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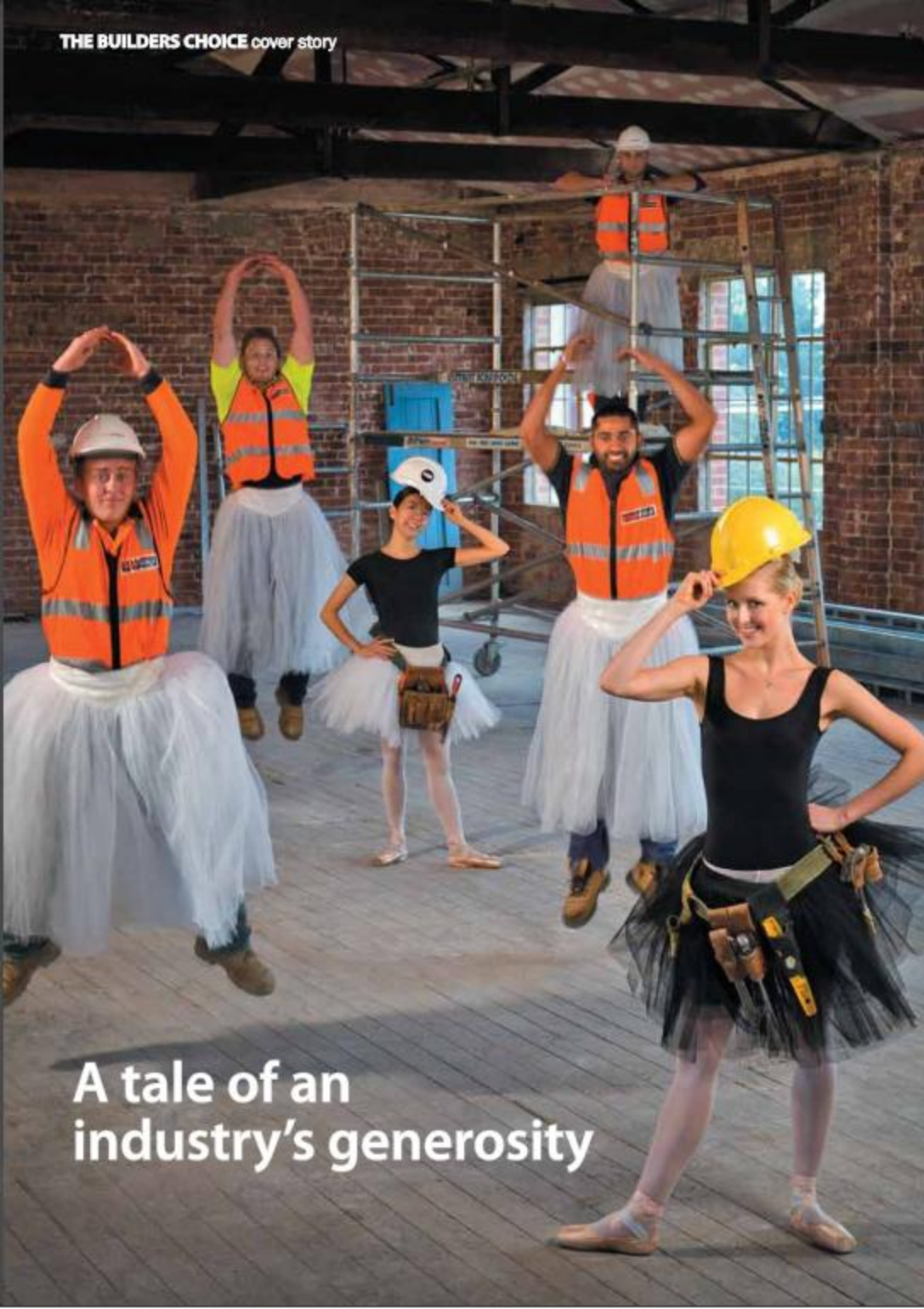
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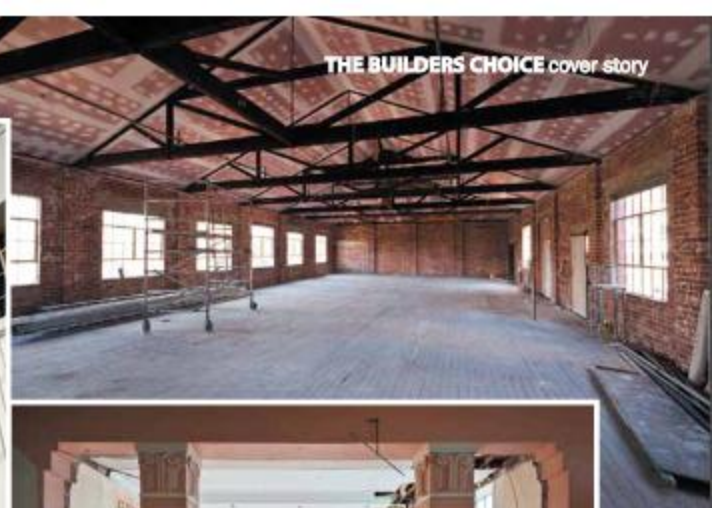


CIRCULATIONS

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A tale of an industry's generosity



// words ara janson // images stephen nicholls photographer

THE TEAM



WEST AUSTRALIAN
BALLET

PROBUILD

SANDOVER
PINDER

By the end of the year, Western Australia will have its own State ballet centre, completed just in time to celebrate West Australian Ballet's 60th anniversary. The \$12 million state-of-the-art training and rehearsal facility is a culmination of intense fund-raising by many sectors of the Perth community:

The State Government committed \$2 million towards the Centre's fit-out and has pledged a further \$1.2 million annually to increase the number of company dancers; the City of Bayswater spent \$4.3 million to purchase the building; and the construction industry has also showed its support for the arts by working alongside WA Ballet to help the company realise the dream of having its own home.

