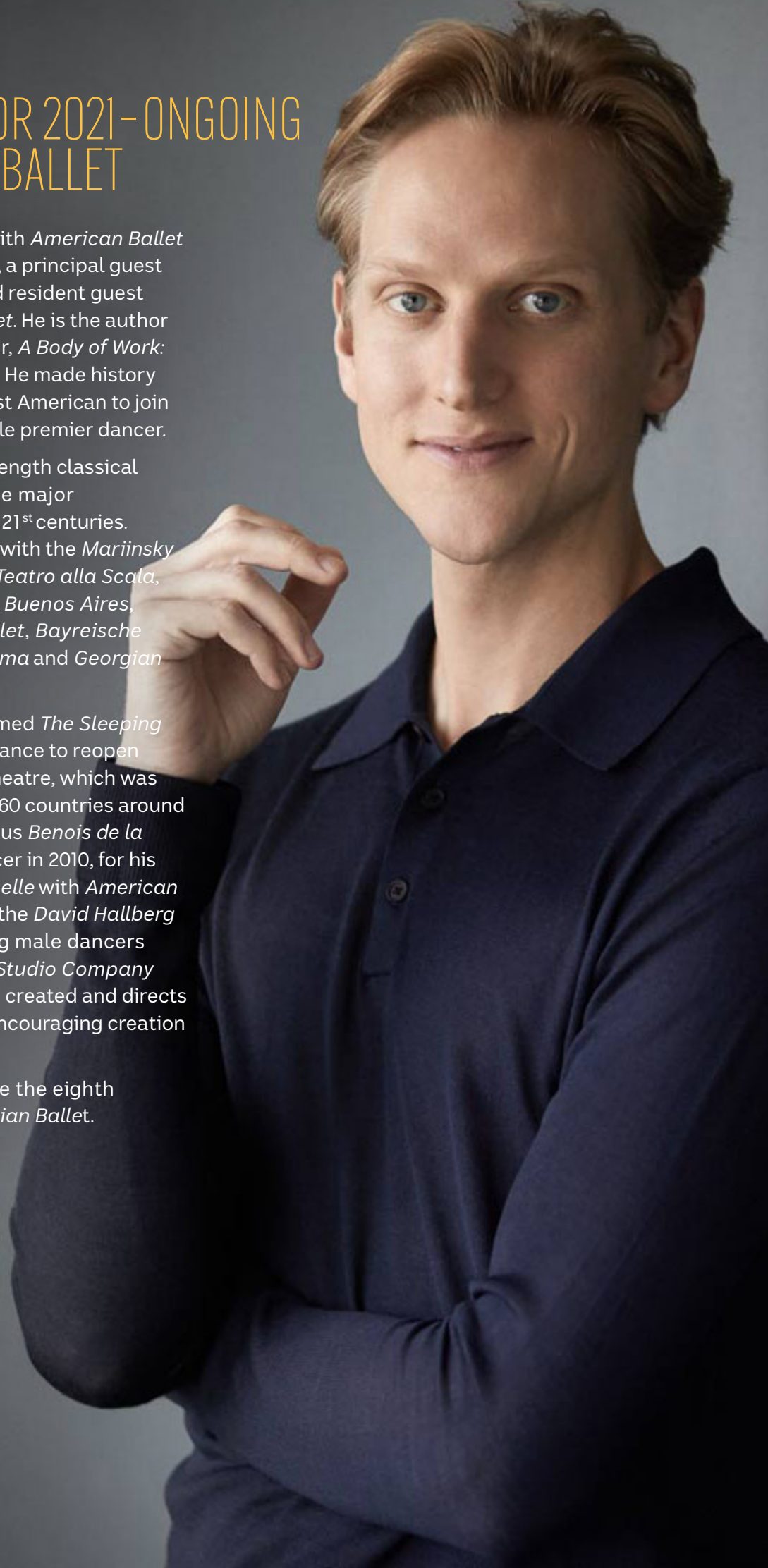# DAVID HALLBERG
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR 2021–ONGOING
THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET

David was a principal dancer with *American Ballet Theatre* and the *Bolshoi Ballet*, a principal guest artist with *The Royal Ballet* and resident guest artist with *The Australian Ballet*. He is the author of a critically acclaimed memoir, *A Body of Work: Dancing to the Edge and Back*. He made history in 2011 when he became the first American to join the *Bolshoi Ballet* under the title premier dancer.

David danced every major full-length classical ballet, along with works by the major choreographers of the 20th and 21st centuries. He performed as a guest artist with the *Mariinsky Ballet*, the *Paris Opéra Ballet*, *Teatro alla Scala*, the *Tokyo Ballet*, *Teatro Colon Buenos Aires*, *Kiev Ballet*, *Royal Swedish Ballet*, *Bayreische Staatsoper Ballet*, *Opera di Roma* and *Georgian State Ballet*, among others.

In November 2011 David performed *The Sleeping Beauty*, the first ballet performance to reopen the newly renovated Bolshoi Theatre, which was broadcast through cinemas to 60 countries around the world. He won the prestigious *Benois de la Danse Prize* for Best Male Dancer in 2010, for his performance as Albrecht in *Giselle* with *American Ballet Theatre*. He established the *David Hallberg Scholarship* to mentor aspiring male dancers at *American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company* and *Ballet Arizona*. He has also created and directs *ABT INCUBATOR*, a workshop encouraging creation by emerging choreographers.

In 2021, David Hallberg became the eighth Artistic Director of *The Australian Ballet*.

Images courtesy of *The Australian Ballet*