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2011 Telstra Ballet Dancer Award ... the winner takes it all!

Chengwu Guo has been crowned the 2011 winner of the Telstra Ballet Dancer Award (TBDA).

In an impressive coup he has also been voted the Telstra People's Choice, scooping the 2011 TBDA pool.

Notably, Chengwu is the first male dancer to win both the panel-voted main Award and the public-decided Telstra People's Choice.

Previously, ballerinas Amber Scott and Stephanie Williams achieved this double-header feat in 2004 and 2009 respectively.

Between the two honours, 22-year-old Chengwu has taken home a cash prize total of \$25,000, awarded by Principal Sponsor Telstra.

The sensational result was announced by Deena Shiff, Telstra's Group Managing Director, Applications and Ventures Group, in front of a capacity crowd of 1500 at the Sydney Opera House, following tonight's Sydney premiere of Graeme Murphy's *Romeo & Juliet*.

While presenting the Award Ms Shiff said: "It's wonderful to see such strong public support for our male dancers. Chengwu has not only won over the public with his talent and dedication but also our highly esteemed judging panel – congratulations!"

The artistic director of The Australian Ballet David McAllister also congratulated Chengwu on his remarkable accomplishment: "Bravo to Chengwu! He is a powerhouse with astounding technical ability who regularly leaves our audiences gasping in astonishment at his death-defying leaps and speed-of-light pirouettes."

"His dual TBDA win is a testament to the growing enthusiasm for male dance and I have no doubt he'll be inspiring young boys everywhere to head to the ballet studio," McAllister said.

The announcement is an annual highlight of The Australian Ballet's partnership with Principal Sponsor Telstra, a relationship of 27 years and one of the longest spanning arts sponsorships in Australian corporate history.

Since the inception of the Telstra Ballet Dancer Award nine years ago, five of the winners have climbed the ballet ladder to reach principal artist status, including Matthew Lawrence (2003), Amber Scott (2004), Lana Jones (2005), Daniel Gaudiello (2007) and Kevin Jackson (2008).

The star-making aspect of the Award is evident again this year – Chengwu has been promoted to soloist for the 2012 season, a swift rise for a dancer who joined The Australian Ballet in 2008.

Since leaving the Jiangxi province of southern China at age eleven to begin ballet training at Beijing Dance Academy, Chengwu has found success at every turn.

He won the prestigious Prix de Lausanne in 2006; his prize was a dance-training scholarship, which he chose to undertake at The Australian Ballet School.

In 2009 Chengwu won the Chinese version of *So You Think You Can Dance* in front of a TV audience of 80 million. That same year he appeared as the teenage Li Cunxin in the smash-hit film *Mao's Last Dancer*.

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Chengwu won the Telstra Ballet Dancer Award after being judged as outstanding on numerous criteria over the course of the year.

This year's TBDA judging panel was comprised of **David McAllister** (Artistic Director, The Australian Ballet), **Valerie Wilder** (Executive Director, The Australian Ballet), **Danilo Radojevic** (Associate Artistic Director, The Australian Ballet), **Richard Howarth** (General Manager, Sponsorship and Awards, Telstra), **Kirsten Galliot** (Editor, the(sydney)magazine) and **Josh Horner** (*Dancing with The Stars* judge and former dancer with The Australian Ballet).

Congratulations must go to the other TBDA nominees for 2011, **Brett Chynoweth**, **Rudy Hawkes**, **Robyn Hendricks**, **Luke Marchant** and **Karen Nanasca**, all of whom gave beautiful performances throughout the year.

With the Sydney season of *Romeo & Juliet* sold out, audiences Australia-wide have the opportunity to experience Chengwu onstage in 2012 during the The Australian Ballet's landmark 50th anniversary year. Season packages are available now from australianballet.com.au.

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