



PALM DESERT festival choreography 2025

SATURDAY 7 PM NOVEMBER 8 | SUNDAY 4 PM NOVEMBER 9



SATURDAY FINALISTS

KELLIE ST. PIERRE is an interdisciplinary artist and educator who performed with DIAVOLO | Architecture in Motion for five seasons. She holds an MFA in Dance and Screendance from the University of Utah and was awarded Pacific Monticello Emerging Choreographer through Regional Dance America. Her choreography has been commissioned by Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, Ching Ching Wong with SALT Contemporary Dance, Ballet Conservatory of San Antonio, and Universities, including the University of Utah and Central Oklahoma. As a screendance artist, her films have been recognized at leading festivals, including Women in Dance, Cinedanza International, and Utah International Dance Film Festival.

FRANCO NIETO, a Princess Grace Award-winner, transformed from a young Pacific Northwest football player to an internationally acclaimed ballet artist. He has danced and taught in more than 10 countries, performing with icons such as Lady Gaga and Sir Elton John. As a principal dancer with NW Dance Project in Portland, Oregon, he toured globally and collaborated with renowned choreographers. Nieto received training at Vancouver School of Arts & Academics, Columbia Dance (with mentor Tracey Durbin), and earned his BFA in Jazz from Point Park University. He is now the founder and Artistic Director of Open Space Dance in Portland, OR.

CECILY KHUNER is a dancer and choreographer from Berkeley, California. She has performed with Terpsicorps Theatre of Dance and Julia Adam Dance and is currently a Leading Artist with Ballet Memphis, where she has danced since 2010. Cecily began choreographing as a young adult for West Edge Opera, most notably for *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*. She has since served as choreographer and movement coordinator for Pacific Northwest Opera and has created original works for Ballet Memphis, Ballet Arts Jackson, LRP Studios, and the Ballet Memphis School. Her newest work, *Suppression and Succession*, was recently commissioned and premiered by Ballet Memphis.

OMAR ROMÁN DE JESÚS, director of BOCA TUYA, is the grand prize winner of the Palm Desert Choreography Festival 2022. Since receiving that honor, he has earned the 2022 Princess Grace Award in Choreography, the 2023 *Dance Magazine* Harkness Promise Award, and residencies with Kaatsbaan Cultural Park and 92NY. His work has been commissioned by over 30 organizations including The Paul Taylor Dance Company, Charlotte Ballet, and Ballet Hispánico. Rooted in Puerto Rican rhythms and storytelling, Omar's choreography blends cultural heritage with cinematic theatricality, earning national and international acclaim for its emotional depth and innovative physical language.

OUTRUN THE BEAR is the creative partnership of choreographers **MEGAN DOHENY** and **ILYA NIKUROV**,

whose work blends physical intensity, playfulness, and striking emotional detail. Former dancers with Israel's renowned Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company (KCDC), they began creating together in 2015 and have presented their work at leading international festivals across Europe, Israel, the U.S., Japan, Singapore, and South Korea. Recent highlights include residencies with LA Dance Project and the Centre Chorégraphique James Carlès, along with commissions from the Korea National Contemporary Dance Company, KCDC, Open Space, Crush on Trash Foundation in Poland, and an upcoming commission with Backhausdance.

JA COLLECTIVE was founded by **JORDAN JOHNSON** and **AIDAN CARBERRY** at USC's Gloria Kaufman School of Dance and merges hip-hop, theater, and contemporary dance into a unique style. Known for shaping half•alive's tours, videos, and TV performances, they've also worked with Future, Frank Ocean, Paul McCartney, Brockhampton, Apple, Gucci, and others. They collaborate with artists like Taika Waititi and Olivia Wilde, and perform globally in Friends of Forsythe. In 2024, they presented at TED, premiered with SF Dance Works, and won top international choreography awards. Upcoming projects include BalletX, Club Guy & Roni, SF Dance Works, and their Japan debut in 2026.

SEAN AARON CARMON was a member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, performing major solo and lead roles from 2011-2018. On Broadway and national tours, he has performed in *La Cage aux Folles*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Lion King*, *Kinky Boots* and *Ragtime*. A celebrated choreographer, he has received awards from acclaimed institutions such as the Palm Desert Choreography Festival, YAGP, National Choreographer's Initiative and the Joffrey Ballet. He currently serves as Rehearsal Director for Dance Kaleidoscope in Indianapolis while continuing to choreograph and educate internationally.

NOELLE KAYSER is an award-winning choreographer and director based in Chicago. She is the inaugural resident choreographer of Open Space, a Whim W'him Choreographic Shindig winner, the 2025 BalletX Choreographic Fellow, and has received a commission from Ballet Collective to develop new choreography for 2026. She served as a guest Ballet Mistress at the Lyric Opera, was the founding rehearsal director for PARA.MAR Dance Theatre, and named one of *NewCity Magazines*, "The 50 People Who Really Perform for Chicago". Noelle's short dance film "dust" - produced by Open Space - has been screened in Germany, Sweden, Greece, Korea, Mexico, Italy, London, and throughout the U.S.

