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PIONEER VALLEY BALLET PRESENTS *SLEEPING BEAUTY* AND *THE FIREBIRD* AT THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC APRIL 2-3

Double Bill featuring Music by Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, PVB's PVB's Professional Company, 200 Dancers from Area Colleges and Schools is a Premiere Production with Original Choreography by Thomas Vacanti and Maryanne Kodzis

EASTHAMPTON --- Pioneer Valley Ballet (PVB) artistic co-directors, Thomas Vacanti and Maryanne Kodzis, conclude their five-year cycle of original, full length ballets based on world-famous folk and fairy tales April 2-3 with *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Firebird* at the Academy of Music in Northampton.

The premiere production features the incomparable ballet scores of Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky, with performances by PVB's company of young professionals as well as almost 200 dancers from UMass, Amherst College, Smith College, Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter School and other high schools, middle and elementary schools throughout the region, from the Springfield area to Greenfield.

Since taking the helm at PVB in 2005, Vacanti and Kodzis have embarked on transforming the organization from a school of ballet into a professional company with a stimulating and challenging ballet training program for students of all ages, including adults. In addition to completely re-choreographing the company's popular annual full-scale production of *The Nutcracker*, they launched an ambitious program of introducing new ballets to be presented each spring. There were two goals: to provide area professional and student dancers with opportunities to engage in narrative ballets in which character and plot development played crucial roles, and to provide area audiences of all ages the chance to enjoy great stories told through exceptional music and dance. *Cinderella*, *Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* preceded this year's production of *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Firebird*.

Like the earlier productions, the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, set to the gorgeous, sweeping, and at times heart-breaking music of Tchaikovsky, is familiar to most audiences. In addition to Princess Aurora, danced by Cassidy Hall, of Florence, and Prince Florimund, danced by Roger Creel from Amherst College, the PVB production is full of forest nymphs and cherubs, dew drops and cupids as well as the wicked Carabosse, danced by Lucas Klinge, from Holyoke, and his minions. The excitement and dramatic power of *The Firebird*, being performed during the centennial celebration of Stravinsky's groundbreaking composition, may not be as well known, particularly by children. Nevertheless, this Russian folktale of a magical bird, a beautiful princess, and forces of good and evil is sure to grab and hold on to all those who see it. Marikate McConnell, from Holyoke, is the Firebird, Meghan Dyer, a member of PVB's professional company, is the lead princess and several talented, athletic dancers from the UMass dance department are riveting in the male roles.

Pioneer Valley Ballet's *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Firebird* will be performed Saturday, April 2 at 1pm and 4:30pm and Sunday, April 3 at 1pm. at the Academy of Music in Northampton. Tickets are available at www.pioneervalleyballet.org or by calling 413-527-6363, and also at the PVB studios in Eastworks in Easthampton (Saturdays 10:30am-2:30pm) or the Academy of Music box office (Tuesday-Friday 3pm-6pm).