

Present and past stars jeté onto the stage for glam 75th year ballet gala



By [Debbie Hathway](#)

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There's no stopping former Capab Ballet principal ballerina Juanita Yazbek, who, while pregnant, is still running her interior design company, fulfilling her duties as a committee member of Friends at Cape Town City Ballet Balletomanes, choreographing work for Cape Town City Ballet's 75th anniversary gala, organising catering and décor for the after party, and working out daily at the gym. Only her Latin American dance classes are on the back burner until her baby is born!



Some of the former stars of CAPAB Ballet and Cape Town City Ballet who will be appearing in Happy Birthday Ballet - from left: back row: Sharon Paulsen, Philip Boyd, Owen Murray; middle row: Elma Wege, Lynn Domancie; front row: Candice Braithwaite, Juanita Yazbek, Debbie Oshry and Grant Mandon

Yazbek has worked on big events, such as Stars 2000 and Stars of the Century, but this anniversary gala is extra special - dancers are flying in from around the world to attend. "For me, it's about the joy, the togetherness of having so many of the past and present ballet stars on stage. The company used to be so much bigger, the dancers have embarked on new careers and gone off in different directions. It's nice for them to see each other again," she said.

The Happy Birthday Ballet gala will take place at the newly refurbished Artscape Opera House in Cape Town on Sunday, 22 November at 7pm. This will be the climax to three performances of Balletscapes on 20 to 21 November, featuring a new ballet called African Landscapes by Robin van Wyk and other up-and-coming company choreographers. Balletscapes will also feature the Grand Pas from Paquita and excerpts from popular ballets by the late David Poole, Veronica Paeper and Andre Prokovsky with Xola Putye, Thomas Thorne, Janine Laidlow and Johnny Bovang, among others, in featured roles.

Happy Birthday Ballet will trace the history of the company from its inception as the UCT Ballet Company, through its development as Capab Ballet, to its present existence as Cape Town City Ballet. It will feature visuals of its founder, the late Dr Dulcie Howes, and her successors David Poole and Veronica Paeper, and pay tribute to those who contributed to the company's long and illustrious past.

Audiences can look forward to seeing Colleen Haman, Susan Paynter, Antoinette Haupt, Elma Wege, Lynn Domancie, Debbie Oshery, Carol Kinsey, Juanita Yazbek, Marylynn Lindsay, Candice Braithwaite, Leanne Voysey, Sharon Paulsen, Janet Lindup, Philip Boyd, Owen Murray, Grant Mandon, Izak Botha, Roland Eskinazi and Andrew Warth in the ballroom scene.

Parading in the promenade will be Clare Shepherd-Wilson, Genevieve Yazbek, Fiona and Mitya Sargeant, Olga Twell, Rebecca Hoffman, Annette Middleton, Sonja Thompson, Katinka van Vlaanderen, Johan and Karen Jooste, Ingrid Buhrer, Diane Cawley, Brendon McClaren, Colin Mandell, Keith du Preez, Allison Foat, Elizabeth Triegaardt, Keith Macintosh and Tracy Li.

"I've worked with the golden oldies before and they still have a big following," said Yazbek. "Some of them are reluctant to participate as they know I'll make them dance! But I'm going to make this fun. It's about panache and elegance; showing them off in the best light in a ballroom scene from Romeo and Juliet for those who can rehearse the previous week and a graceful promenade for those only arriving that weekend."

In spite of drastic budget cuts and a dire lack of funding over the past 11 years, CTCB has survived and can proudly stake its claim as the oldest ballet company in the country and among very few in the world that can boast such longevity.

Over the past seven decades, Cape Town dancers and choreographers have made their mark locally and internationally. These include Phyllis Spira (The Royal Ballet Touring Company), David Poole (Sadler's Wells Ballet), Eduard Greyling (Het Nationale Ballet), Keith Mackintosh (Geneva Ballet), Cecily Robinson (Ballet Russes), Johaar Mosaval (Royal Ballet), Diane van Schoor (current head of Royal Ballet School's White Lodge), Desiree Samaai (Northern Ballet Theatre), Jack Wyngaard (London City Ballet), John Magnus (Joffrey Ballet), Allison Foat (Manhattan Ballet) and Tracy Li (Hong Kong Ballet).

Guest artists who have performed with the company are among the greatest names in classical ballet: Margot Fonteyn, Attilio Labis, Maina Gielgud, Thomas Edur and Agnes Oakes. Dance makers who have become world-renowned include John Cranko (Stuttgart Ballet) and Frank Staff (Capab Ballet).

In the mid-1980s, David Poole, Capab Ballet's artistic director from 1970 to 1990, identified a need for children in the Cape's disadvantaged communities to be given the opportunity to learn and perform ballet. He started the first ballet outreach programme in the townships, which became known as Dance for All, now run by former Capab Ballet principal dancer Philip Boyd and, until her untimely death last year, his wife Phyllis Spira. Today, Cape Town City Ballet works closely with Jikeleza, the company's outreach project based in Hout Bay.

Tickets for Happy Birthday Ballet cost R220 throughout, while Balletscapes tickets cost from R95 to R150. Book through Computicket or call +27 (0) 21 421 7695.

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ABOUT DEBBIE HATHWAY

Debbie Hathway is an award-winning writer, with a special interest in luxury lifestyle (watches, jewellery, travel, property investment) and the arts.

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