

Big step for dance in WA

■ Stephen Bevis

Nearly 20 years after the demise of the Chrissie Parrott Dance Company, WA is a step closer to having a new full-time contemporary dance company with the appointment of Queensland choreographer Raewyn Hill as its inaugural artistic director.

Hill is due in Perth today to take the helm of the Contemporary Dance Company of WA, which also is on the lookout for a more catchy name to match the excitement felt in dance circles at the prospect of the first such company in a generation.

The company will emerge from the ashes of the youth-focused Buzz Dance Theatre and STEPS Youth Dance Company once they wind up at the end of this year. The new dance flagship will extend its reach to adult audiences while retaining the education, performance and development roles.

State funding from both wound-up companies, about \$500,000, will be pooled. The board, led by former Perth International Arts Festival general manager Wendy Wise, expects sponsorships and other revenue to meet an annual budget of \$1 million.

The company, the first in the field since Parrott's company folded in 1996, has been six years in the making since the State Government initiated its Future Moves dance reforms in 2008.

A driving force has been the Future Moves co-ordinator and former Chrissie Parrott and WA Ballet dancer Margrete Helgeby, whose businessman husband Michael Chaney is founding supporter.

Hill was born in New Zealand in 1972, has been artistic director of Dancenorth for the past five years and made the Townsville company one of the most acclaimed in Australia. Her critically acclaimed works include *Black Crows*, *MASS* and *Fugue*, created for the Australian Ballet in 2012. She has presented work at the Cite Des Arts in Paris, the Baryshnikov Arts Centre and Juilliard School in New York, the

Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow, the Beijing Dance Academy and Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

Hill is expected to hold auditions early next year for a full-time ensemble of six dancers, supplemented project by project, and is looking to perform publicly late next year.

"Her experience will give us the artistic impetus we need to develop and launch the CDCWA's inaugural season in mid-2015," Ms Wise said.

She said Hill would develop an innovative and distinctive vision and curate, commission and create world-class works for a year-round program.

"Her appointment will inject choreographic innovation, enable collaboration with other choreographers and artistic companies and help to attract and retain the best contemporary dancers."

Hill was selected from an international field of more than 70 candidates.

"Her commitment to innovation and embracing change stood out during the national and international search," Ms Wise said. "Her ability to engage the sector and inspire new audiences will help the CDCWA enrich the community and promote a sense of connection to contemporary dance."

Ms Wise said Hill's reputation for developing innovative community engagement programs would be vital as CDCWA sought "to contribute to the national cultural environment, gain international recognition and provide exciting new employment opportunities for dancers".

Rafael Bonachela, artistic director at the Sydney Dance Company, said the appointment was a perfect springboard for a company with solid foundations and world-class aspirations.

"This is such a fantastic opportunity for WA. They should be both excited and proud. We look forward to building a strong relationship across the Nullarbor with them."

■ People are invited to suggest a name for the new company at: moveme.org.au.