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The Australian Ballet turns 50 and looks better than ever!

A year of highlights begins with the chance to create a ballet for us

The Australian Ballet has returned to the rehearsal studio this week in preparation for the company's landmark 50th anniversary season in 2012.

Artistic Director David McAllister has kicked off the festivities by announcing the **50th Anniversary Ballet Project**.

This exciting initiative encourages choreographers with a unique artistic vision, be they a professional or novice choreographer, to submit their ideas for a brand-new ballet work.

The winning entrant will receive \$30,000 to develop their idea and will have their work considered for staging by The Australian Ballet in 2015.

McAllister said the competition was a fantastic way to begin the 50th anniversary celebrations.

"Right from the very beginning, one of the defining aspects of the company has been its commitment to creating new opportunities for Australian artistic talent. Over the years we've fostered burgeoning choreographers like Graeme Murphy, Stephen Baynes and Stanton Welch, who have all been lauded on the world stage."

"The pool of creative talent in Australia is astonishing so I'm incredibly enthusiastic to see exactly who we'll unearth," McAllister said.

From its aspirational beginnings to its current status as one of the country's most prolific and progressive arts organisations, The Australian Ballet has been much loved in the hearts of Australians.

Over 50 years, The Australian Ballet has:

- Invested in **\$40 million** worth of costumes and sets
- Sold over **12 million** tickets to its performances
- Danced through **250,000** pairs of pointe shoes
- Performed **7201** shows
- Used **7000** metres of fabric netting to make over **700** tutus
- Created Australia's most expensive tutu for Peter Wright's *The Nutcracker*; worth over **\$5000**
- Employed over **550** dancers
- Amassed a repertoire of **389** ballets by **144** choreographers
- Funded **237** new commissions
- Toured to **37** countries
- Sparked many a romance, with **dozens** of dancer marriages
- Produced **twelve** ballet babies in the past decade
- Been led by **seven** artistic directors (Peggy van Praagh, Robert Helpmann, Anne Woolliams, Marilyn Jones, Maina Gielgud, Ross Stretton and David McAllister)

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2012 promises to be The Australian Ballet's biggest season ever.

In Sydney and Melbourne, traditional full-length works that pay tribute to the company's rich heritage sit alongside more experimental mixed bills that point boldly to the future.

The company begins the year with *Infinity*, a triple bill of all new Australian works; including Stephen Page's *Warumuk – in the dark night*. Featuring a mix of dancers from The Australian Ballet and Bangarra Dance Theatre, this work combines Western ballet with the spirituality of Indigenous dance and will also be performed on the company's New York tour in June.

Graeme Murphy's heartbreaking *Romeo & Juliet* will tour to Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, while the free Telstra Ballet in the Park will be staged in Canberra.

The Dancers Company will go on the road with *Don Quixote*, delighting audiences in regional Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

To celebrate the company's birthday, which officially falls on 2 November, a very special international gala will be held in Melbourne. Featuring some of the biggest names in ballet from around the globe, this will be the dance event of the year.

Beyond Australian shores, the company will be heading to the mecca of dance: New York. It's been 13 years since our dancers performed in this dynamic city and they'll return with a bang during June, with the North American debut of Graeme Murphy's iconic *Swan Lake* and a mixed all-Australian bill.

All of this dancing requires a strong, talented ensemble of artists. So, this month the company warmly welcomes five new dancers into the corps de ballet: **Benedicte Bemet, Joseph Chapman, Jasmin Durham, Brodie James and Jill Ogai**, all 2011 graduates from The Australian Ballet School.

At The Australian Ballet, 2012 will be a year like no other – one for reflection and looking forward, and of course, celebration. Now ... let's get the party started!

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*The 50th Anniversary Ballet Project prize of \$30,000 cash has been kindly donated by The Australian Ballet Society. Terms and conditions of the 50th Anniversary Ballet Project can be read at australianballet.com.au/balletproject

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