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**BalletX Celebrates 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season with The Virtual Premier Party on May 6**

*Stream the 7pm event honoring Heather Watts and Jane G. Pepper for free*

**PHILADELPHIA (April 2, 2021)** – BalletX continues its 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season on Thursday, May 6 with The Virtual Premier Party, a free live-streaming event and fundraiser honoring two creative visionaries: **Heather Watts**, former Principal Dancer with New York City Ballet, and **Jane G. Pepper**, former President of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Tickets are available beginning today at [BalletX.org/premierparty](http://BalletX.org/premierparty) and open to everyone.

The 60-minute event will feature two new works – world premieres by Tiler Peck and Caili Quan commissioned specifically for the event – as well as other performances, documentary footage from BalletX’s first 15 years, tributes and commentary.

Known for its innovation, community involvement and cutting-edge approach to modern dance, BalletX has produced 100 world premiere ballets since its inception – a number virtually unheard of for a company its size. So as the organization ventures into new territory with its first full-length streaming gala, it just seemed natural to honor Watts and Pepper, who are both visionaries in the world of performing arts, according to **Christine Cox**, BalletX’s Artistic & Executive Director.

“BalletX is so incredibly grateful to the generosity of our audiences and donor community, who have kept us creating new work and employing our dancers and artists for the past year. While we will miss celebrating our annual Premier Party fundraising gala in person, we are thrilled to be able to introduce the company to a larger audience than ever before, and to honor two trailblazing women who have transformed our cultural landscape and made a lasting impact on BalletX,” said **Cox**.

Cox, who co-founded BalletX with Matthew Neenan in 2005, has relied on the tireless support of both women as the company has grown. She credits their advice and support as instrumental in helping reach new audiences, both locally and nationally, and with raising the city’s profile within creative circles.

The show is free to stream although tickets are required; they are available at [BalletX.org/premierparty](http://BalletX.org/premierparty) thru Noon on May 6. The performance will begin at 7pm ET. It will also be available via BalletX’s online subscription service, BalletX Beyond, beginning mid-May.

**Premier Party Gift Boxes** are available for purchase online for \$350/each, with proceeds directly supporting the creation of new work in the company’s 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season. The Premier Party Gift Box is **available while supplies last** and are filled with limited-edition 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary merchandise and a split of champagne from Moore Brothers Wine Company. Boxes must be ordered by April 23 (or while supplies last) and will be delivered to homes the first week of May; proof of age is required.

The Virtual Premier Party is presented with lead support from Premier Sponsors the Arnhold Family and Susan and Jeff Campbell, alongside the BalletX Board of Directors.

#### **ABOUT HEATHER WATTS**

**Heather Watts** joined New York City Ballet (NYCB) in 1970 and was a Principal Dancer until her retirement in a gala performance in 1995. Ms. Watts worked closely with George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins in NYCB, and was an acclaimed international star. She taught academic courses in 2006 and 2007 on Balanchine's life and work at Harvard University, and received two Derek Bok awards for distinguished teaching. Ms. Watts has taught several courses at Princeton University as well as UC Santa Barbara, Boston Ballet, Baltimore School of the Arts, and Juilliard. She has taught master classes worldwide and was the Director of New York State Summer School of the Arts from 1982 to 1994. Ms. Watts is a contributing cultural editor at Vanity Fair, and has served as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts, and serves on the Artists Committee for the Kennedy Center Honors. Ms. Watts was an inaugural fellow at the Center for Ballet and the Arts, New York University in 2014 and received an honorary degree from Hunter College in 2012.

#### **ABOUT JANE G. PEPPER**

**Jane G. Pepper** retired in 2010 as President of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which she had led for nearly 30 years. Her involvement with corporate and cultural institutions is extensive, including serving as a Director of The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.; Trustee of the Natural Lands Trust; Chair of the Board of Trustees, Longwood Gardens, Inc.; Chair of the Selections Committee for the Eisenhower Exchange Fellowships Philadelphia International Leadership Initiative; and a Vice President of the Royal Horticultural Society, London. She holds a Master's Degree in Public Horticulture Administration from the Longwood Graduate Program and a Bachelor's Degree in Plant Science, both from the University of Delaware. She earned an Associate of Science Degree in Landscape Design from Temple University.

#### **ABOUT BALLETX**

[BalletX](http://BalletX.org), celebrating its 15th Anniversary Season as Philadelphia's premier contemporary ballet, commissions choreographers from around the world to create new ballets that are "fresh, inclusive, and connect to what people want" (*Philadelphia Citizen*). Led by Artistic & Executive Director Christine Cox, BalletX has been recognized by *The New Yorker* as a "place of choreographic innovation" for producing nearly 100 world premiere ballets by more than 50 choreographers in its 15-year history. In addition to virtual works, main-stage performances, and international touring, the company offers free community pop ups, dance classes, artist Q&As, open rehearsals, and in-school dance education, designed to bring its audiences and the nation closer to dance. Among its many accolades and honors, BalletX was featured on the cover of *Dance Magazine's* October 2019 issue under the headline "BalletX is Taking All the Right Risks." To learn more about BalletX's programming and dancers, please visit [www.BalletX.org](http://www.BalletX.org) and follow the company on social media.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: Select video and photography, including headshots, are available for publication at [BalletX.org/pressroom](http://BalletX.org/pressroom).