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NEW WORKS FESTIVAL RETURNS
Festival to feature international choreographers, Richmond Ballet's own Stewart

Richmond, VA – Richmond Ballet is pleased to announce the return of the New Works Festival, the second installment of the Ballet's 2013-2014 Studio Series. The Festival – which will present four, new works in progress this season – is set to debut March 25-30, 2013, at the Ballet's downtown Studio Theatre. This year's Festival will feature the work of four contemporary ballet choreographers including former New York City Ballet dancer Melissa Barak, the classically trained Canadian-native Peter Quanz, the award-winning Mexican-born Edgar Zendejas as well as emerging choreographer Gavin Stewart, who is now in his second season with Richmond Ballet II. This will mark the first time since the Festival's premiere in the spring of 2008 that a Richmond Ballet II company member has been invited to participate as a choreographer.

As the culmination of four, one-week workshops, where choreographers each receive 25 hours to set their 10-15 minute pieces in Richmond, The New Works Festival is meant to give choreographers the opportunity to explore and create new work with the support and resources of Richmond Ballet. With unlimited access to the company's professional dancers, costume shop, and production team, along with the opportunity to perform in a state-of-the-art studio theatre, the Festival presents a unique platform for both choreographers and audiences to share and see work that is new, and potentially, still in progress.

"The New Works Festival an incredible concept," said choreographer Peter Quanz. "Very few ballet companies offer choreographers time in the studio to research ideas, to explore. These works-in-progress will be shown publicly and offer the nascent glimpse into wonderfully exciting creations. When ballets have been well rehearsed and prepared for a premiere, they sometimes lose the raw and new feeling of a great new discovery."

Choreographers for this year's Festival were once again selected by Richmond Ballet Artistic Director Stoner Winslett and her artistic team. "At Richmond Ballet, we truly believe that commissioning new work is crucial for the perpetuation of the art form," said Ms. Winslett. "We look for choreographers who possess the ability to create work that can become both significant in our time and enduring for future generations. Furthermore, we believe the choreographers represented here have the ability to show such a tremendous range within the world of dance – and to have such tremendous variation on display, on one stage, is a powerful testament to the talent of our dancers, the far-reaching curiosity of our audiences and the infinite flexibility of this art form."

"So far, we have been incredibly pleased with the way our four participants have embraced this unique challenge, and they have done so with a positive, energetic and creative spirit. We are especially proud to be featuring one of the Ballet's own, with the work of Gavin Stewart – we are so excited to be able to offer this platform to Gavin so that he might have the opportunity to further explore his passion for choreography," added Ms. Winslett.

Additional information on music selection, working titles and production details to be released at a later date.

New Works Festival 2014 Choreographers

Melissa Barak

Originally from Los Angeles, California, Ms. Barak received her ballet training at the Westside School of Ballet in Santa Monica, California, as well as at The School of American Ballet in New York City. Having previously danced with multiple US-based companies, including The New York City Ballet from 1998-2007, and from 2007-2011 as a principal dancer with Los Angeles Ballet, Ms. Barak has now choreographed 11 different commissioned works, and has been invited to participate in the New York Choreographic Institute on four different occasions. At only 22, Ms. Barak became the youngest choreographer to choreograph for The New York City Ballet, when her piece *If By Chance* premiered at the New York State Theater in June of 2002. Ms. Barak has since choreographed two additional works for the legendary company. Ms. Barak has also choreographed for such companies as the American Repertory Ballet, Los Angeles Ballet and Sacramento Ballet, with two appearances at the National Choreographer's Initiative in 2007 and then again in 2012. One of *DANCE Magazine's* 'Top 25 to Watch' in 2002, Ms. Barak has been a recipient of the Choo San Goh and Mae L. Wein Award for Choreography.

