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American Ballet Theatre Artists Vote to Authorize Strike

New York, NY (January 19, 2018) – The Artists of American Ballet Theatre (ABT), the internationally renowned ballet company, overwhelmingly voted to authorize a strike shortly after midnight on Wednesday.

Eighty (80) Dancers and Stage Managers, represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), took the vote as negotiations stalled. The Artists have been bargaining with ABT management since late April of 2017 for a new three-year agreement. Among other issues, the group is seeking to improve retirement contributions which were completely eliminated for one year, then cut in half - from 7.5% to 3.75% - during the recessionary period beginning in 2008. Artists are now seeking modest increases in the contribution rate to regain those previous levels. The group is also requesting that minimal wage increases be effective from the date of contract expiration rather than from ratification. The Artists have conceded to the Company cost saving proposals in order to obtain these modest gains.

“These hard-working ABT dancers have dedicated their lives to becoming the top Artists in their field. Stage managers work long hours, often through lunch and dinner breaks, to get the performances on stage. These Artists have further proven their loyalty to ABT by spending the majority of their relatively short careers with the Company. They all deserve to be able to retire from dance with dignity and respect and payments better reflecting what they have given to the Company throughout the years,” stated Leonard Egert, National Executive Director of AGMA.

Griff Braun, AGMA’s New York Dance Executive, said “ABT falls far short when compared with other AGMA dance companies of all sizes in terms of retirement contributions. The total cost of our retirement and wage retroactivity proposals is less than $30,000 over a three-year period. This is a small price to pay to begin to address the legitimate concerns of those who create and maintain the artistic excellence of the Company.”
ABT management, by its failure to respond adequately, has put in jeopardy ABT’s upcoming scheduled four-week U.S. tour. Unless a tentative agreement is reached, the Artists have authorized the Negotiating Committee to call a strike prior to the tour dates.

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The American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) is a labor organization that represents the Artists who create and engage in America’s operatic, choral and dance performances across the world. AGMA represents approximately 7500 opera and choral singers, ballet and modern dancers, and production personnel at all principal opera houses and ballet companies in the United States. As it relates to dance, AGMA represents most major ballet and modern dance companies across the country from New York City Ballet to San Francisco Ballet. The Union provides forceful advocacy and defense of its members’ employment and artistic rights and is affiliated with the AFL-CIO; Branch of Associated Actors and Artists of America. For more information please go to www.musicalartists.org.