JOSHUA BLAKE CARTER is the Christel DeHaan Artistic Director of Dance Kaleidoscope in Indianapolis, IN. He spent 14 years with Giordano Dance Chicago as a dancer, choreographer, administrator, and Director of

Choreographer photos can be found on the front cover - just match up the number!

Giordano II. Joshua's choreography has been featured by companies such as DanceWorks Chicago, South Chicago Dance Theatre, Visceral Dance Chicago, Wonderbound, and more. His work for Paramount Theatre's production of *Newsies* earned him a Jeff Award nomination and a Regional Broadway World Award nomination for Best Choreography. Joshua also choreographed the closing number for *Sing! Featuring Elton John* in Chicago.

MORGAN WILLIAMS began his professional career with Dance Kaleidoscope and went on to dance with companies including Joel Hall & Dancers, Visceral Dance Chicago, and Eisenhower Dance Detroit. His commercial credits include SYTYCD, The Black Eyed Peas, & Fox TV show *Empire*. In 2019, he founded Water Street Dance Milwaukee. Named one of *Dance Magazine's* "25 to Watch", Morgan has choreographed for Madison Ballet, Milwaukee Ballet II, Texas Christian University, and Illinois State University, among others. "Morgan Williams' choreography is so unique and expressive that I would be happy if he choreographed every show in Milwaukee." (*Milwaukee Magazine*)

SUNDAY FINALISTS

ROCHELLE MAPES' diverse choreography has been presented on many stages, including professional concert venues, in festivals, colleges, studios, and high schools. She is honored to present work for the third time at PDCF. As a performer, Rochelle danced for BARE Dance Company under the direction of Mike Esperanza, RhetOracle Dance Company with Nate Hodges, musical artist Gladys Knight, and the FX show *Nip/Tuck*. Rochelle earned an MA and BFA in Dance from Cal State University, Long Beach and is an established dance educator. Teaching credits include Orange County School of the Arts and the American Ballet Theatre Gillespie School. Currently, Rochelle is the Director of Dance at Mater Dei High School.

AVREE WALKER is a graduate of Las Vegas Academy of the Arts and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and has represented the University's dance department across South Korea, Canada, Europe, and the United States. He toured with Contemporary West Dance Theatre, performing works by Alvin Ailey, Rennie Harris, Donald Byrd, and Hope Boykin. His regional theatre credits include *Matilda the Musical*, *The Wiz*, *The Color Purple*, and *The Prince of Egypt*. A veteran of *Jubilee!* and *Extravaganza*, he currently performs in *Vegas! The Show*. Walker has choreographed for The Ailey School, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, Deeply Rooted, and Collage Dance, and serves as Artistic Director of the City of Las Vegas Live Arts Institute.

[Sunday bios continue on the inside back cover.]

WELCOME!



Welcome to Palm Desert Choreography Festival! This year has been a personal epiphany.

As I watched nearly 160 submissions, I was deeply inspired by the breadth of talent, creativity and artistic excellence that this Festival now attracts. It reflects everything that I envisioned at its launch in 1998. Here we are in 2025, so successfully embraced by the dance community and now at a pivotal time when the field of dance must seek new pathways for funding and sustainability.

Saturday's line-up, featuring the work of choreographers who work with professional dancers, includes a number of powerful duets that fully express the range of the contemporary dance genre and encompass such varied creativity. While many choreographers are new to the Festival, a few are returning award-winning finalists. You may read about these artists on the inside front and back covers.

We are honored to present our Lifetime Achievement Award to David Parsons, a legend in the modern genre. David first came to my attention with his humorous but evocative choreography in *The Envelope*, though his visually stunning signature solo, *Caught*, has garnered even more critical acclaim. Please read about this brilliant choreographer, dancer, educator and founder of Parsons Dance Company on page 5.

On Sunday we present work that's bold and full of creativity by choreographers who work with pre-professional dancers, enriching the contemporary palette. The Sunday performance also features students from the East Valley Dance Project, an initiative we proudly offer to youth in the most underserved dance region of the Coachella Valley. Many students return to the project year after year which speaks of the value of the experience. Festival award-winning choreographer Jenny Backhaus and her dance company Backhausdance continue to contribute expertise to this worthy project. Please read more about it on page 6.

Other educational opportunities include multiple workshops for local and visiting dancers who wish to experience a finalist's approach to choreography and movement styles. These are offered at no cost thanks to our generous supporters. Check out the offerings on page 19.

As the weekend unfolds, I invite you to savor the creativity, community, and inspiration that surrounds us. On behalf of the entire team, thank you for supporting this Festival and the artists who bring it to life.

With gratitude,

Shea New
FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Please take our audience survey



THANK YOU

McCallum Theatre extends its sincere thanks and appreciation to the following individuals and organizations for their generosity in making this event possible.

