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# 1953 New Zealand Ballet formed MCH, 2011m Nation Dates FINAL

## A history of the Royal New Zealand Ballet

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The New Zealand Ballet was founded as an independent charitable trust in 1953 by Danish Royal Ballet Principal Dancer Poul Gnatt with the backing of Auckland ballet teachers Bettina Edwards and Beryl Nettleton.

Their first performance was in Auckland on June 30, 1953, with 20 senior and 18 junior dancers, accompanied by a ten piece orchestra. The first tour took place during September 1953 with a small dance company including a pianist and a violinist. Throughout the 1950s ongoing support from the Community Arts Service (CAS) allowed the company to prosper and continue touring and performing.

In 1959, after Government advice, a formal trust was created to manage the company. Alongside this the company moved to a base in Wellington, and for the first time was able to offer the dancers full-time contracts.

During the 1960s a number of New Zealand dancers based abroad returned home to work with the company. Numerous overseas dancers also joined the company as guest stars. In Wellington in 1967 the National School of Ballet was opened, with the primary aim of developing potential new dancers for the NZB.

Financial difficulties dogged New Zealand Ballet since its founding and in 1970 Jon and Jacqui Trimmer (who were both involved with NZB in the late-1950s) returned to New Zealand in order to ensure the company's ongoing survival.

The company has been a strong supporter of local choreographers, and performs a diverse repertoire, both nationally and internationally, maintaining a balancing act between crowd-pleasers and more adventurous, risky works. Alongside traditional works, the Ballet's repertoire also includes the masterworks and major ballets of the 20th century.

It received a Royal charter in 1984, and has been directly Crown funded since 1998. In January of that year the Royal New Zealand Ballet also moved into its first ever permanent purpose built premises at Wellington's St James Theatre.

In 2010 the RNZB was the featured ballet company in the TV series "The Secret Lives of Dancers", a documentary series that followed the company during rehearsals, casting, and touring.

Today the company has 32 dancers and a raft of behind-the-scenes staff. Touring is still the lifeblood of the RNZB with annual the company performances to over 100,000 people throughout New Zealand, as well as making regular overseas tours.

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