

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET

PRESS RELEASE

30 August 2023

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET ANNOUNCES THE VIRTUAL STAGE

- A PIONEERING PROJECT FEATURING CONTENT DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH CANON AND RIVR, FUNDED BY BLOOMBERG PHILANTHROPIES' DIGITAL ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME
- EXPLORATIONS OF IMMERSIVE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INCLUDING AR, VR, MOTION CAPTURE AND 3D MAPPING
- THE VIRTUAL STAGE WAS LAUNCHED AT AN EVENT IN BIRMINGHAM TODAY AND THE PLATFORM IS NOW LIVE AT brb.org.uk/virtual-stage



IMAGES AND VIDEO AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

Birmingham Royal Ballet today announces **The Virtual Stage** - a tech focused project featuring content developed in collaboration with **Canon** and **RiVR**, funded by **Bloomberg Philanthropies** that explores the many different ways that AR, VR, 3D mapping and Motion Capture can be applied to BRB's productions in order to enhance experiences and interaction, increase accessibility, promote its productions worldwide and bring ballet to life in new ways.

With significant funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies' Digital Accelerator Programme, BRB has invested in equipment and staff training to allow its team to dive into the world of immersive technologies alongside partners Canon and RiVR.

Carlos Acosta, Director of Birmingham Royal Ballet said: *'I am absolutely thrilled that we have launched Birmingham Royal Ballet's Virtual Stage, becoming one of the first ballet companies in the world to embrace immersive technology and unlock the potential it holds. I am particularly excited about the possibilities this work has for reaching younger and new audiences across the globe, bringing them up close to classical ballet in a way that, until recently, has not been possible. Virtual Stage is another example of BRB's commitment to pushing boundaries and keeping ballet fresh and relevant for future generations in this digital age. Thank you to Bloomberg Philanthropies for making this happen as part of the Digital Accelerator Programme'*

Clive Booth Photographer, filmmaker and Canon Ambassador said: *'As a photographer and filmmaker, I'm always looking for new and meaningful ways to tell a story and now for the first time I can immerse an audience quite literally inside the narrative. Swan, Regan Hutsall shares her journey from a childhood dream to finally becoming a ballerina. This project brings dance to those who wouldn't normally be able to visit live theatre and is a wonderful example of technology used for good.'*

Mark Fensome European Product Professional at Canon said: *'For Canon, this was a perfect partnership and application of VR technology to provide a real benefit to the community. We were happy to bring our product and technical expertise to help support Clive and Tom in their VR journey. We were certainly pushing all the technologies and VR capabilities of the equipment to the maximum on this shoot. Personally, I could not have been happier to have been part of this amazing team that came together with real passion and absolute dedication, delivering on Clive's and Tom's vision to make a difference to individuals in the community, with the most beautiful and immersive VR experience that I have seen!'*

Tom Rogers, Creative Digital Producer at Birmingham Royal Ballet said: *'I am delighted to be launching our Virtual Stage programme, having the opportunity to truly innovate within the confines of classical ballet has been both exciting and terrifying in equal measure. Throughout this process, I have been humbled by the unwavering support this project has received from the entire BRB team. Their commitment and willingness to go above and beyond have been instrumental in creating this ground-breaking work. We are only just beginning to understand the potential immersive technology has to reach new audiences and provide a new kind of experience within dance that simply wasn't possible just a few years ago. To know that we are at the forefront of this technological revolution with a desire to make ballet accessible and relevant to people around the world is hugely inspiring for me and something I look forward to building upon in the future.'*

Brad Woodward Managing Director at RiVR said: *'RiVR is delighted to be part of this unique collaboration with The Birmingham Royal Ballet. This is a world first; a suite of immersive assets created in the arts, allowing users to 'step inside' Birmingham Royal Ballet.'*

Using the medium of virtual reality they can experience the background of the Organisation and feel what it is like to be behind the scenes. These experiences can be downloaded anywhere in the world bringing the excitement of performance and the experience of world-class practitioners to a new audience whilst creating a new previously unexplored revenue stream.'

By working with, and learning from, industry leaders Birmingham Royal Ballet aims to become pioneers in the application of immersive technology for the international dance sector. The Virtual Stage has already been having a marked impact on BRB's content creation and digital output, but BRB's new online platform The Virtual Stage takes things to a whole new level.

The areas of technology being explored in this partnership include **3D Mapping, Augmented** and **Virtual Reality** and **Motion Capture**.

