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Ballet Rhode Island to Open Season 49 With World Premiere Based On True Holocaust Survivor Story of Anka Nachtigal, mother of Rhode Island Resident Lilliane Birch

Created in partnership with the Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center, the new work will feature choreography by Ballet Rhode Island Artistic Curator and Resident Choreographer, Yury Yanowsky

September 22, 2026 (**Providence, RI**) – Ballet Rhode Island has announced that a World Premiere based on the true Holocaust survivor story of Anka Nachtigal, mother of Rhode Island resident Lilliane Birch, will open the company's 49th season as part of its *In Motion* program. The new work, titled *Nachtigal* in honor of Birch's mother, is being created in partnership with the Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center, with choreography by the Ballet's Artistic Curator and Resident Choreographer, Yury Yanowsky. Performances will take place October 23-25 at the Woodman Center at Moses Brown in Providence, RI, and November 6 at United Theatre in Westerly, RI.

To develop *Nachtigal*, Ballet RI is working closely with Birch, whose parents survived the Holocaust and whose family story is one of extraordinary survival, humanity, and the profound impact of seemingly small acts of courage and kindness. As part of the creative process, Birch is sharing her family's history directly with Yanowsky, allowing personal memory and lived experience to become a starting point for a new work of art.

"In addition to honoring Anka, *Nachtigal's* connection with the German word for "nightingale" has come to hold particular resonance in the creation of the work," Yanowsky said. "Known for its song in darkness, the nightingale offers an image of memory, voice and endurance: not an erasure of the night, but a voice that

continues within it.”

Nachtigal survived much of the Holocaust by hiding in several locations in Kraków before being deported to Auschwitz, where she endured the horrors of Dr. Josef Mengele’s experiments. Her father, John Nachtigal, served in the Polish Army, was captured by the Soviets, imprisoned in a labor camp in Siberia, and later parachuted back into occupied Poland.

“I have loved ballet since I was six years old and my parents splurged big time to take me to a performance of the Bolshoi Ballet,” Birch said. “Towards the end of my parents’ lives, they started to be sad at the thought that what they had gone through during the Holocaust would be forgotten. So to remember them in this beautiful way makes my heart dance with joy.”

Ballet RI is respectfully extending complimentary tickets to *In Motion* performances to first and second generation survivors of the Holocaust and their guests (four tickets per party). Interested parties can reach out to Ballet Rhode Island’s box office by emailing rebecca@balletri.org. Ticket orders may also be processed over the phone by calling (401) 432-6064.

“We are intentionally not creating this work in isolation,” Ballet RI Artistic Executive Director Kathleen Breen Combes said. “Our relationship with the Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center brings historical knowledge, educational context and, most importantly, a connection to lived experience into the process.”

In addition to the World Premiere, the Ballet’s *In Motion* program will also feature Yanowsky’s *Bathers*, inspired by the luminous world of American Impressionism, and the company premiere of former Boston Ballet principal dancer and current American Ballet Theatre principal dancer James Whiteside’s *City of Women*.

For more information, 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 with a diverse repertoire of classical, neo-classical, and contemporary ballet. The company’s mission to reimagine classical ballet as a modern, inclusive art form that reflects the rich diversity of Rhode Island’s communities, is achieved through its public performance series, community engagement programs, and the School of Ballet Rhode Island.

Founded in 1978 by Christine Hennessy and Winthrop Corey, Ballet Rhode Island has undergone a remarkable transformation defined by growth, innovation, and a renewed commitment to artistic excellence and community engagement. Under the

direction of former Boston Ballet Principal Dancer Kathleen Breen Combes since 2019, Ballet Rhode Island has deepened its commitment to presenting a wide-ranging repertoire, balancing groundbreaking contemporary works with timeless classical masterworks, and has prioritized accessibility, diversity, and education in meaningful new ways. With performances now staged across the region, and as the resident dance company at the United Theater in Westerly, Rhode Island, the Ballet has firmly established itself as a leading cultural force in Southern New England.

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