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The Coeta and Donald Barker Foundation
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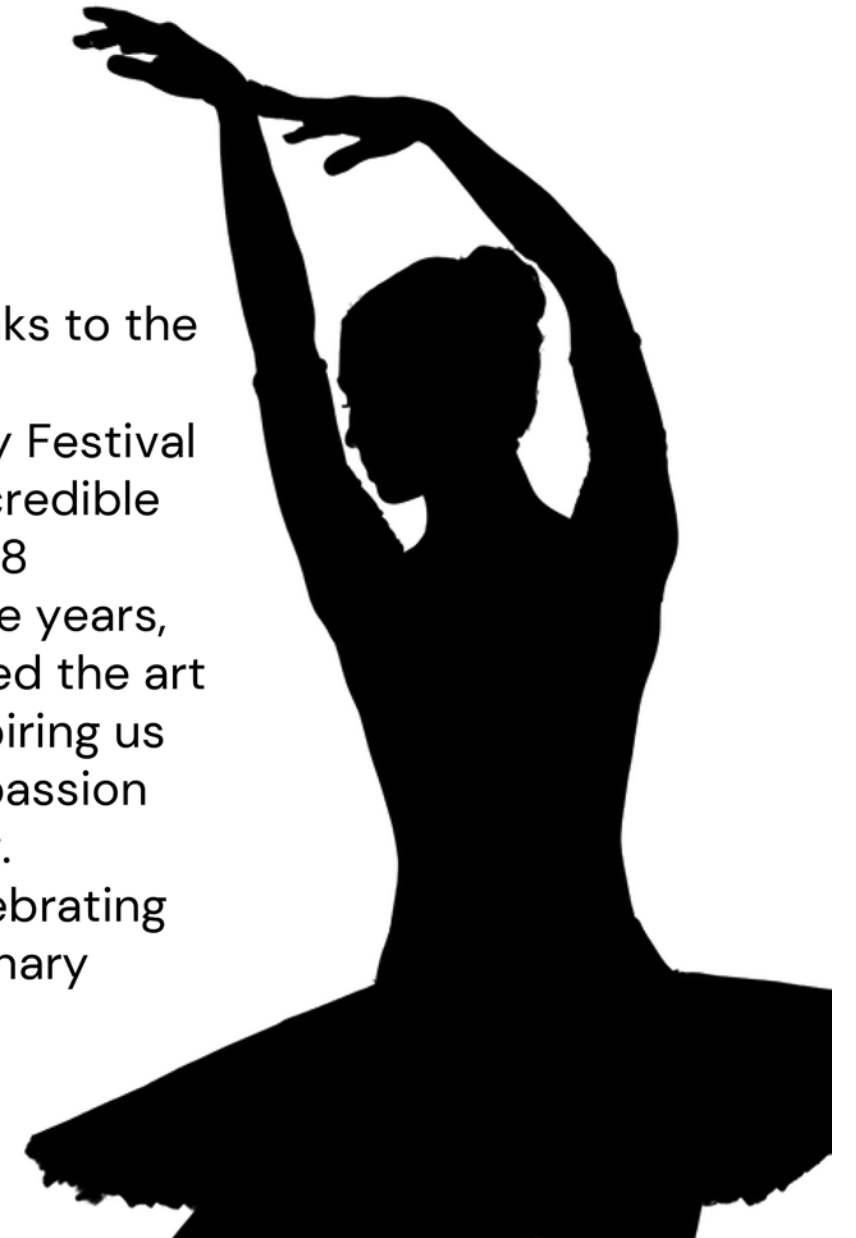


THE CITY OF PALM DESERT CONGRATULATES
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT

DAVID PARSONS

www.discoverpalmdesert.com

Heartfelt thanks to the Palm Desert Choreography Festival and all the incredible finalists. For 28 transformative years, you've elevated the art of dance, inspiring us all with your passion and creativity. Join us in celebrating this extraordinary journey!



Special thanks to College of the Desert for providing Festival workshop space.

Celebrating 28 Years
of Dance Excellence.
Honoring the artistry,
innovation and passion
that make this Festival
a true celebration
of movement.

Michael & Tamara Groat

2025 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

DAVID PARSONS



DAVID PARSONS has enjoyed a remarkable career as a director, choreographer, performer, master teacher and producer. Raised in Kansas City, Parsons made it to New York at the age of 17 when he received a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey School. After Ailey, he became an understudy with the Paul Taylor Dance Company and then joined the company as a principal dancer. He stayed for eight years. During summers, he toured with MOMIX; he appeared with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Mark Morris in the first White Oak tour; and he launched his choreographic career by setting work on the Taylor Company and on the National Ballet of Canada, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Batsheva Dance Company, and the Paris Opera Ballet.

After leaving the Taylor company, Parsons was a guest artist with New York City Ballet for four years before his artistic prowess led him to undertake such diverse projects as choreographing *Aida* at Arena di Verona and producing and co-choreographing *María de Buenos Aires* at the Skirball Center, as well as creating the choreography for *Fool's Fire*, a 1992 film directed by Julie Taymor. Perhaps one of his most thrilling assignments was choreographing and directing the dance elements for Times Square 2000, the 24-hour festivities in Times Square celebrating the turn of the Millennium. Since then, Parsons has participated in many projects, such as choreographing *A Knight's Tale*, a musical theater work directed by John Caird, who previously directed the Broadway and West End productions of *Les Misérables* and the London National Theatre's production of *Candide*. Staged at Tokyo's iconic Imperial Theatre in summer 2018, the work featured Japanese pop stars.