In fact, more than \$2 million by way of goods and pro-bono services has been contributed towards the construction of the Centre by such firms as Probuild, Sandover Pinder, Geoff Hesford Engineering, Wood and Grlevo Engineers, Davson+Ward Quantity Surveyors, Valmont, Everett-Smith, Jade Projects and Hydraulics Design Australia. Many individuals and companies have also made monetary contributions to the fund which now stands at some \$11.4 million - just \$600,000 short of the project's target.

West Australian Ballet General Manager, Steven Roth, says the project has been an amazing example of how a lot of people and organisations, including local and State government and the corporate and private sector, can share a vision and deliver an historic piece of arts infrastructure for the State.

"The generosity of all involved has been quite overwhelming. Where others have tried and failed, this is an example of what has actually worked. We hope this success story encourages others to follow," said Steven.

The new ballet centre is located on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Whatley Crescent in Maylands. The Sixth Avenue wing incorporates three previous buildings, constructed in 1909 and 1920, while the Whatley Crescent wing, described as Inter-war, stripped classical style with art deco ornamental detailing, was built in two stages from 1937.

The building stood empty before its recent purchase by the City of Bayswater, with help from Lotterywest, and leased to the ballet company for a peppercorn rent.



Photo: Jon Green



Photo: Jon Green

The ground floor of the Sixth Avenue wing will be used to house extensive wardrobe rooms which include a laundry, spray and dye area, a wig room, a fabric storage area, technical offices and a fitting room. Opening onto a piazza in the street is a cafe and bar which will welcome the community and create a popular meeting place.

The other side of the lower floor has been given over to offices, a boardroom and stores. Accessed off the Heritage Foyer, the new part of the building is an extension at the rear comprising a staircase, a lift and bathrooms. The upper floor includes three rehearsal studios (one suitable for public performances), offices, a green room, kitchen, physio room, dancers' dressing areas, bathrooms and a shoe store.

"The fabric of the building has been left largely untouched. There were large open spaces and the top floor was wall-free, so we didn't have to modify or change very much to create wonderful studios," said Steven Roth.

Sandover Pinder are the lead architects on the project and company principal, David Karotkin, said that by creating a home for the ballet it has also taken a heritage building, found a new use for it and extended its life.

"The ballet was very clear about how they wanted to use the building," said David, who worked closely with project architect, Catherine Watts.

"They are bringing together all the functions which currently happen over three venues. Part of our job was to refine those requirements into one building and the warehouse layout we started with, suited the creation of dance studios."

"Sandover Pinder are always keen to work on interesting arts projects, so becoming a major benefactor of the ballet centre offered a perfect opportunity," said David.

Probuild State Manager, Eric Meyerowitz, said, "The new Centre is a fantastic community project, one that can bring necessary relief to the much needed facilities of the ballet. Hopefully, in the future, it will provide further opportunities to many members of the community interested in pursuing a career in the ballet. Our work is just a token of the value that Probuild sees in being a small part of assisting the community to develop such a meaningful project."

"I hope Probuild's contribution to the Centre sets an example for other companies to get more involved in arts projects, big and small, around Perth," he said.

The work Probuild did on the conversion involved demolishing an old toilet block, construction of the two-storey amenities block, rectification of timber floors, the erection of new office partitions, the restoration of heritage ceilings and floors and installing new mechanical, hydraulic, electrical and fire services. While the facade required little work, the flooring throughout the building and a large portion of the ceilings required restoration.

"The rectification of the timber floors was the biggest challenge," said Eric Meyerowitz.

"Some areas of the building date back to 19th century and the timber had degraded. There are three ballet rehearsal studios at the facility, so it was paramount that every timber joist was investigated to ensure it could support the necessary loads. A timber specialist from the CSIRO was engaged to inspect the joists and, as a result, over 100 joists had to be replaced or braced," he said.

As well as ensuring correct acoustics between floors and in the rooms, the floors of the studios had to be specially sprung so as to reduce injuries to the dancers. Designed by British floor specialists, Harlequin, the Centre will have the first AeroDeck floor installed in the world.

"Where others have tried and failed, this is an example of what has actually worked. We hope this success story encourages others to follow."

Eric Meyerowitz said the features of Studio 1, the main rehearsal space, are what he likes most about the building.

"It is located in a section of the building that dates back to the 1800s, with the original jarrah beams, brickwork and windows restored to their original beauty. The ceilings follow the arch of the roof and this enables the jarrah beams and the original brickwork to stand out and really showcase the 19th century construction," he said.

The West Australian Ballet will continue to present its large productions at His Majesty's Theatre and The Quarry but Steven Roth says they will host small salon shows at their new Centre.

"Studio 1 will hold about 150 people, so there are smaller dance companies who can utilise a space that size for performances outside our training hours," he said.

"We'd also like to establish an elite ballet school here to train the next generation of dancers. We don't have such a school in Perth which means our best dancers have to go to Melbourne or New Zealand," he said.

The centre still needs some \$600,000 to meet its fundraising target. Those wishing to contribute, can make a donation or purchase a brick for \$500. All donations are tax deductible and will be acknowledged by name in a sculptural list on the Centre's main staircase. Or, for \$1 million, Steven Roth has said that he will put your name on the front of the building. **BC**

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