

Art Inspires Art in Creation of New Full-Length Ballet, Marilyn - Her Life. The Untold Story.

A World Premiere by Dani Rowe, Oregon Ballet Theatre Artistic Director

PORTLAND, OR, UNITED STATES, March 21, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Viewing Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe Series in the personal collection of noted Portland philanthropist Jordan Schnitzer inspired OBT Artistic Director Dani Rowe's new full-length ballet Marilyn. The world premiere ballet tells the story of Marilyn Monroe's life from a new perspective.



A new ballet based on the life of Marilyn Monroe.
Photo of Carly Wheaton by Christopher Peddecord.

The initial idea for Marilyn took root during a conversation between Dani Rowe and frequent collaborator, costume designer Emma Kingsbury after Marilyn Monroe's iconic "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" dress was worn to the Met Gala in 2022. In considering Marilyn's lasting cultural impact, the idea of making a Marilyn ballet surfaced and sparked excitement. "How could a ballet capture Marilyn's layers?" Rowe asked herself. "Her glamour, vulnerability, and myth?"

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*Dani Rowe, Artistic Director,
Oregon Ballet Theatre*

Then, shortly after joining Oregon Ballet Theatre in 2023, Rowe had dinner with Portland philanthropist, Jordan Schnitzer. Schnitzer, who has been named an [ARTnews Top 200 art collector globally](#), is a lifelong Portland resident, local business owner and Oregon's foremost fine art collector. Schnitzer spoke about his Andy Warhol collection and shared his insights into Warhol's fascination with celebrity culture, particularly his Marilyn Monroe series. Schnitzer extended an invitation to view these prints up

close and share more about Warhol's screen-printing process.

“Seeing Warhol's Marilyns up close deepened my understanding of his work and its resonance

with Marilyn's story," says Rowe. "The vibrant prints captured her public image, while the imperfections hinted at the vulnerability beneath. This duality inspired the emotional core of the ballet: the tension between performance and authenticity, between image and reality."

Rowe also found thematic inspiration in Warhol's Marilyn Diptych, which juxtaposes colorful images of Marilyn with fading, black-and-white versions.

This contrast speaks to the duality of her persona — the radiant star and the woman struggling with inner demons. The juxtaposition of brightness and darkness became central to the ballet's narrative.

OREGON BALLET THEATRE

"When Dani Rowe visited The Schnitzer Collection, she saw one of our Andy Warhol screenprints of Marilyn Monroe. I could see the sheer captivating intensity of the moment! Later, she called and asked what I thought of her creating a ballet called Marilyn. I thought it was a spectacular idea and now all of us can experience how one artist inspired another to create a magical performance! Thank you, Andy Warhol and thank you, Dani Rowe!"

--Jordan Schnitzer, President of Schnitzer Properties and the Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation

From this foundation, Rowe began crafting a libretto that explores the different versions of Marilyn — the ingenue, the star, the wife, and the lost soul. This ballet reflects the contradictions of Marilyn's life, weaving together impressions of iconic moments to tell a story of fame, identity, and vulnerability.

"Warhol's Marylins challenged me to look beyond the surface, to see the layers of humanity beneath the icon, and to bring that depth to life on stage," says Rowe. "Ultimately, this ballet explores the fragile line between image and reality, between performance and truth. It's a tribute to the enduring power of art to reveal the complexities of being human."

A Production of Firsts & aFemale Led Artistic Team

Marilyn represents many firsts for Oregon Ballet Theatre. It is the first full length ballet for Artistic Director Dani Rowe and was created in association with the Estate of Marilyn Monroe, LLC. Marilyn also marks one of OBT's first co-productions.

Marilyn is also notable for featuring a female led artistic team. According to a 2023 Dance Data Project report, only 29% of ballet companies have female artistic directors. Among the largest

150 ballet companies in the U.S., [only a quarter of the works produced in 2022 were choreographed by women.](#)

Included in the Marilyn artistic team with Dani Rowe are Composer Shannon Rugani; Costume and Scenic Designer Emma Kingsbury; and Lighting and Scenic Designer David Finn.

“Working alongside incredible artists like Dani and Emma is not only a privilege, but also a rare and significant moment. In my 15 years as a professional dancer and performer, I never danced for a female choreographer and only performed to a handful of compositions by women. The opportunity to collaborate with a female led creative team is something truly special and long overdue in our industry,” said Composer Shannon Rugani. “It’s always an honor to work alongside an artistic genius, and this experience with Dani has been nothing short of inspiring.”

Financing new work is a challenge for most fine arts organizations, and what began as a playful idea has grown into a major artistic endeavor, supported by multiple ballet companies. OBT invited Tulsa Ballet and BalletMet to partner in the role of co-producers of Marilyn. As co-producers, they share a portion of the costs to build the production and will collectively own and manage the production. After the ballet premieres in Portland, it will then tour to Tulsa, OK and Columbus, OH respectively, to be performed by their organizations.

As Oregon Ballet Theatre’s first co-production in its 35-year history, Marilyn has been thoughtfully crafted to travel light, making it accessible for other ballet companies anywhere in the world to feature.

Sets and costumes have been built in Oregon and have included OBT’s production team and local artists, including OBT’s Costume Shop and fashion designer Adam Arnold.

In the world of dance where partnering is second nature, collaborating with like-minded arts groups to create new work makes both fiscal and artistic sense. And in a true full-circle moment, Oregon Ballet Theatre’s Marilyn is generously commissioned by Jordan Schnitzer and the Arlene and Harold Schnitzer CARE Foundation.

A Welcome Addition to Portland’s Vibrant Creative Community

Rowe has just rounded the corner of her second year at OBT. During that time, she’s attracted artists from around the globe to Portland. Notable accomplishments include:

- The American premiere of Loughlan Prior’s Hansel and Gretel, which Pointe Magazine dubbed one of the 12 Stand Out Performances of 2024
- A new adaptation of Giselle from Tiit Helimets and Dani Rowe after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot
- A world premiere from French choreographer Nicolas Blanc, which will debut in The OBT Collection

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