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## **SELL-OUT SHAKESPEARE BALLET RETURNS TO THE STAGE**

It was the ballet that broke a 54-year box office record for Queensland Ballet back in 2014 and in August this year Sir Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* is set to return to the Brisbane stage.

Audiences lapped up this classic of all love stories five years ago and Queensland Ballet Artistic Director Li Cunxin said he's long been asked when it would return.

"MacMillan's *Romeo & Juliet* is certainly considered one of the premiere versions of this classical ballet and Queensland Ballet is only one of a few ballet companies in the world that has the rights to perform this work," Mr Li said.

"We are the only Australian ballet company that has been endorsed by the Macmillan Trust to perform *R&J* and we stand alongside internationally-renowned companies like the American Ballet Theater and The Royal Ballet as the companies entrusted with this acclaimed production.

"When we first performed this production in 2014, we brought out a raft of international ballet stars including Carlos Acosta, Tamara Rojo and Steven McRae to supplement our dancer numbers and to take on the lead roles. This year I'm proud to say, Queensland Ballet can stand on its own and deliver a world class performance of this demanding production.

"Our company has seen remarkable growth over the last five years in both our dancer numbers and the standard of our dancing to the point that we are able to take on the biggest and most demanding of ballet productions readily.

"What a privilege it is to be bringing this ballet to the Brisbane stage. This production is one of the most loved and respected versions of the *Romeo & Juliet* in the ballet world so I wouldn't be surprised if we see much of our audience travelling from interstate to experience it," Mr Li said.

*Romeo & Juliet* was the first three act ballet that MacMillan created and when it premiered in 1965 the title roles were controversially given to superstars Rudolph Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn despite being created on other dancers.

At its opening night, audiences were so overcome by the production that the dancers received 43 curtain calls, with the audience eventually having to be persuaded to leave the theatre, and it has continued to wow ballet go-ers ever since.

As Queensland Ballet dancers prepare for the opening of *R&J* on 28 August, they'll do so under the watchful eye of Sir Kenneth's widow Lady Deborah MacMillan (an established artist in her own right as a painter and set designer) who will travel out to Brisbane for the season.

Lady MacMillan will be joined by fellow Australian, Leanne Benjamin, a former star with The Royal Ballet (TBT) for 21 years, who will work with QB dancers to coach the role of Juliet and Julie Lincoln, another former TBT dancer who is now known the world over for staging MacMillan works after working with the man himself for many years.

Mr Li said it was not only a privilege for the Company to be performing such a work but also to be working with such shining lights of the ballet industry.

“Our dancers are thrilled to be working under the guidance of luminaries like Lady Deborah and Leanne and I know they will bring out the very best in our dancers,” Mr Li said.

“To have someone like Leanne coaching, who has danced the role of MacMillan’s Juliet countless times, is a once in a lifetime opportunity for our dancers.

“Meanwhile our male dancers will be honing not only their ballet technique but also their sword-fighting skills under the watchful eye of Gary Harris, another industry giant who has worked with our company countless times.

“This is just such a magnificent ballet that wonderfully weaves through Shakespeare’s classic tale of tragic loss, warring families and young love with incredible sets, sumptuous costumes and engaging characters.

“This was a sell-out season for us last time we performed it and was a defining moment for us as a ballet company. I expect we’ll see the same this season as we return to the Brisbane stage with this epic love story.

“If you only see one ballet this year, then this is definitely the one to see, it’s our blockbuster, not-to-be-missed ballet event of the year.”

We will also be welcoming a number of former QB dancers back to the stage for this production in character roles including Rachael Walsh, Christian Tátchev, Zenia Tátcheva and Matthew Lawrence as well as Steven Heathcote, Ballet Master for The Australian Ballet, whose daughter Mia Heathcote is a Soloist with QB.

Sir Kenneth MacMillan’s *Romeo & Juliet* opens on August 28 at the Lyric Theatre, QPAC. For more information visit [www.queenslandballet.com.au](http://www.queenslandballet.com.au)

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