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American Repertory Ballet and ARB's Princeton Ballet School

2008-2009, A Year of Celebration!

*55 years of the School, 45 years of the Nutcracker, 45 years of the Company, 15 years with Rider University,
and 10 years under Artistic Director Graham Lustig*

American Repertory Ballet and ARB's Princeton Ballet School is celebrating significant milestones and anniversaries in the 2008-2009 season. Founded by Audrée and Bud Estey in April 1954 as the Princeton Ballet Society, the organization has grown into a school with over 1400 students in three studio locations, a professional company of 21 members, and significant community-based education and outreach programs.

Prior to founding the Princeton Ballet Society, Audrée Estey held classes in many fascinating local locations including the Lawrenceville School, McCarter Theater, and the garage of nuclear physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer. As demand for her teaching grew, in 1954 Mrs. Estey opened the Princeton Ballet School, conducting classes at the Rose Cottage. She later moved the school to Alexander Street in 1964, where it continued to nurture and educate many young aspiring dancers. In 1996 the school headquarters moved into its current facility with four studios in the Princeton Shopping Center.

Princeton Ballet School expanded into Cranbury in 1974, holding classes at the Old School Building on Main Street. To meet increasing demand, the school converted a historical building, also on Main Street, from a car garage to a dance studio and moved into its current location in 2000.

In 1979, the New Brunswick Cultural Commission asked Princeton Ballet School to further expand into New Brunswick, and in 1981 classes commenced on Church Street. In 1983, the school moved to the second floor, just above the marquis of the State Theatre. As the school grew beyond that capacity, the New Brunswick studio moved to its current location at 80 Albany Street in 1991.

Princeton Ballet School now boasts a faculty of over 45 specialists. Led by Artistic Director Graham Lustig and School Director Mary Pat Robertson, teaching luminaries include Maria Youskevitch and Kathleen Moore, of American Ballet Theatre; Mary Barton and Douglas Martin, former principals with the Joffrey Ballet and American Repertory Ballet; and guest teacher Kyra Nichols, former principal with New York City Ballet. Additional teachers include several dancers with American Repertory Ballet; Carol Bellis, principal of the Cranbury studio; and specialists in areas such as theater dance, Pilates, Spanish dance and Persian dance. Alumni of Princeton Ballet School have gone on to dance with many outstanding companies, including American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Mark Morris Dance Company, Martha Graham Dance Company, Paul Taylor Dance Company, Twyla Tharp, and The Washington Ballet, just to name a few. Others have chosen to perform on the Broadway stage and in touring productions such as *Movin' Out* and *Dirty Dancing*.

"It's an honor and a privilege to be able to lead a school like Princeton Ballet School," remarks Mary Pat Robertson, Director of ARB's Princeton Ballet School. "In its goals of personal growth for each participant, and its breadth of involvement of all types and ages of dancers, it's truly a unique institution. We are so lucky to be located in central New Jersey, which has such a respect for education and the arts. As I approach my 29th season of teaching for the school, I look forward all over again to working with these exceptional students."

With a commitment to the transformative nature of dance education, the organization reaches well beyond the walls of the studios. Mrs. Estey, in what was an extremely forward thinking move in 1968, established the Wednesday Program in conjunction with the Board of Education of the Princeton Regional Schools to provide dance education for students of differing socio-economic levels. Expanding on this concept, DANCE POWER, conceived by Dr. Penelope Lattimer, was founded in 1985. DANCE POWER is a collaboration between American Repertory Ballet and the New Brunswick Board of Education, and is now the longest running partnership in New Jersey between an arts organization and a Board of Education. This program provides all third graders in the New Brunswick Public Schools 20 weeks of in-school dance education during their gym period. Since its inception, over 12,000 public school students have benefited from this program. After school dance clubs have been created to extend the student learning experience, and currently 67 DANCE POWER Scholars receive full scholarships for dance training at ARB's Princeton Ballet School. The Education and Outreach programs of American Repertory Ballet and ARB's Princeton Ballet School also include in-school assemblies and master classes.