In addition to the more than 75 works that he has created for Parsons Dance, Parsons has received commissions from such companies as American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the American Dance Festival, Jacob's Pillow, the Spoleto Festival, and Het Muziektheater in Amsterdam, with his most recent from the Kansas City Ballet, who staged his work *A Play For Love* in May 2019.

Heralded by *The New York Times* as "one of the great movers of modern dance," Parsons has received many accolades throughout his career, including three Choreography Fellowship Grants from the National Endowment of the Arts; the American Choreography Award; the *Dance Magazine* Award; a Howard Gilman Fellowship, and the Dance Masters of America Annual Award. In May 2018, he received the Capezio Award, one of the most prestigious awards in dance.

“One of the great movers of modern dance.”

– *The New York Times*

Please take our audience survey



EAST VALLEY DANCE PROJECT



An important outreach project of Palm Desert Choreography Festival, East Valley Dance Project has served students in Thermal for the past 19 years. Originally a partnership with Desert Mirage High and Toro Canyon Middle Schools, the Project now also includes students from Coachella Valley High School. East Valley Dance Project engages youth in dancemaking under the artistic direction of multiple Festival award-winner Jennifer Backhaus. It includes residencies by professional dancers in high school dance classes, an audition workshop and eight intense rehearsals. The culmination is a performance of an original piece of choreography to close the Sunday performance of Palm Desert Choreography Festival. While participating in the process of crafting a dance, students develop an understanding of its potential as a form of expression, develop life skills, and gain access to McCallum Theatre. We are grateful to Jenny, Mo, Sammi, and Zachary of Backhausdance for their partnership and collaboration on this Project.

East Valley Dance Project wants to thank The Houston Family Foundation, Anderson Children's Foundation, and BIGHORN Cares for their generous sponsorship.



*Celebrating 28 Years of Dance and Innovation.
Congratulations to the choreographers, dancers,
and supporters who have made the Palm Desert
Choreography Festival a beacon of artistic
excellence. Here's to the next chapter of dance
at The McCallum!*

Jeff Elder & Karla Kjellin-Elder

28 Years of Inspiring Movement

A heartfelt congratulations
to the artists and visionaries who
bring dance to life on our stage.

Sally & Michael Schreter

28 Years Strong!

**Celebrating
the power of dance,
the joy of creativity,
and the magic of this
extraordinary festival.**

Bravo to all!



Susan and Mort La Pittus

PALM DESERT CHOREOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

Saturday

SATURDAY **NOVEMBER 8, 2025**

- \$10,000 **Grand Prize**
- \$5,000 **Second Place**
- \$2,500 **Ensemble Awards**
- \$1,500 **Duet Awards**

Opening Remarks by
KAJSA THURESSON-FRARY VICE PRESIDENT-EDUCATION

ACT ONE

THE RATE WE CHANGE

Choreographer **KELLIE ST. PIERRE**
 Company **Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company**
 Music by **Daniel Clifton**
 Lighting Design **Ken James**
 Costume Design **Melissa Younker**
 Dancers **Cody Brunelle-Potter, Megan McCarthy, Fausto Rivera, Sasha Rydlizky, Miche' Smith, Luke Dakota Zender**

A FADING MEMORY

Choreographer **CECILY KHUNER**
 Music **Lieberstraum** by Franz Liszt
 Lighting Design **Sheric Hull**
 Costume Design **Bruce Bui**
 Dancers **Iori Araya, Cayce Cavett**
Dancers courtesy of Ballet Memphis

LIKE THOSE PLAYGROUND KIDS AT MIDNIGHT

Choreographer **OMAR ROMÁN DE JESÚS**
 Company **Boca Tuya**
 Music **Original Composition** by Jesse Scheinin
 Lighting Design **Ben Rawson**
 Dancers **Omar Román de Jesús, Ian Spring**

EDGE OF THE SKY

Choreographer **JOSHUA BLAKE CARTER**
 Company **Dance Kaleidoscope**
 Music by **Max Cooper (Feat. James Yorkston), John Hopkins**
 Lighting Design **Laura E. Glover**
 Costume Design **Terri D. Moore**
 Dancers **Jonathan Cubides, Ryan Galloway, Ryan Jaffe, Courtney Jefferies, Marie Kuhns, Natalie Nagy, Morgan Ranney, Nathan Rommel, Julie Russel, Sarah Taylor, Manuel Valdes, Zay**

ANIMAL

Choreographer **NOELLE KAYSER**
 Company **nk + collaborators**
 Music **Abrazo 2020** by Suso Saiz, **Everything Turns Black to Blue & Recurring Afterimage** by Slow Attack Ensemble, **Aleph** by Empty Set
 Lighting Design **Drew Billiau**
 Costume Design **Amanda Gladu**
 Dancers **Jonah Delgado, Meredith Harrill**

UPSTAIRS NEIGHBOR

Choreographers **FRANCO NIETO**
 Company **Open Space Dance**
 Music **SAT, Boban Markovic Orkestar, Lascia ch'io pianga** from **Rinaldo (HVV7)** by George Frideric Handel, **Technohead** by Kiddie Mix
 Lighting/Costume Design **Franco Nieto**
 Dancers **Ariel Clarke, Bree Kostelnik**

