

# CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

April 17, 2024 12:32 PM

## Cleveland Ballet takes 'interim' tag off its CEO, who sees big progress at the organization

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Ames Photography

The Cleveland Ballet performing "Sleeping Beauty."

The interim leader of Cleveland Ballet, installed in December 2023 to stabilize the organization in a time of turmoil, now has the job on a permanent basis.

The ballet announced that its leadership transition is "formalized and secured" following the board of directors' appointment of Larry Goodman as president and CEO.

# CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS



Since taking over as interim CEO, Goodman "has been instrumental in securing a future for ballet in Cleveland and the region with a lot of hard work and support from his staff, dancers, the community, the board of directors and donors," said Dr. Michael Frank, chair of the ballet's board, in a statement.

He said Goodman "has focused on creating a roadmap for fiscal responsibility and artistic beauty that is the foundation for a thriving organization and along the way recommitted his passion for the organization with a desire to continue beyond his interim role."

Goodman's tenure as interim CEO started in the most difficult of circumstances.

In November 2023, then-president and CEO Michael Krasnyansky and then-artistic director Gladisa Guadalupe, who are married and co-founded this iteration of the ballet, were temporarily suspended in the wake of what the organization at the time termed "serious workplace allegations."

A later investigation by the board focused on three main categories: "systemic intimidation, nepotism and retaliation;" "alleged sexual misconduct by Krasnyansky" by at least "16 current and former company dancers and staff" who said Krasnyansky "improperly touched them or sexually harassed them;" and "financial irregularities" that included commingling of funds of the ballet and a separate dance school run by Guadalupe, and ballet funds "used for personal expenses of Mr. Krasnyansky or Ms. Guadalupe, including personal car insurance, travel, meals, and lodging."

Krasnyansky resigned on Nov. 21, 2023. Guadalupe was removed from her role on Jan. 10.

Timour Bourtasenkov, who was interim artistic director overseeing the ballet's most important production of the season, "The Nutcracker," in December, now is in that role on a permanent basis. Up next for him: preparing the ballet for its final production this season at Playhouse Square, "Sleeping Beauty," running April 25–27.

In a phone interview on Wednesday morning, April 17, Goodman said he began in the interim role with "a pretty steep learning curve." By spring, when working on the budget for fiscal 2025 (which begins Aug. 1) which was to include \$50,000 for a CEO search, he came to this realization: "I was energized and engaged by this job and ... helping ballet succeed in Cleveland, which is a pretty great goal."

# CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

Goodman said he approached board leadership and indicated he was willing to stay in the CEO role full-time if he was meeting expectations.

He was. As Frank, the board chair, put it, "Larry's leadership has been essential to aligning Cleveland Ballet with strategic and sustainable business goals and practices."

Goodman said that in the last few months, he sees "four significant areas" of progress for the ballet:

- **Artistic:** Goodman said Bourtasenkov, the artistic director, "has just upped everybody's game" and has "set high standards and expectations for excellence." The December production of "The Nutcracker," which Bourtasenkov oversaw, was a critical hit and "our most successful 'Nutcracker' ever," Goodman said, generating about \$1.35 million in ticket sales.
- **Cultural:** "Fixing the culture was as important, or more important, than fixing the operating model," Goodman said. He said changes in communicating to staff and artists that their input is valued has helped, as has the implementation of a monthly happy hour aimed at building camaraderie.
- **Financial/commercial:** Ticket sales for the upcoming "Sleeping Beauty" production already are around \$170,000, nearly double the level of the fall 2023 production, "Carmen." He said the organization is seeking savings in all aspects of its operations - one example: changing to a phone system that cut monthly costs for that service by more than half - and is "rightsizing" itself with a shorter season (32 weeks from 40 weeks) and a smaller company of dancers (26 for fall 2024 from 33 in fall 2023). He said the ballet's fiscal 2025 budget, \$2.8 million, will be in balance. The organization does plan to hire a development director, Goodman said.
- **Community:** It's important, Goodman said, for the ballet to do more to engage both the dedicated fan and the more casual ballet-goer. The ballet is setting up a young professionals group to drive more engagement in the latter category. A recent event at the restaurant Amba, Goodman noted, drew 65 guests.

When he joined the organization as interim CEO, "It was my responsibility to assess and implement changes to make the company as strong as possible moving forward," Goodman said. "I feel confident in the outstanding artistic and administrative team in place, and excited to see us grow together."

Goodman has a bachelor's degree in English literature from Bucknell University, a master's and Ph.D. in English language and literature from the University of Chicago, and a certificate in strategic management from Georgetown University. He has chaired the Ohio Association of Independent Schools and has been on the board of several independent schools. Goodman lives in Cleveland with his wife, Anne, who runs a consultancy focused on fundraising and capacity-building for nonprofits.

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