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Ballet Rhode Island Launches New Strategic Plan, Adds Distinguished Artistic Faculty With Eye Toward 50th Anniversary

Three-year plan charts a path toward building a nationally recognized creative force in dance, rooted in Rhode Island

Renowned artists Trinidad Vives, Parren Ballard, and Gloria Govrin join Ballet RI's artistic and educational team

September 8, 2026 (Providence, RI) – As Ballet Rhode Island (Ballet RI) approaches its fiftieth anniversary in 2028, a new three-year strategic plan will position the company for its next era of artistic, educational, and organizational growth. The plan charts a path toward building a nationally recognized creative force in dance, one that is deeply rooted in Rhode Island, distinguished by artistic excellence, and sustained by education, community, disciplined stewardship, and courageous leadership.

Already putting that vision into action, Ballet RI is significantly strengthening its artistic and educational team with the addition of three highly respected artists and educators: **Trinidad Vives**, former Ballet Mistress and Associate Director of Houston Ballet, Artistic Associate at Boston Ballet, and Interim Artistic Director of The Washington Ballet, joins as Ballet RI's first Pre-Professional Programs Director; internationally experienced dancer and educator **Parren Ballard** joins the Artistic Faculty Team; and renowned former New York City Ballet soloist and longtime master teacher **Gloria Govrin** joins Ballet RI's faculty, bringing decades of experience training and mentoring professional and pre-professional dancers.

"At its heart, our strategic plan is built around a very simple idea: art is why Ballet RI exists, and everything else exists to support it," said Artistic Executive Director Kathleen Breen Combes. "As we approach our fiftieth anniversary, we have an extraordinary opportunity not simply to celebrate where we have been, but to define who we want to become. We are investing in the artists, teachers, infrastructure,

partnerships, and organizational strength that will allow Ballet RI to take a significant step forward.”

The three-year plan focuses on five foundations for Ballet RI’s future: creating extraordinary art; educating and developing the next generation; expanding the organization’s reach and visibility; building organizational and financial strength; and strengthening the governance, facilities, partnerships, and leadership necessary to sustain Ballet RI for the next fifty years.

This new direction builds on a period of significant growth and transformation under Breen Combes’ leadership. Since joining the organization in 2019, Breen Combes has led Ballet RI through the pandemic, a major organizational rebrand, and a period of sustained artistic and institutional growth. During that time, Ballet RI has grown its annual operating budget by 50%, increased investment in its professional dancers and artistic product, expanded the reach and programming of its School, launched new community initiatives, developed new artistic and institutional partnerships, and significantly broadened its performance footprint across Rhode Island and Southern New England.

“The quality of the art being created here is exceptional, but our visibility has not yet caught up with the work,” Breen Combes said. “The next chapter is about changing that. We want Ballet RI to be known beyond Rhode Island as a place where extraordinary dancers, choreographers, teachers, and students come to create, take risks, and grow, and at the same time remain deeply connected to the community that has sustained this organization for nearly fifty years.”

Building the Next 50 Years

Founded in Providence in 1978 as Festival Ballet Providence by Christine Hennessy and Winthrop Corey, Ballet RI has evolved throughout its nearly five-decade history alongside the art form itself.

Breen Combes, Artistic Executive Director, joined the organization in 2019 following a distinguished career as a principal dancer with Boston Ballet and later assumed artistic and executive leadership following Mihailo Djuric’s 22-year tenure as Artistic Director. Since then, Ballet RI has entered a period of significant evolution, with an emphasis on strengthening the caliber and breadth of its repertoire, investing in dancers and the creation of new work, expanding access to dance education, developing new audiences and partnerships, and building the organizational infrastructure necessary to support long-term growth.

In May 2023, that evolution was reflected publicly when Festival Ballet Providence became Ballet Rhode Island, signaling both the organization’s growing reach and a renewed commitment to reimagining classical ballet as a modern, inclusive art form reflective of the communities it serves.

Today, Ballet RI has established a growing regional presence, with performances at venues including The Veterans Memorial Auditorium and the Woodman Performing Arts Center in Providence, the University of Rhode Island in South Kingstown, the Margaret L. Jackson Arts Center in Fall River, Massachusetts, and the United Theatre in Westerly, where Ballet RI serves as resident dance company.

The organization has simultaneously expanded its investment in the creation of new work, artist development, education, and community access, priorities that will become increasingly central as Ballet RI moves toward its fiftieth anniversary and beyond.

Ballet RI's ProviDANCE after-school program brings free dance education to public schools in Providence. In addition to introducing children to dance, the program provides a pathway into the School of Ballet RI, with scholarship and mentorship opportunities available.

