



Media Release – 6 July for immediate release

Romeo and Juliet - RNZB's biggest production of the year

Shakespeare's greatest love story, *Romeo and Juliet*, will be brought to life next month by the Royal New Zealand Ballet, in the company's most epic production of 2017.

Newly choreographed, this three-act ballet by Francesco Ventriglia, with set and costume design by three-time Oscar-winning designer James Acheson (*Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Last Emperor*, *Restoration*) has its world premiere in Wellington on 16 August.

22 performances of this captivating story will be performed by the national ballet company, which will tour to eight centres. The Ryman Healthcare Season of *Romeo and Juliet* is the RNZB's third and final touring production of the year. Orchestras in Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland and Dunedin will perform Prokofiev's instantly recognisable score, conducted by NZSO Associate Conductor Hamish McKeich.

Francesco Ventriglia, who has choreographed 23 works for ballet companies around the world including La Scala, the Bolshoi Theatre and American Ballet Theatre, and was nominated for the Golden Lion for a work he created for the dance component of the Venice Biennale, is honoured to create his second full-length ballet for the RNZB and New Zealand audiences.

"To create a brand new classical ballet of one of the greatest stories and the most beautiful scores is so invigorating. I'm taking great care to respect Shakespeare and Prokofiev's great works plus drawing inspiration from Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 multi Academy Award winning film. I'm also working with a dream team of collaborators and the very talented artists of the RNZB, who I'd like to thank for their incredible work."

"James Acheson's magnificent sets make me feel right at home, like I'm in Verona in the height of an Italian summer. All of the costumes are exquisite. We have been very true to the Renaissance period and I know audiences will also be transported to the time and place where our star-crossed lovers meet."

To stay true to the famous story, Francesco has invited Italian editor and dramaturg Mario Mattia Giorgetti to join the creative team, alongside Choreographic Assistant Gillian Whittingham who worked very closely with Liam Scarlett on the RNZB's critically acclaimed *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Frederic Jahn returns to New Zealand to join the team as Guest Ballet Master. Frederic, who grew up in Dunedin and danced with the RNZB in 1965-68 before dancing internationally, also happens to have been Francesco's first ballet master when Francesco was a young dancer at La Scala.

Patricia Barker, the RNZB's newly appointed Artistic Director says: "It's a very exciting time to have joined the RNZB – this production promises to be exquisite while it transports us to the heart of Verona. The energy in the studio is captivating. I have enjoyed getting to know the RNZB dancers and I'm looking forward to seeing them inhabit these iconic characters."

It's been over a decade since the RNZB created a new version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Work began on this production in October 2016 and it will be the RNZB's biggest production of 2017 with 13 scene changes and over 90 costumes.

"We're delighted to be able to support the RNZB's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. We think our residents – and the rest of New Zealand - are in for a real treat," Ryman Healthcare Chief Executive Gordon MacLeod said.

The Ryman Healthcare Season of *Romeo and Juliet* performed by the Royal New Zealand Ballet

16 August – 24 September touring to Wellington (with Orchestra Wellington), Christchurch (with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra), Auckland (with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra), Rotorua, Dunedin (with the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra), Invercargill, Palmerston North, and Napier.

www.rnzb.org.nz

ENDS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Wellington with Orchestra Wellington, St James Theatre: Wed 16– Thur 17 Aug 7.30pm, Fri 18 Aug 7.30pm (free Pre-Performance Talk 6.30pm), Sat 19 Aug 1.30pm (free Post Matinee Q&A) & 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm), Sun 20 Aug 4pm.

Christchurch with Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Isaac Theatre Royal: Fri 25 Aug 7.30pm (free Pre-Performance Talk 6.30pm), Sat 26 Aug 1.30pm (free Post Matinee Q&A) & 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm). Partner Event of the Christchurch Arts Festival.

Auckland with Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, ASB Theatre, Aotea Centre: Wed 30 – Thur 31 Aug 7.30pm, Fri 1 Sept 7.30pm (free Pre-performance Talk 6.30pm), Sat 2 Sept 1.30pm (free Post Matinee Q&A) & 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm), Sun 3 Sept 4pm (Audio Described performance).

Rotorua Civic Theatre: Fri 8 Sep 7.30pm, Sat 9 Sept 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm).

Dunedin with the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra, Regent Theatre: Wed 13 Sept 7.30pm, Thur 14 Sept 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm)

Invercargill, Civic Theatre: Sun 17 Sept 7.30pm.

Palmerston North, Regent on Broadway: Thurs 21 Sept 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm).

Napier, Napier Municipal Theatre: Sun 24 Sept 7.30pm (Warm Up, Curtain Up 6.20pm)

For booking info see www.rnzb.org.nz

Pre-Performance Talk: A free event with one of the creative team involved in the production to get a deeper insight into the production. Takes place in the theatre 30 minutes prior to the performance

Post Matinee Q&A: A free question and answer session with some of our dancers to get insight into the life of a ballet dancer.

Warm Up, Curtain Up: A gold coin donation event to see the dancers warm up on stage prior to a performances. Meet in the theatre foyer at 6.10pm for a 6.20pm start.

Audio Described performance: In a first for New Zealand, and thanks to Auckland Live, we are delighted to offer a live audio description of *Romeo & Juliet* for blind and visually impaired patrons on Sunday 3 September. Bookings essential.

Upcoming shows:

Tutus on Tour: The RNZB's beloved regional touring programme to heartland New Zealand. A gala style performance of much loved classical and contemporary works.

Ashburton: Ashburton Trust Event Centre 23 August

Gisborne: Memorial Theatre 27 September

New Zealand School of Dance 50th Anniversary Graduation Season: Celebrating 50 years of achievement, our national dance school, now recognised as the Official School of the Royal New Zealand Ballet, will present a season of visionary choreography at the St James Theatre. Performances will feature students of the NZSD alongside dancers from the RNZB.

Wellington: St James Theatre, Fri 24 & Sat 25 Nov

The Royal New Zealand Ballet

The Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB) was founded in 1953 by Danish dancer Poul Gnatt, as a touring professional ballet company for all New Zealanders. Now based at Wellington's St James Theatre, the Royal New Zealand Ballet is an intrinsic part of New Zealand's national heritage, and has the largest following of all New Zealand performing arts companies. The Royal New Zealand Ballet continues to invest in live music, performing with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Wellington, the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra and the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra. The RNZB enjoys a reputation for strong and unique interpretations of full-length dramatic works. To this base the RNZB have been added many masterworks and major ballets of the 20th century, such as Balanchine's works and the Stravinsky ballets. The company has an enviable track record in commissioning new works from New Zealand and international choreographers. The RNZB regularly represents New Zealand on the international stage, with recent tours to the UK, Australia, China, USA, Italy and Hong Kong.

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