A significant upgrade of the in house equipment, as well as specialist training of the BRB team, was needed to meet the requirements of 180 VR capture and the creation of ancillary content such as new dance films and documentaries that can be accessed by a broad range of audiences.

3D mapping and scanning of Nutcracker and Swan Lake with RiVR during the 22/23 season has created virtual and augmented reality content to be used for a variety of applications. Including virtual reality experiences and augmented reality content.

One of the ambitions is that The Virtual Stage programme will be key to BRB building relationships with other industry leading practitioners and continue to develop the high standards and production values of its digital storytelling and experiences.

Working closely with Clive Booth and Canon, a **Swan Lake VR** experience will tour to schools across the West Midlands, with other commercial opportunities currently being explored.

Freefall, BRB's company of dancers with learning disabilities, will also have its own VR experience and a VR Documentary, created by RiVR, of BRB's famous production of **The Nutcracker** will both be made available to specialist schools and through Birmingham Open Media's (BOM) network of neuro-divergent programs. Also housed on The Virtual Stage. Freefall VR will also be 'shown' at a gala event to mark 21 years of Freefall Dance Company.

The Virtual Stage will leap from screen to real world with **NutcrackAR** - an AR campaign taking the 12 days of Christmas to locations around the city. The trail will go live in November at a Nutcracker event at the Bullring. Each day of the countdown to opening night will highlight a different AR sight with each partner venue through a dedicated social media campaign. After opening night on the 17th November, we will host all objects in and around Hippodrome square for the duration of our run and the festive season. Content will be accessed through posters presented in various formats housing unique QR codes with AR content, descriptive text and voiceover plus links to ticketing information.

All of the content will go live on The Virtual Stage webpage today 30 August at the launch event. **brb.org.uk/virtual-stage**

Press contacts clair@breadandbutterpr.uk / 07957 272 534

Notes to Editors:

Birmingham Royal Ballet

Based at Birmingham Hippodrome, Birmingham Royal Ballet is the United Kingdom's leading touring ballet company performing a range of traditional, classical and heritage ballets as well as ground-breaking new works with the aim of encouraging choreographers of the future.

The Company's Director since January 2020 is the internationally renowned Carlos Acosta.

Birmingham Royal Ballet standardly performs at Birmingham Hippodrome for approximately ten weeks of the year and the remainder of the year tours throughout the United Kingdom and overseas. On average, the Company performs 175 shows a year nationally and internationally.

The Royal Ballet Sinfonia is Birmingham Royal Ballet's permanent orchestra, it is also Britain's busiest ballet orchestra. The Sinfonia also plays frequently for The Royal Ballet and other leading ballet companies, including performances with Paris Opéra Ballet, New York City Ballet, Australian Ballet, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, the Kirov, Norwegian Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and La Scala Ballet.

About Canon UK

Canon (UK) Ltd is the UK & Ireland marketing and sales operation for Canon Inc., employing around 1,400 people.

Founded in 1937 with the specific goal of making the best quality camera available to customers, Canon's tireless passion for the Power of Image has since extended its technology into many other markets and has established it as a world leader in both consumer and business imaging solutions. Its solutions comprise products, ranging from digital compact and SLR cameras, through broadcast lenses and portable X-ray machines, to multi-function and production printers, all supported by a range of value-added services.

Canon invests heavily in R&D to deliver the most innovative products and services to satisfy customers' creative needs. From amateur photographers to professional print companies, Canon enables each customer to realise their own passion for image.

Canon's corporate philosophy is Kyosei – 'living and working together for the common good'. In EMEA, Canon Europe pursues sustainable business growth, focusing on reducing its own environmental impact and supporting customers to reduce theirs using Canon's products, solutions and services. Canon has achieved global certification to ISO 14001, demonstrating a world-class environmental management standard.

For further information about Canon UK please visit <http://www.canon.co.uk/>

About RiVR

Reality in Virtual Reality Limited, or RiVR for short, was established in 2017 in Warwickshire, and is recognised globally for providing content and hardware virtual reality experiences. It is synonymous with helping Organisations to imbed immersive training in their environments to accelerate learning and the retention of knowledge.

About Bloomberg Philanthropies

Bloomberg Philanthropies invests in cities and countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organisation focuses on five key areas for creating lasting change: the Arts, Education, Environment, Government Innovation, and Public Health. Bloomberg

Philanthropies encompasses all of Michael R. Bloomberg's giving, including his foundation, corporate, and personal philanthropy as well as Bloomberg Associates, a pro bono consultancy that works in cities around the world.

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