

# Queensland Ballet Announces 2026 Company Artists

*Farewells and New Beginnings Under New Artistic Director, Ivan Gil-Ortega*



**Brisbane, 10 December, 2025:** Queensland Ballet is pleased to announce its artists for the 2026 season under the leadership of new Artistic Director, Ivan Gil-Ortega. In 2026, Queensland Ballet welcomes 15 new dancers, including 11 **Jette Parker Young Artists**, 3 **Artists to the corps de ballet** and guest artist, **Jake Mangakahia**. The 2026 season also marks the retirement of Principal Artist, Cuban-born, **Yanela Piñera**.

Paying tribute to Piñera, Gil-Ortega said she had been a valuable and much-loved artist of Queensland Ballet for the past ten years.

“Yanela has thrilled audiences with her portrayals of the title role in *Carmen* by fellow Cuban dancer, Carlos Acosta, Nikiya in *La Bayadère* and Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, among many others. But after ten years of dancing all the leading roles in the classical ballet repertoire, she will join the artistic team, bringing her experience to support the dancers,” Gil-Ortega explained

Piñera trained at the National Ballet School in Havana and danced as principal dancer for 11 years with the National Ballet of Cuba before joining Queensland Ballet in 2015.

“My training in Cuba and career with the National Ballet of Cuba shaped me as an artist. Appearing as a guest artist on leading stages across the world before joining Queensland Ballet offered me extraordinary artistic growth, as well as the opportunity to pursue family life and other goals. I’m not saying goodbye to the stage completely but would like to thank all the people who guided me through my journey as a dancer. I feel deep affection and gratitude to my teachers, mentors and choreographers who trusted and supported me and look forward to helping the next generation of dancers fulfill their dreams,” Piñera said.

Queensland Ballet will open Gil-Ortega’s inaugural season with the epic *Messa da Requiem* at the new Glasshouse Theatre, QPAC, followed by an ambitious program featuring five of the world’s leading choreographic voices.

“My first season will challenge the dancers not only technically, but also artistically. I look forward to working with the diverse talent across the Company who truly embody Queensland Ballet’s pioneering spirit,” Gil-Ortega said.

The appointment of Principal Rehearsal Director, Lisa-Maree Cullum, also signifies a new chapter of artistic excellence and innovation.

"I am confident that under the guidance of Lisa-Maree, all our company artists will continue to grow and contribute to our pursuit of world-class artistry and storytelling," Gil-Ortega said.

Cullum said Queensland Ballet continues its commitment to pushing the boundaries of classical and contemporary ballet.

"These dancers bring fresh energy, excellent training, and exciting potential to the stage as they begin their professional careers. With five of the dancers coming through the Academy of Queensland Ballet, it reinforces the strength of the training and its role cultivating a vital pipeline for emerging talent," Cullum noted.

As the Company looks forward to the new season, Queensland Ballet also bids a fond farewell to several dancers who have made meaningful contributions to our stages. The full roster includes:

### **2026 JETTE PARKER YOUNG ARTISTS**

**Levi Miller & Annie Chen** – Jette Parker Young Artists from 2025 to continue with the program into a second year.

**Saya Hibino, Gabriel Lowe, Emily Sprout, Nicole Drynan** – Pre Professional Program Graduates of 2025 joining the Jette Parker Young Artist Program in 2026.

**Sooan Lee, Thomas Jones, Ruito Takabatake** – Australian Ballet School graduates 2025, joining the Jette Parker Young Artist Program in 2026.

**Samantha Wong** freelance performer returning to Australia as a Jette Parker Young Artist in 2026.

**Eric Zhu** – Shanghai Dance Academy Graduate and student from English National Ballet School joins Jette Parker Young Artist Program in 2026.

### **2026 COMPANY ARTIST**

**Moeki Kojima** – Jette Parker Young Artist in 2025, promoted to Company Artist in 2026.

**Leona Takada** – Joins as Company Artist from Alberta Ballet.

**Sophie Kerr** – Academy of Queensland Ballet Alum, Joined Jette Parker Young Artist Program in 2022-2024, performed with English National Ballet and has been offered a Company Contract in August 2025 and will continue with the Company into 2026.

**Jake Mangakahia** – joins as a guest artist for six months after dancing with The Australian Ballet following performances across Europe in Christopher Wheeldon's *American in Paris*.

### **FAREWELLS**

**Yanela Piñera** – Joined Queensland Ballet in 2015 and will retire to join the Artistic Team as a Ballet Repetiteur.

**Dylan Lackey** – Joined Queensland Ballet in 2017 and will retire from stage to pursue a career in Graphic Design.

**Sean Ferenczi** – Joined Queensland Ballet as a Jette Parker Young Artist in 2023 and Company in 2024 and will be moving on from the company.

# ENDS #

### **Editors' Note:**

Interviews: Claire Vince, PR and Communications Manager [Cvince@queenslandballet.com.au](mailto:Cvince@queenslandballet.com.au) / 0468 726 910.

Images and biographies of the new company artists please see [here](#):

### **About Queensland Ballet**

Queensland Ballet's mission is to contribute to Australia's cultural landscape by being an integral part of the national and international ballet ecology - striving for artistic excellence, pathways for emerging artists, and impact through our community outreach, education, and dance health programs. We aim to enrich lives and contribute to wellness across society through the magic of ballet.

### **About Academy of Queensland Ballet**

Queensland Ballet provides industry-informed ballet and dance training pathways through our world-class Academy, developing dancers towards professional careers in Australia and overseas. Together, we are nurturing the dancers of the future. Under the direction of Academy Director, Christian Tatchev, Academy of Queensland Ballet provides comprehensive professional ballet and dance training programs and events for students from age 6 through to career employment.

2/2