Peter Quanz

A graduate of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School, Peter Quanz danced professionally with the Stuttgart Ballet before turning to choreography full-time in 2002. Mr. Quanz has set commissioned works for such esteemed ballet organizations such as American Ballet Theatre, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Hong Kong Ballet, the Mariinsky Theatre (Russia), the National Ballet of Canada, the National Ballet of Cuba, the Royal Ballet (United Kingdom), and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Mr. Quanz's body of work now includes over 40 original choreographic commissions, including eight works which he has set for his own company, Q Dance. Q Dance, a company as well as a 'choreographic laboratory', has performed on stages in both the United States and in Canada, including the Joyce Theatre in New York City. In 2011, the Buryatian National Ballet performed a trio of Mr. Quanz's works at the world-renowned Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. The collaboration awarded Mr. Quanz a State Medal in Literature and the Arts from the Republic of Buryatia, Russia.

Gavin Stewart

Gavin Stewart, currently in his second season with Richmond Ballet's second company, Richmond Ballet II, will be the first member from Richmond Ballet II to participate as a choreographer in the company's own New Works Festival. Hailing originally from Tulsa, Oklahoma, Mr. Stewart graduated from the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) with a B.F.A. in Dance Performance. In addition to performing with Richmond Ballet, Mr. Stewart has performed with the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, the Wyllyams/Henry Contemporary Dance Company, and the Owen/Cox Dance Group, and has toured with MOVE: the Company, under the direction of Josh Beamish. Mr. Stewart has choreographed for the UMKC Conservatory, the Wyllyams/Henry Contemporary Dance Company, the Stewart/Art and Performance Laboratory and Richmond Ballet II. An avid musician, Mr. Stewart has also composed original music to accompany many of his choreographic works, and in 2012, released "Seep Through", an album of original folk songs.

Edgar Zendejas

Edgar Zendejas, a native of Mexico, received his dance training from Escuela Nacional de Danza in Mexico City and from the United States International University in San Diego, California. Mr. Zendejas has performed with such companies as Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago. By the early 1990s, Mr. Zendejas began his work with Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal, where he was soon became an associate choreographer. Since the premiere of his first choreographic work in 2003, Mr. Zendejas has continued to produce original pieces that have been met with critical acclaim in Canada, Mexico and the United States. Mr. Zendejas has received choreographic commissions from Jacob's Pillow, Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, Ballet Hispanico, DanceWorks Chicago, Luna Negra Dance Theater, and Ballet de Monterrey (Mexico). In 2010, Mr. Zendejas was selected as the winner of the Hubbard Street 'National Choreographic Competition' and in 2012, he won the Outstanding Choreographer Award at the Youth American Grand Prix. Today, Mr. Zendejas serves as the Artistic Director of his own company, ezdanza, which is based in Montreal. ezdanza continues to be a company focused on research, creation and dissemination.

New Works Festival 2014 Performances:

Tuesday, March 25, 6:30 pm
Wednesday, March 26, 6:30 pm
Thursday, March 27, 2:00 pm and 6:30 pm
Friday, March 28, 6:30 pm
Saturday, March 29, 6:30 pm and 8:30 pm
Sunday, March 30, 2:00 pm and 4:00 pm

The 2013-14 Studio Series is generously sponsored by Altria.

Additional support is provided by the Richmond Ballet Choreographers' Fund,
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Media Sponsor: *Style Weekly*

PLEASE NOTE:

Media wishing to attend any of The New Works Festival performances *must* arrange to do so through Richmond Ballet's press office by contacting Kate Crowder at kcrowder@richmondballet.com or 804.344.0906, ext. 246.

For more information on Richmond Ballet and its classes and programs,
please visit www.richmondballet.com or call 804.344.0906.

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Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, is dedicated to the education, promotion, preservation, and continuing evolution of the art form of ballet. Richmond Ballet strives to keep meaningful works of dance alive and to produce and foster new works that remain true to these values. Now in its 30th professional season, Richmond Ballet's mission is to "awaken and uplift the human spirit, both for audiences and artists."