Investing in Artists and the Next Generation

A central priority of Ballet RI's strategic plan is establishing the organization as a destination for exceptional dance training and artist development.

The School of Ballet RI serves students beginning at age 2.5 through advanced pre-professional training, alongside adult programming and specialized opportunities for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The organization's expanding professional track program includes the Professional Trainee Program, apprentice opportunities, and the Company Rep Workshop, creating increasingly direct pathways between training and professional experience.

The addition of Vives, Ballard, and Govrin represents a significant investment in that vision. As Ballet RI's first Pre-Professional Programs Director, Vives will oversee the development of pre-professional students and trainees and help shape the organization's expanding professional training pathway.

A native of Madrid, Spain, Vives graduated from the École Supérieure de Danse de Cannes Rosella Hightower and received a First Prize medal and scholarship at the prestigious Prix de Lausanne. She went on to perform as a principal dancer with internationally recognized companies including Hamburg Ballet, Basel Ballet, and English National Ballet.

Following her performing career, Vives became an influential teacher and artistic leader, serving as Ballet Mistress and Associate Director at Houston Ballet and Artistic Associate at Boston Ballet. In 2023, she was appointed Interim Artistic Director of The Washington Ballet before serving as School Director of The Washington School of Ballet.

Parren Ballard brings decades of international professional experience as a dancer, teacher, and mentor to Ballet RI's Artistic Faculty Team. During his performing career, Ballard danced as a soloist with companies including Cincinnati Ballet, Basel Ballet, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, English National Ballet, and Houston Ballet, working with leading choreographers and artistic directors across Europe and the United States. He has since dedicated himself to teaching and developing the next generation of dancers.

Gloria Govrin brings another extraordinary depth of experience to Ballet RI's training environment. A former soloist with New York City Ballet, where she danced under George Balanchine, Govrin has spent decades teaching, coaching, and mentoring dancers at the highest levels of the profession. Her knowledge of classical technique, artistry, musicality, and the Balanchine tradition adds an invaluable dimension to Ballet RI's growing artistic faculty.

"Bringing Trinidad, Parren, and Gloria to Ballet RI is exactly the kind of investment this plan calls for," Breen Combes said. "Young dancers become extraordinary artists when they are surrounded by extraordinary teachers, mentors, and working professionals. Each of these artists brings something distinct to our organization, but they share an extraordinary depth of knowledge, generosity, and commitment to developing the individual artist. Together, they significantly strengthen what we can offer our students and dancers."

The expansion of Ballet RI's artistic team, alongside Yury Yanowsky as Artistic Curator and Resident Choreographer also reflects a larger ambition: to create an environment in Rhode Island where exceptional artists can build meaningful careers, students can access world-class training, choreographers can develop new ideas, and audiences can experience the breadth of what ballet can be today.

"Our fiftieth anniversary is an important milestone, but we see it much more as a launching point than a finish line," Breen Combes said. "We have spent the last several years building the foundation. Now we are envisioning what Ballet RI can become over the next fifty."

Ballet RI's 49th Season opens with *In Motion*, October 23–25 at the Woodman Performing Arts Center at Moses Brown School in Providence and November 6 at the United Theatre in Westerly. Its annual production of *The Nutcracker* will be presented December 17–27 at Veterans Memorial Auditorium in Providence.

For more information on the full season and School enrollment, and to purchase tickets, visit balletri.org.

ABOUT BALLET RHODE ISLAND

Ballet Rhode Island is Rhode Island's premier professional ballet company, captivating local, regional, and national audiences through a diverse repertoire spanning classical, neo-classical, and contemporary ballet. Our mission is to thrill and move our audiences, dancers, choreographers, students, supporters and staff with art and discipline. We aim to reimagine classical ballet as a modern, inclusive art form that reflects the rich diversity of Rhode Island's communities through professional performance, education, artist development, and community engagement.

Founded in Providence in 1978, Ballet RI enters its next era with a commitment to extraordinary artistry, ambitious new work, exceptional training, and meaningful community connection. Under the artistic and executive leadership of former Boston Ballet Principal Dancer Kathleen Breen Combes, Ballet RI has expanded its professional company, School, community programs, artistic partnerships, and regional performance footprint while increasing investment in the creation of new work and the development of dancers and choreographers.

As the organization approaches its fiftieth anniversary in 2028, Ballet RI is pursuing an ambitious vision for its future: to become a nationally recognized creative force in dance, rooted in Rhode Island and helping shape what ballet can become for the next generation.

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