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## The Australian Ballet welcomes Alexander Rodrigues, the new Robert and Elizabeth Albert Conducting Fellow

In August, The Australian Ballet welcomed Brisbane-born Alexander Rodrigues, the latest recipient of the Robert and Elizabeth Albert Conducting Fellowship. After an 18-month COVID-induced delay Alexander has started his fellowship under the directorship and guidance of **Nicolette Fraillon, The Australian Ballet's Music Director and Chief Conductor, and Orchestra Victoria's Artistic Director.**

The Robert and Elizabeth Albert Fellowships were established in 2012 to support the development of conductors and pianists in the field of classical ballet. The Australian Ballet requires conductors and pianists of the highest calibre to match and partner the world-class standards of its dancers. Standard training pathways for conductors and pianists don't usually develop the knowledge and skills to work with ballet dancers. Conductors and pianists who work with the company must understand and adjust to different choreography, staging, costumes and theatres, as well as the different physiques, musicality and preferences of the dancers, and the variations inherent to live performance.

Prior to 2012, there was no formal training pathway for budding ballet conductors in Australia. Robert Albert, a former Director and Board member of The Australian Ballet, and his wife Elizabeth, have been instrumental in the development of countless young artists across Australia and generously agreed to support two fellowships annually, one for ballet pianists and one for conductors. Alexander is the fifth conductor to have won this opportunity for growth and development.

**Nicolette Fraillon says,** "We are thrilled to welcome Alexander to The Australian Ballet. Music is the essential partner to dance but to provide wise, understanding and genuinely supportive partnership a conductor needs to understand the language of classical ballet and music making in a truly collaborative but complex theatrical context. To gain such understanding is a long but thoroughly rewarding journey and it's thanks to the extraordinary ongoing support from Robert and Libby Albert that we are able to offer the next generation of Australian talent the kind of training requisite to the success of the art

from. To work in, and with, one of the leading companies in the world, being mentored by the music staff, artistic staff and all the gifted professionals who work at The Australian Ballet, is an outstanding opportunity for a young conductor. Alexander is a very talented young musician and we are all excited to be playing a part in this next stage of his development."

Born and raised in Brisbane, Alexander graduated from the University of Queensland with a **Bachelor of Science (Astrophysics) and Arts (Music).** Alexander learnt the piano and violin from a young age before learning the oboe and has been the principal oboist of the Tasmanian Youth Orchestra and the UTAS Conservatorium Orchestra.

While at university, he learnt pipe organ and was awarded the Organ Society of Queensland's Pipe Organ Scholarship in 2015. He has since performed on the instrument with the Queensland Youth Orchestra's Wind Symphony and the University of Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, as well as the Derwent Symphony Orchestra.

Alexander's interest in conducting began in 2009. He conducted the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra as part of the inaugural Australian Conducting Academy in 2018. He has also conducted the Berlin Sinfonietta as part of two International Masterclass Berlin courses with Professors Johannes Wilder and Roberto Paternostro as well as participating in the Zlin Conducting Masterclass in the Czech Republic.

**Alexander says,** "The Conducting Fellowship role with The Australian Ballet is such an exciting opportunity for me to broaden not only my music repertoire, but my knowledge of dance and ballet.

"Since starting the fellowship, I've begun to get my head around how the different elements come together in the rehearsal process: learning what the different French and Italian dance steps mean; understanding how dancers and dance teachers 'count' the music; observing how the dancers rehearse; sitting with the répétiteurs and studying how they prepare their scores; learning about the

importance of tempi and, of course, studying the orchestral scores and reading up about the ballets for upcoming productions.

"I've always been someone who loves understanding how things work and I can't wait to see the productions on stage and becoming more accustomed to the ballet world."

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