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A history of the Royal New Zealand Ballet

News: 3 February 2014

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

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the opening weekend of the New Zealand International Film Festival in July 2013.

The Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB) is a company of 36 dynamic dancers, performing an eclectic repertoire of outstanding dance for national and international audiences, whilst continuing to build a style that is ultimately unique to this company and Aotearoa, New Zealand. The demands of their audience, particularly within New Zealand, means that they present an eclectic repertoire of choreographic styles, from 19th century classics to 21st century contemporary works. 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.

Updated on 7th October 2019

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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.

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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.

In 2013 the Royal New Zealand Ballet presented Russell Kerr's landmark production of *Swan Lake* as the centrepiece of the company's 60th birthday year. In addition, director Toa Fraser's feature film interpretation of the Royal New Zealand Ballet's performance of *Giselle*, had its world premiere in