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

PALACE

Choreographers **MEGAN DOHENY & ILYA NIKUROV**
 Company **Outrun The Bear**
 Music **Original Score** by Dylan Tedaldi, **Quartet for Strings and Piano in A Minor** by Gustav Mahler, **Ghost Train Digest** by The Books
 Lighting/Costume Design **Megan Doheny & Ilya Nikurov**
 Dancers **Megan Doheny, Ilya Nikurov**

GOODBYE

Choreographer **MORGAN A. WILLIAMS**
 Company **Water Street Dance Milwaukee**
 Music **Waves** by Anna Phoebe & Aisling Brouwer (AVAWAVES), **Cavalier** by James Vincent McMorrow
 Lighting Design **Issac Norman**
 Costume Design **Kate Alava**
 Dancers **Freddy Aguirre, Kate Alava, Abby Hermans, Hannah Hopkins, Sloan Logsdon, Teresa Noonan, Cassidy Quinn, Sheamar Williams-Robinson**

CASTLING THE UNKNOWN

Choreographers **AIDAN CARBERRY AND JORDAN JOHNSON**
 Company **JA Collective**
 Music **Eric Pham**
 Lighting Design **Aidan Carberry**
 Dancers **Aidan Carberry, Jordan Johnson**

hiFi

Choreographer **SEAN AARON CARMON**
 Company **Dance Kaleidoscope**
 Music **Hoop-de-Do, Magic Moments, Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes** by Perry Como; **So Long, Stay Well** by Rock Hudson
 Lighting Design **Laura E. Glover**
 Costume Design **Terri D. Moore**
 Dancers **Jonathan Cubides, Ryan Galloway, Ryan Jaffe, Courtney Jefferies, Marie Kuhns, Natalie Nagy, Morgan Ranney, Nathan Rommel, Julie Russel, Sarah Taylor, Manuel Valdes, Zay**

2025 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD presentation

DAVID PARSONS Parsons Dance

Presented by **Margaret Selby of Selby Artists Management**
 Tribute video courtesy of **Suellen Richmond and Parsons Dance**
 Statue – *Standing Lovers* by Colin Webster Watson

AWARD PRESENTATION

FINALIST PLACEMENT AWARDS
 SECOND PLACE AWARD
 GRAND PRIZE AWARD

Presented by **Kajsa Thuresson-Frary, Vice President - Education; Shea New, Festival Founder/Artistic Director; and Joe Pradetto, Council Member, City of Palm Desert**

JUDGES

Joseph Carman
 Daniel Ezralow
 Molly Lynch
 Kitty McNamee
 Margaret Selby



Donald McKayle, 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient presenting the Lifetime Achievement Award to Carmen de Lavallade in 2004.

Please take our audience survey



PALM DESERT CHOREOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

Sunday

SUNDAY **NOVEMBER 9, 2025**

- \$3,000 **Grand Prize**
- \$1,500 **Second Place**
- \$1,250 **Ensemble Awards**
- \$750 **Duet Awards**

Opening Remarks by
KAJSA THURESSON-FRARY VICE PRESIDENT-EDUCATION

WHERE THE LIGHT MEETS

Choreographer **AVREE WALKER**
Company **Las Vegas Academy of the Arts**
Music *Come Out, Music for 18 musicians section II* by Steve Reich
Dancers **Zachery Chan, Arilyn Esquivel, Reese Fayne, Caitlyn Groff, Shaye Heitner, Ruth Langkusch, Brynn Liening, Chanise Murphy, Vincent Pollock, Jayda Preston, Kadence Roberts, Reagan Robinson, Aubree Santillan-Rocha, Tiara Sherman, Alissa Maraj Sweeney, Ace Tadeo, Layla Tart, Isabella Wildfong**

LOVE LOST

Choreographer **RILEY HART**
Company **Aztec Arts Academy**
Music *Love Lost* by Mac Miller, The Temper Trap
Lighting Design **Blair Dodson**
Costume Design **Riley Hart**
Dancers **Amaya Dsouza, Elle Walker**

DARLING AVIARY

Choreographer **JACOB GUTIERREZ-MONTOYA**
Company **Hawkins School of Performing Arts**
Music *String Quartet in F Major, M.35: 2 Assez vif. Très rythmé* by Ravel
Lighting/Costume Design **Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya**
Dancers **Eryka Batayola, Autumn Co, Landon Coady, Shabnam Dehqanzada, Tatum Frey, Gracie Gamez, Isabelle Gerondakis, Isabella King, Haley LaGreca, Lily Laredo, Audrey Lewin, Emily Na, Anna Paredes, Alexis Powell, Lexi Schnell, Lauren Verceles**

FIT IN OR FIT OUT

Choreographer **HANNAH MILLAR**
Company **Imprints Dance Company**
Music *ever do you want* by altrice
Dancers **Lexi Amundarain, Shawnee Avila, Aminah Carter, Halie Donabedian, Julia Gonzalez, Jordyn Maxfield, Lexi Maxfield, Nao Yamashita**

