



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, June 22, 2023

Ballet dancers to delay performance in campaign to protect their future pay

The Australian Ballet's performance of *Identity* at the State Theatre in Melbourne on Friday night is set to be delayed as dancers take industrial action for the first time in more than two decades.

Dancers will "hold the curtain" for 15 minutes as part of a campaign to future proof their earnings in a new enterprise bargaining agreement.

The dancers, who are members of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, want to ensure that their future pay is not eroded by rising living costs.

MEAA Equity Director Michelle Rae said negotiations began in September 2022 but have stalled after management sought to strike out a financial safety net that ensures dancer pay keeps pace with inflation.

"Dancers regret that this action is necessary and the disruption it will cause to enjoyment of Friday night's performance, but they want the ballet audience to be aware of how management is trying to cut their future pay," she said.

"The Australian Ballet's management can avoid the delay to the beginning of the performance by returning to the negotiating table with an improved offer for our members."

At stake for ballet dancers is a cost of living clause in their enterprise agreement which ensures pay rises match the rate of inflation as a bare minimum.

This lifeline in the agreement has been particularly important given the current cost of living crisis and financial sacrifices dancers made to support the company during the COVID pandemic in 2020-21.

For part of 2020, dancers agreed to a wage cut of 50%, and they also agreed to forego the pay rise that they were due in 2021.

In addition to axing the cost of living clause, management has offered a pay rise of just 1% for the rest of this year, at a time when inflation is still close to 7%.

"Dancers have told management about how they are struggling with the rising cost of living," Ms Rae said. "Many had to dip into their savings during the pandemic and today they are living a hand to mouth existence. These dancers are the best in the country and have dedicated their lives to their art. They love working at The Australian Ballet – their hard work, skill and loyalty must be recognised by management.

"If management does not improve its offer, dancers risk their financial futures being jeopardised by the rate of inflation. We ask audiences to support the dancers by calling on The Australian Ballet's management and board retain a cost of living clause in their agreement."

Last month, 91% of dancers voted for a range of industrial actions, up to and including a full strike.

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