

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sacramento Ballet Mourns the Passing of Artistic Director Emeritus, Ron Cunningham

Sacramento, CA – March 10, 2026 – The Sacramento Ballet announces with deep sadness the passing of its former artistic director, Ron Cunningham, whose visionary leadership shaped the organization and helped establish professional ballet in the Sacramento region.



Mr. Cunningham was appointed Artistic Director of Sacramento Ballet in 1988, after a successful career as a dancer and director with numerous companies across the country, including Boston Ballet. Under his leadership, the company grew from a small regional ensemble into a respected professional ballet company known for artistic excellence and meaningful community engagement. For more than three decades as Artistic Director, Cunningham along with his wife and collaborator, Carinne Binda, cultivated generations of dancers and choreographers, introduced audiences to both classical repertoire and contemporary works, and elevated the visibility of the company.

Cunningham’s artistic legacy extends far beyond the stage. He was a passionate advocate for dance education and believed deeply in the transformative power of the arts. His commitment to nurturing young artists and expanding access to dance helped inspire thousands of students, performers, and audiences throughout Northern California. Ahead of his time, he prioritized accessibility, opening the door

for young dance enthusiasts to experience ballet, casting children of all abilities in his signature *Nutcracker* production every year.

Dennis Mangers, a longtime advocate for the arts in Sacramento, highlighted Ron's commitment to accessibility: "I loved what they contributed to this ballet, and in particular, I want to highlight the fact that ballet in the old days had not always been an inclusive art form. Ron Cunningham took a look at the diversity of this community and decided that those days were over. He made it clear to this community, this is a diverse community, and your ballet company is going to reflect that reality."



Board Chair, Alyssa Paoletti, shared "Ron Cunningham was a pillar of Sacramento's artistic community, dedicating 30 years to the Sacramento Ballet and shaping it into a vibrant and beloved institution. Under his leadership, the company flourished, offering dancers a nurturing and challenging environment, and audiences a rich tapestry of performances that ranged from timeless classics to daring new works. His commitment to artistic excellence and community engagement leaves a legacy that will inspire Sacramento's cultural landscape for generations to come."

Sacramento Ballet rehearsal director, Stefan Calka, had this to share about Mr. Cunningham: "I was fortunate to know Ron, not only as my director, but as a mentor and a friend. He taught me the importance of storytelling and instilled a deep commitment to artistry. That commitment helped shape the artistic culture of this company and influenced generations of artists and audiences. His work as a director, choreographer and arts advocate created an important foundation that we continue to build on."

Now in its 72nd year, Sacramento Ballet carries forward the artistic spirit Cunningham ignited, presenting world-class performances, offering dance education programs, and serving the broader community through the power of movement.

The Sacramento Ballet community extends its deepest condolences to Ron Cunningham's family, friends, and colleagues.

Additional information about memorial arrangements will be shared as details become available.

About Sacramento Ballet

Founded in 1954, Sacramento Ballet is a premier performing arts organization dedicated to enhancing the human experience through dance. The company presents a dynamic repertoire of classical and contemporary works, provides high-quality dance education, and engages audiences across the region through performances and community programs.

Media Contact:

Colby Damon, Marketing Director
marketing@sacballet.org

Photos by Jay Mather