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**HOUSTON BALLET ANNOUNCES THE RETIREMENT OF FIRST SOLOIST LINNAR LOORIS**

**PHOTOS & VIDEO:** <https://bit.ly/2X1xQuU>

**HOUSTON, TEXAS** [June 24, 2019] — Houston Ballet announces the retirement of First Soloist Linnar Looris at the end of its 2018/19 season. Looris took his final bows on the Wortham Theater Center stage during Stanton Welch's *Marie* on Sunday, June 23. He departs to his native Estonia, where he will serve as the new Artistic Director of Estonian National Ballet.

"I'd like to thank the whole Houston Ballet family, its supporters and this wonderful community for the twelve unforgettable years we've shared together," says Looris. "I'm grateful to each and every one of you for giving me the opportunity to do what I love and to grow more than I could've ever imagined. Thank you all for making me "Houston strong!" and for supporting me so generously as I take on this new challenge in my life. This company, this city – y'all have a special place in my heart forever!"

Looris spent 12 years dancing with Houston Ballet. He joined the Company in 2007 and was promoted to First Soloist in 2011. He performed many lead roles including The Nutcracker Prince in Ben Stevenson's *The Nutcracker*, Prince and Stepmother in Stanton Welch's *Cinderella*, Onegin in John Cranko's *Onegin*, Solor in Stanton Welch's *La Bayadere*, Prince Florimund in Ben Stevenson's *The Sleeping Beauty*, Pinkerton and Sharpless in Stanton Welch's *Madame Butterfly* and Prince Siegfried in Stanton Welch's *Swan Lake*. Additionally, Welch created roles on him in his world premiere ballets *Tapestry*, *The Core* and *Marie*.

Looris received classical ballet training from the Tallin Ballet School In Estonia. He toured with the European Dance Festival around France, Italy and Switzerland before joining Estonian National Ballet in 2001, where he became a Principal Dancer in 2003. While in the Company, Looris performed all the leading roles in its classical and contemporary repertoire and toured to Finland, Sweden, Ukraine, Russia and America. In 2006, he joined Birmingham Royal Ballet as a Soloist until joining Houston Ballet. Looris was recognized for his talents with the Philip Morris Young Dancer of the Year Award in 2002 and the Foundation of Culture Scholarship Award in 2004 and 2006.

Houston Ballet thanks Looris for his time with the Company and sends its warmest wishes for his next chapter.

## **ABOUT HOUSTON BALLET**

Houston Ballet has evolved into a company of 60 dancers with a budget of \$33 million, making it the country's fifth largest ballet company. With a state-of-the-art performance space built especially for the company—also the largest professional dance facility in America—Houston Ballet's \$46.6 million Center for Dance opened in April 2011, with an endowment of just over \$74.1 million (as of July 2017).

Australian choreographer Stanton Welch AM has served as Artistic Director of Houston Ballet since 2003, raising the level of the company's classical technique and commissioning works from dance makers such as Christopher Bruce, Alexander Ekman, William Forsythe, Jiří Kylián, Trey McIntyre, Julia Adam, Edwaard Liang, and George Balanchine. Executive Director James Nelson serves as the administrative leader of the company, a position he assumed in February 2012 after serving as the company's General Manager for more than a decade.

Houston Ballet has toured extensively both nationally and internationally. Over the past fifteen years, the company has appeared in renowned theaters in London, Paris, Moscow, Spain, Montréal, Ottawa, Melbourne, New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and in cities large and small across the United States.

Houston Ballet's Education and Community Engagement Program reaches more than 60,000 individuals in the Houston area annually. Houston Ballet Academy teaches more than one thousand students every year, and approximately 50 percent of the current company was trained by the Academy. For more information on Houston Ballet, visit [www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org).

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