SMUSH

Choreographer **JAYDE SPIEGEL**
Company **Jayde Spiegel**
Music *La Fantasia, River's End* by Gather;
hum+sec.s by SHOMOMOSE×mitsuru shimizu
Lighting Design **Baylee Ferrerra**
Costume Design **Jordyn Apostolache**
Dancers **Eva Anderson, Lauren Kay, Mady Leier, Trinity Massey, Alyssa Mena, Elisa Murray, Sierra Tanji, Eva Watson**

FOLSOM PRISON BLUES

Choreographer **ASHTON TITUS**
Music *Folsom Prison Blues* by Johnny Cash
Lighting Design **Camille Roberts**
Costume Design **Ashton Titus & Dancers**
Dancers **Lauren Bramlett, David Burn, Bianca Capanna, Macy Deppe, Leah Jo Feldman, Cailey Fono, Mia Harris, Elle Holland, Mia McGarity, Cole Neville**

THREAD LIGHTLY

Choreographers **MADISON LUCAS & ELLA MELIDEO**
Music **Original Composition** by Gabriel Jon Griswold
Lighting Design **Madison Lucas & Ella Melideo**
Dancers **Madison Lucas, Ella Melideo**

EL CAMINO AUN NO ESCRITO

Choreographer **MARTIN ORTIZ TAPIA**
Music *Muchachita and Silbando Mambo* by Pérez Prado,
Adiós by Mambo Mambo Mambo
Lighting Design **Kam Hobbs**
Costume Design **Maria E. Ortiz**
Dancers **AbbeyRose Bermejo, Fiona Doyle, Ryan Rosas, Ava Schnell, Hunter Thomas, Byron Vaca, Sasha Zitser**

PRESS AGAINST THE GLASS

Choreographer **MELISSA BOBICK**
Company **University of Utah**
Music *String Quartet No. 3 "The Way of 1000 and One Comet": II. Allegro Gibigianna* by Ezio Bosso
Lighting Design **Original lighting** by Cole Adams
Costume Design **Rachel Hayes**
Dancers **Caitlyn Camchong, Kylie Chu, Evelyn Dodge, Grace Friedley, Tori Gilbert, Jasmine Parente, Hayley Winslow, Alison Yang**
Dancers courtesy of the University of Utah

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

WANING MOON

Choreographer **GILLMER DURAN**
Company **Ballet Arizona Studio Company**
Music *Symphonie Fantastique Op 14. II. A Ball. Allegro non troppo.* by Hector Berlioz
Lighting Design **Michael Panvini**
Costume Design **Jules Dancewear & Ballet Arizona**
Dancers **Abigail Carpenter, Emma Taylor, BriAnna Binzak, Dasha Dercach, Emerson Butler, Gabriella Agnew-Huertas, Julianna Utzinger, Laurel Ho, Nahomi Alafita, Noah Finnigan**
Dancers courtesy of Ballet Arizona

CONCESSIONS

Choreographer **MICHELLE SHEAR**
Company **Mt. SAC Repertory Dance Company**
Music *Bolero* by Maurice Ravel
Lighting Design **Nolan Catingub**
Costume Design **Michelle Shear**
Set Design **Ethan Shear**
Dancers **Roberto Morales, Dylan Tillman**

ONE:MANY / MANY:ONE

Choreographer **ROCHELLE MAPES**
Company **Mater Dei Dance Conservatory**
Music *Counting Atomic* by Ryan Lott
Lighting Design **Shawn Fidler**
Costume Design **Rochelle Mapes**
Dancers **Tayla Banayan, Jasmine Chua, Bella Dinglasan, Jeanelle Fajardo, Madeline Lim, Morgan McCormick, Genesis Quiette, Sheridan Stone, Lily Turk, Alexsa Wilde**

DO NOT TEMPT ME NEEDLESSLY

Choreographer **ALEX SCHOOLING**
Music *Elegy: Do Not Tempt Me Needlessly* by Mikhail Glinka,
Clara Rockmore, and *Nadia Reisenberg; All the Days I've Missed You* by Colin Stetson
Lighting Design **Courtney DiBello**
Dancers **John Myongil Aguirre, Paige Russell**
Dancers courtesy of the Oklahoma City Ballet

HIDE AND SEEK

Choreographer **LIAN LONG XUAN**
Music *Hide and Seek* by Imogen Heap
Lighting/Costume Design **Lian Long Xuan**
Dancers **Jaremy Bady, Avis Chang, Venrick James, Lian Long Xuan, Alicia Mears, Allison Smith**

LAW OF THE JUNGLE

Choreographer **ZACHARY GROENEWOLD**
Company **Orange Coast College**
Music **Glenn Morrison**
Lighting Design **Quintin Powell**
Dancers **Niko Black, Amelia Gonzalez, Bruno Hernandez, Vanessa Jensen, James Lithuge, Emma Manzanares, Miyabi Matsushita, Yun Yu Naing, May Me Yone Shwe**

