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More than 1,500 Students, Educators to Kick off 15th Annual ‘The Nutcracker’ *Highmark & Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Present Dec. 2, Student Matinee Performance*

PITTSBURGH, PA (Nov. 7, 2016) – Kicking off the 15th anniversary run of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre’s “The Nutcracker,” more than 1,500 students and educators will fill the Benedum Center for the 11 a.m., Friday, Dec. 2, Student Matinee performance sponsored by Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield.

The performance is the first of 26 performances of Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr’s Pittsburgh-inspired interpretation, onstage through Dec. 27, at the Benedum. Just before the curtain rises, Neil Parham, director of community affairs for Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, will present a \$50,000 check to PBT Artistic Director Terrence S. Orr and Executive Director Harris Ferris.

“Highmark has been a longstanding supporter of the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre’s Student Matinee Program,” Parham said. “As the lead sponsor of this program, we want to make sure that our children have the resources they need to be healthy and succeed, and education is a great place to start. We are hopeful that this program will create opportunities for children who otherwise would not have access to the arts.”

The Highmark sponsorship makes it possible for PBT to offer discounted ticket prices for schools, professional development workshops for teachers and curriculum guidance for the classroom. During the Student Matinee performance, PBT will offer students a behind-the-scenes peek at production by raising the curtain during intermission so students can view set changes with commentary from Mr. Orr.

“Highmark’s support makes a strong statement about how important the arts are to a well-rounded education,” Orr said. “For many at our Student Matinee performances, this is their first-ever ballet experience. I don’t think we can underestimate the power of live performance to inspire ideas, aspirations and personal expression.”

PBT’s “The Nutcracker” has been a Pittsburgh tradition for 15 years. Set to Tchaikovsky’s sublime score, the story journeys through a moonlit snowscape to a whimsical Land of Enchantment, reminiscent of the historic amusement parks of Pittsburgh. More than 100 dancers bring to life iconic choreography from the waltz of the snowflakes to the Sugarplum Fairy pas de deux. PBT’s “The Nutcracker” laces the familiar story with references to Pittsburgh’s landmarks and history.

In addition to PBT’s 30 company dancers, more than 130 PBT School students, ages 7 and up, will perform throughout the run as toy soldiers, clowns and other fairy tale characters.

PBT will present 26 performances of “The Nutcracker,” Dec. 2-27, at the Benedum Center. Tickets start at \$28 and are available at www.pbt.org, 412-456-6666 or the Box Office at Theater Square.

About Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield

Highmark Inc., doing business as Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, serves approximately 3.3 million members through the company’s health care benefits business and hundreds of thousands of additional members through the Blue card program. It employs more than 4,200 people in western,

north central and northeastern Pennsylvania. Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies. For more information, visit www.highmark.com.

About Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre

One of the most exciting ballet companies in the United States, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre has built a legacy of excellence and innovation since its founding in 1969. Its eclectic style has been shaped by a series of distinguished artistic directors over four decades. In the 1980s, former New York City Ballet Principal Dancer Patricia Wilde led the Company to new heights and national acclaim with an emphasis on virtuosic technique and works by the modern masters, including her mentor, George Balanchine. Since 1997, the Company has flourished under the direction of Terrence S. Orr, former American Ballet Theatre ballet master and principal dancer. Mr. Orr has created a powerful repertoire, including fresh versions of traditional ballets, original works commissioned to contemporary American music and dramatic works that push the boundaries of ballet as an art form. Through more than 50 performances each year at home and on tour, PBT audiences discover the passion and joy of ballet.

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