Princeton Regional Ballet Company kicked off in 1963 with a benefit performance by American Ballet Theatre at McCarter Theatre. In 1970, the pre-professional company was named a National Honor Company by the National Association of Regional Ballet, and in 1978 the company received a federal CETA grant, allowing for the hiring of professional dancers and technical staff. A year later, to embrace its progression into a professional dance company, it reorganized as the Princeton Ballet Company. As the level of professional dance increased, the company was named a Major Arts Institution by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in 1987. In 1990, the company, wishing to embrace a wider performance base, renamed itself American Repertory Ballet.

Now in the 10th year of his directorship, Graham Lustig joined the organization as Artistic Director in July 1999. As Artistic Director, Mr. Lustig has introduced many new productions to both the school and company such as *Don Quixote*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Wishing to expand the scope of the professional company he introduced the works of renowned American choreographers such as Twyla Tharp, Kirk Peterson and Val Caniparoli. In 2001 Mr. Lustig launched *Dancing Through the Ceiling*, a commissioning project created to showcase emerging and established women choreographers, and to date twelve new ballets have been created. The twenty-one member professional company's impressive and powerful dancers hail from places as diverse as Australia, Germany, Japan, and all over the United States.

“Over the decades, throughout many dance-filled seasons, American Repertory Ballet and ARB's Princeton Ballet School has continued to expand its vital presence within the New Jersey arts community, deepening its reach and strengthening all of its programming,” Graham Lustig explains. “Whether performing at a senior center or the NJPAC, teaching public school students in DANCE POWER, or coaching aspiring professional ballet students, witnessing the joy they express is one of the many bonuses of bringing leadership to the creative team.”

The 45th Annual performance of *The Nutcracker* will open at McCarter Theatre on November 20th, making Princeton Ballet School's *Nutcracker* the third longest running *Nutcracker* in the country. In 1963, Princeton Ballet Society presented its first annual production of *The Nutcracker*, with choreography by Audrée Estey. This production was presented for 36 years until, in 2000, Graham Lustig's *The Nutcracker* premiered at McCarter Theatre with costumes by Zack Brown and lighting design by Alex Nichols.

This year Princeton Ballet School is also celebrating 15 years of partnership with Rider University. In 1993 Rider University created its Dance Program with Princeton Ballet School. Under the nurturing leadership of Dr. Kim Chandler Vaccaro, the program has rapidly expanded. Studio dance classes are held at Princeton Ballet School and lecture classes and performances are given on the Rider University campus. Rider University students have also done internships with Princeton Ballet School and DANCE POWER, and have danced in *The Nutcracker* and with ARBW, part of Princeton Ballet School's pre-professional training program. This summer American Repertory Ballet hosted four interns, allowing Rider University students to see the business-side of dance, and further strengthening the ties between the two organizations.

Timeline:

- 1954 – Princeton Ballet Society founded April 23
- 1963 – Princeton Regional Ballet Company is founded
- 1963 – First Annual performance of The Nutcracker
- 1974 – Princeton Ballet School expands to Cranbury
- 1978 – Princeton Regional Ballet Company receives federal CETA grant, allowing for the hiring of professional dancers and technical staff
- 1979 – Princeton Ballet School expands to New Brunswick
- 1979 – Princeton Regional Ballet Company reorganized as Princeton Ballet Company
- 1990 – Princeton Ballet Company is renamed American Repertory Ballet
- 1993 – Rider University Dance Program created
- 1999 – Graham Lustig joins as Artistic Director

About ARB's Princeton Ballet School – ARB's Princeton Ballet School, founded in 1954, provides a complete curriculum in ballet. There are classes for children and adults, including special class sections for young boys. The school also offers a Professional Training Program, a large Open Enrollment Division, and an international Summer Intensive. Princeton Ballet School is the official school of American Repertory Ballet, a 30-year-old contemporary ballet-based dance company. Holding a Citation of Excellence from the New Jersey Council on the Arts, American Repertory Ballet is designated a Major Impact Arts Organization with significant outreach and educational programming, including DANCE POWER, a program begun 24 years ago in conjunction with the New Brunswick Board of Education.