FESTIVAL OUTREACH PRESENTATION

EAST VALLEY DANCE PROJECT

FORWARD, IN TANDEM

Artistic Director **JENNIFER BACKHAUS**

Choreography **JENNIFER BACKHAUS,
MO GOODFELLOW, SAMMI WAUGH
& ZACHARY MEDINA**

Company **East Valley Dance Project**

Music **Early in the Park and Children** by Hauschka

Media Design/Editing **Adrien Padilla**

DANCERS

Coachella Valley High School

**Anabel Sanchez, Arlyn Ponce, Audrey Ramos, Avery Contreras,
Carolina Cota, Dayanara Saabedra, Delaila Nuñez, Dulce Hernandez,
Eduardo Mendoza, Emily Torres, Emily Jara, Fernando Hernandez,
Isabella Lopez, Itaty Haro, Janeth Flores, Jay Arreola, Julissa Luna,
Kain Gil, Kimberly Garcia, Kimberly Aguilera-Andrade, Lauren Salado,
Michelle Ramirez, Natalie Diaz Valadez, Nevina Espinoza,
Nicole Linares, Rey Ramirez, Sophia Arreola, Stephanie Rodriguez,
Tiffany Mendoza, Yaretzi Meza**

Desert Mirage High School

**Alexa Magaña, Allisson Galarza, Amairany Ortiz, America Torres,
Analia Urias, Ashley Castañeda, Brisa Mora, Carolina Guzman,
Channel Hernandez Torres, Daisy Martinez, Emely Hernandez,
Gretel Rubio, Jackie Lopez Pacheco, Jackie Derueda-Felix,
Janessa Chavez, Lucia Perez, Magdalena Mier, Maria Quintana,
Nat Zavala, Paulina Suárez, Perla Mojica Chávez, Sandra Hernandez,
Sheyla Holguin, Victoria Sandoval, Yasmen Perez, Yunnuen Orozco**

AWARD PRESENTATION

FINALIST PLACEMENT AWARDS

SECOND PLACE AWARD

GRAND PRIZE AWARD

Presented by **Kajsa Thuresson-Frery, Vice President - Education;
Shea New, Festival Founder/Artistic Director; and Jan Harnik,
Mayor, City of Palm Desert**

JUDGES

Jennifer Backhaus

Daniel Ezralow

Julenda Satow Freeman

Molly Lynch

Kitty McNamee

**BRAVO to McCallum for
continuing to create an
environment for DANCE.**

JAMES WALTER 'JIM' NEUMAN

Over the past 28 years
the Festival has...

- > presented the works of **807** choreographers
- > presented **807** pieces of choreography
- > awarded **\$909,675** to deserving choreographers
- > served **20,476** workshop/residency participants
- > honored **26** Lifetime Achievement Award recipients
- > served **47,594** audience members

CONGRATULATIONS!

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENTS

1998 Marc Breaux

1999 Grover Dale

2000 Lula Washington

2001 Joe Tremaine

2002 George Chakiris

2003 Dee Dee Wood

2004 Carmen de Lavallade

2005 Donald McKayle

2006 Rudy Perez

2007 Glen Tetley

2008 Alan Johnson

2009 Nigel Lythgoe

2010 Eugene Loring

2011 Julie McDonald

2012 Colleen Neary
Thordal Christensen

2013 Jacques d'Amboise

2014 Suzanne Farrell

2015 Daniel Ezralow

2016 Lois Greenfield

2017 Savion Glover

2018 Gloria Kaufman

2019 Rennie Harris

2022 Toni Basil

2023 Helgi Tomasson

2024 Nappytabs

2025 David Parsons

GRAND PRIZE WINNERS (SATURDAY)

1998 *Mambo Mania* – Javier Velasco/San Diego Ballet & *Samael Loves Lilith* – Brian Fretté/Hit & Run Productions

1999 *Bulb* – Bubba Carr/Subliminal Movements • **2000** *Common Ground* – Carley Conder/Scottsdale CC

2001 *Subway* – Frit and Frat Fuller/Kin Dance • **2002** *Le Coeur Illuminé* – Marie de la Palme

2003 *Sliding Down* – Garrett Ammon/Ballet Memphis • **2004** *Flicker and Shift* – Laura Gorenstein Miller/Helios Dance Theater

2005 *Duet* – Viktor Kabaniaev • **2006** *Their Song* – Greg Sample/CDA Las Vegas

2007 *Falling Petals* – Ting-Ting Chang/Dream Dance Contemporary Arts • **2008** *A Ritual Dynamic* – Jon Lehrer/LehrerDance

2009 *Forces* – Jamel Gaines/Creative Outlet Dance Theatre of Brooklyn • **2010** *Fragments* – Olivier Wevers/Whim W'Him

2011 *Monster* – Olivier Wevers/Whim W'Him • **2012** *Two Against One* – Lauren Edson/Boise Dance Co-op

2013 *Sally Meets Stu* – Danielle Agami/Ate9 Dance Company • **2014** *Mouth to Mouth* – Danielle Agami/Ate9 Dance Company

2015 *Critics of the Morning Song* – Joshua L. Peugh/Dark Circles Contemporary Dance

2016 *Persistence of Memory* – Ting-Ting Chang/T.T.C Dance & *Mine* – Laura Karlin/Invertigo Dance Theatre

2017 *Black & White* – Manuel Vignoulle/M/motions • **2018** *Earth* – Manuel Vignoulle/M/motions

2019 *hi are you like me* – Dolly Sfeir • **2022** *Los Perros Del Barrio Colosal* – Omar Roman De Jesus/Boca Tuya

