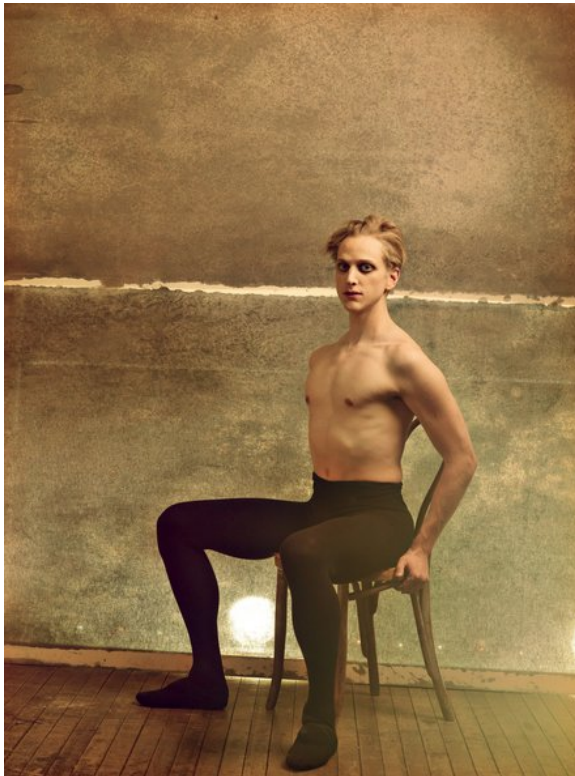


# Ballet Star David Hallberg Unites Five International Ballet Companies for One Night

APRIL 17, 2015 1:49 PM by [MARK GUIDUCCI](#)

Photographed by Annie Leibovitz, *Vogue*, April 2013



It turns out that bringing together members of five leading international ballet companies hardly requires introducing them to each other. According to ballet star **David Hallberg**, who should know, most of the world's best dancers already know each other. "Ballet is incestuous," he says, explaining this evening's sole performance of a program called "Legacy" at the David H. Koch theater, part of the Youth

America Grand Prix ballet competition. "This world is smaller than small."

It helps that at various points in his career Hallberg himself has danced with all five of the troupes who are in New York City this

week: the Australian Ballet, the Mariinsky Ballet, the Tokyo Ballet, and the Bolshoi Ballet, in addition to the American Ballet Theatre, where Hallberg began his career. One of the most sought-after male dancers of his generation, Hallberg is also the only American to have ever joined the Bolshoi, Russia's premier company, a move that inspired **Stephen Colbert** to characterize him as "Benedict Arnold, in slightly tighter pants." These days, Hallberg splits his time between the Bolshoi and ABT, which he still refers to as "home."

Hallberg will not be dancing this evening. He's been rehabilitating an injured ankle for more than a year, giving reason for some audiences to question whether "Legacy" might indicate an imminent retirement. But that's decidedly not the case, says Hallberg, who is still only 32 years old. "The title is certainly not referring to my finale," he affirms. Hallberg, a perfect gentleman, is too polite to celebrate himself, anyway. "The idea of [a dancer's] legacy is decided by the public. I would never presume to claim that for myself. I'm presenting these companies' legacies."

Nevertheless, each company performing tonight has left a major impression on Hallberg. "I've guested with many, many companies, but these ones have stuck with me," he says. In Tokyo, for instance, the South Dakota-native learned discipline. "Do the work. Do the job. In Japan, it's not okay to make excuses for yourself. If you do, you'll be an outsider." At the Mariinsky, he danced *Sleeping Beauty* with the company for which it was

originally choreographed. Australia, which has a dance scene Hallberg describes as “alive, but removed,” has provided Hallberg a much-needed escape on multiple occasions. At the Bolshoi, it took him at least six months to break in with the principals, who initially received him “stone-faced, but respectful.” He describes ABT’s Studio Company, a troupe comprised of teenage dancers being groomed for the *corps de ballet*, this way: “Where I started, where I was fresh, naïve, ambitious. Back then, I wanted to be the youngest principal, like, yesterday, but I had a ton of things to learn.”

For Hallberg, the programming of “Legacy” is as important as its casting. He describes the decision to show “Bhakti III,” a piece choreographed by Maurice Bejart with which the Tokyo Ballet will open tonight’s performance, for instance, as potentially controversial. “Bejart is almost never performed in New York City; critically, he just gets attacked here. But I don’t need this evening to be a huge critical success.” It’s just one of Hallberg’s recent choices that fall outside the neatly prescribed lines of the ballet norm (in addition to his affiliation with the Bolshoi, there is a collaboration with Performa, the New York City–based performance art initiative, scheduled for November). As Hallberg himself puts it, “This is not me as a dancer, but as a curator.”

“David Hallberg Presents: Legacy” will be performed tonight, Friday, April 17, at 7:00 p.m. at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center.