

## **Opening Remarks: All Stravinsky, Pacific Northwest Ballet**

*Bert Valdman, Senior Vice President – Finance and Chief Financial Officer  
Puget Energy*

Good evening. I'm glad to be here to see tonight's performance and to speak with you for a few moments about our role as supporters of the arts. We're about to have dinner, so I'll keep my remarks short.

Puget Sound Energy is honored to sponsor this event, and I'm honored to be a part of this great ballet company.

Tonight we're going to experience the first time the Pacific Northwest Ballet has performed Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

When it premiered in Paris nearly a century ago, it was so controversial that it triggered a riot. The audience reacted wildly to the ballet's unusual score and pagan theme.

I don't expect we'll get that reaction tonight – we'll all just be happy to see a little springtime at this time of year.

We'll also see *Firebird*, Stravinsky's first score for ballet and one of his most memorable and dramatic. The ballet is adapted from a Russian folk tale of good versus evil.

Kent Stowall choreographed *Firebird*. Kent has choreographed more full-length ballets than any other American director of a major ballet company.

Kent and co-artistic director Francina Russell have guided and shaped this ballet's mission of excellence for 28 years. Both have given so much as dancers, educators and creative leaders. They are stepping down this year, but will leave a legacy of artistic quality as their lasting gift to this company.

After an exhaustive search, Peter Boal has been chosen as our next artistic director. Peter is a principal dancer with the New York City Ballet and will begin his new position with us in July. Kent, Francina and Peter have already been working together to map out the ballet's current season.

The third part of tonight's performance is *Apollo*, choreographed by George Balanchine. Stravinsky himself loved how Balanchine was able to interpret his music.

Leonardo da Vinci said that painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt. Ballet is like that, too. Some say Stravinsky is best experienced this way – not just by listening but by seeing his music set in motion by dance.

I can't say I'm very knowledgeable about ballet, but I love it because it's so accessible. A ballet performance reaches people on so many different levels.

I've always loved the arts, I've always spent time being involved in the arts. Most of all, it's important to me to support the arts.

It's easy to sit and listen; it's more difficult to put forth the effort to help what you care about grow. I think that effort is worthwhile. My way of helping is by using what I do during the day – financial planning – to help the ballet prosper.

This is a good city for the arts. Because as you know, Seattle appreciates culture. Until recently, I lived in New York. New York is known as a big cultural center. It's synonymous with art. Yet I find here in the Northwest that the arts are taken just as seriously. This city has a vibrant arts community, and I'm very glad to be a part of it.

When you support something, when you really care about it, you feel a sense of ownership in it. You belong to it, and it belongs to you. I think a lot of us feel that way about this ballet company.

It's like a big, beautiful house. It's wonderful, you want to own it and live in it. You see its value. And that's powerful, that feeling of ownership. When you own something, when you have a stake in something, you take responsibility for it. You identify with it. You protect it and you help it grow.

That's why, when you come here tonight, I can say "Welcome to my ballet." Why each of us can say "Welcome to my ballet." Because we care about it, we support it and nurture it.

And on a bigger scale, we can say "Welcome to my city." This is where we live, the place we call home. A community that values what's important. Woodrow Wilson said it best: "We are not here merely to make a living. We are here to enrich the world."

At Puget Sound Energy, we say, "This is my energy company." We say it, and we work hard so our customers, employees and shareholders will be able say it too. We believe in that strong sense of ownership that makes it possible to commit to the future. The future of this city, the future of the community, of the people and of our company.

We have just connected our millionth electric customer in this vibrant area. We have watched our service territory grow beyond the national average because so many want to live in this part of the world.

And we're very glad to be here, serving our customers and supporting what makes the area so unique and appealing – our great sense of community and dynamic arts culture.

I like ballet because it's so accessible. It's visual art and music together; the style can be contemporary or classical. It's storytelling. I'm looking forward to the stories we'll be shown tonight. And as the curtain comes up, each of us can say, "Welcome to my ballet."

Thank you.