



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, June 8, 2023

Australian Ballet dancers take industrial action in ongoing pay dispute

For the first time in more than a decade, dancers at Australia's premiere national dance company, the Australian Ballet, are taking protected industrial action in a bid to ensure future pay is not eroded by rising living costs.

In a recent protected action ballot overseen by the Fair Work Commission, 91 per cent of dancers voted in favour of taking industrial action following a breakdown of negotiations between their union, MEAA, and the Ballet's management for the company's next enterprise bargaining agreement.

They began industrial action last week with a social media campaign to highlight their concerns.

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.

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.

In its place, management has offered a pay rise of just 1% for the rest of this year.

The cost-of-living clause in the Australian Ballet EBA acts as a financial safety net by protecting future pay rises from being eroded by CPI increases. It ensures that as a bare minimum, dancers' pay will rise each year by the annual CPI.

Ms Rae said the union had collected a staggering number of stories from dancers that painted a bleak picture of their financial wellbeing.

"Throughout negotiations dancers at every level of the company have told management of their serious concerns about their financial insecurity, with many describing how they live from pay cheque to pay cheque," she said.

"Management still refuses to provide workable solutions which has disappointed dancers given they also reminded management that many dancers' savings had been wiped out after they had agreed to significant pay cuts and wage freezes during COVID to ensure the company's survival.

"Dancers at the Australian Ballet have voted in favour of protected industrial action as an absolute last resort.

"They have immense pride in their work and their company, but as management continues to reject their reasonable and modest claims, they have been left no other choice."

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Last week, dancers began the first phase of their protected industrial action by making the rare move to go public and ask industry colleagues and followers to show the Australian Ballet's management and board that the public supports dancers in their fight for financial security.

"At all times, but especially during a cost-of-living crisis, financial security is worth fighting for," the dancers' public statement says.

Dancers and management are set to meet again in the coming weeks to continue negotiations."

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