2023 *Te odiero* – Candelaria Antelo & Arthur Bernard-Bazin/HURyCAN

2024 *Blooming Flowers and the Full Moon* – Natasha Adorlee/Concept 04

GRAND PRIZE WINNERS (SUNDAY)

1998 *Toccata Fugue in D Minor* – Penny & Candice Huffor/Renee Fox • **1999** *Eternal Scream* – Sharon Collins-Heads

2000 *MisBehavin'* – Melissa Strom & Charles Brown • **2001** *Chris' Dance* – Marie Hoffman

2002 *Shouldn't Be Here* – Terry Schulke/Mandy Rogers • **2003** *Angels of Auschwitz* – Amy Bates Nakamura

2004 *Toccata and Fugue* – Olga Ioda • **2005** *Fire* – Jen Hechtle Bradford • **2006** *The Race* – Bret Easterling

2007 *Bach Street Prelude* – Conny Mathot • **2008** *Table for Two* – Marie Hoffman

2009 *Amongst the Hedges* – Will Johnston/Jenna Otter • **2010** *Nevermore* – Amy Bates Nakamura

2011 *Framed* – Elke Calvert • **2012** *Les Adieux* – Conny Mathot • **2013** *Concentric Harmonies* – Francisco Gella

2014 *The Wolves* – Dana Metz • **2015** *Juliet* – Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya & *Lesson #35* – Terry Schulke/Mandy Rogers

2016 *Heroes* – Crystal & David Zibalese • **2017** *Glory* – Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya

2018 *As The Smoke Seeps In* – McKell Lemon

2019 *When The Dark Moves* – Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya/Hawkins School of Performing Arts

2022 *Unravel* – Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya/Hawkins School of Performing Arts

2023 *My Way* – Keithan Haver/Broadway Dance Theatre • **2024** *LOVE* – Nicole Berger/Orange County School of the Arts

JUDGES

JENNIFER BACKHAUS is the Founder and Artistic Director of Backhausdance, a critically acclaimed contemporary dance company based in Orange County. She is also a dedicated member of the dance faculty at Chapman University. A lifelong learner, Jennifer holds a BFA in Communications and Dance from Chapman University and an MFA in Choreography from Hollins University. Since the inception of Backhausdance, Jennifer has been committed to choreographing and producing contemporary concert dance. She has also designed and implemented an extensive dance education and performance program for all ages. Her choreography is infused with humor, athleticism, and theatricality. Under her artistic leadership, Backhausdance has received numerous awards and honors, including being named Outstanding Arts Organization by Arts Orange County in 2012. Jennifer was recognized by Chapman University with the Distinguished Alumni Award in 2017 and Alumni of the Year in 2007. This year marks her nineteenth year creating work for local dancers in McCallum's Palm Desert Choreography Festival through the East Valley Dance Project.

JOSEPH CARMAN is a former soloist with the Joffrey Ballet, Dutch National Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre where he danced ballets by George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, Antony Tudor, Twyla Tharp, Gerald Arpino, Robert Joffrey, Glen Tetley, Hans van Manen, Kurt Jooss, and many others. A graduate of New School University with a degree in journalism, he has been a contributing editor for *Dance Magazine* for 20 years. He has also written on dance and the performing arts for numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Playbill*, *The Village Voice*, *The Advocate*, *Pointe*, *Dance Studio Life*, *Stagebill*, and *The Forward*. Additionally, he has written program notes for New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Houston Ballet, the Nantucket Atheneum Dance Festival, and Segerstrom Center for the Arts. In 2004, his book *Round About the Ballet* was published. He has served as a member of the *Dance Magazine* Award committee and now lives permanently in Palm Springs.

DANIEL EZRALOW is an award-winning director, choreographer, writer, and performer whose illustrious career spans theater, film, music, and television. *The Huffington Post* praised his production of *PEARL* at Lincoln Center as "a stunning collaborative spectacle." He has created works for Teatro alla Scala, Cirque du Soleil's LOVE, the Sochi Olympics, The Paris Opera, and Batsheva Dance Company. On Broadway, he choreographed *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, and in film *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, *Across the Universe*, and Francis Ford Coppola's recent *Megalopolis*. Ezralow has collaborated with artists Issey Miyake, Josh Groban, Andrea Bocelli, and Katy Perry, to name a few. He is the Founder and Artistic Director of Ezralow Dance, known for its explosive physicality and playful humor. He stage-directed and choreographed the opening and closing of World Expo Dubai 2020, earning an LA Choreography Award nomination. In 2015, Ezralow received Palm Desert Choreography Festival's Lifetime Achievement Award.

JULENDA SATOW FREEMAN (JULIE) is the chair of the Dance Department at Mt. San Jacinto College. She holds an MFA in Dance from the University of California, Riverside, and was a recipient of the Chancellor's Distinguished Fellowship Award, a two-time fellow in the Gluck Program of the Arts, a Brithinee Fellow at the Culver Center of the Arts, and, recently, an honoree of the CALIFA: RESToring the Source retreat sponsored by Dancing Earth. Julie has performed extensively with Stephanie Gilliland and Dancers and Groundwork, and

performance highlights include dancing at the Japan American Theatre as part of the Olympic Arts Festival and performing solo work at the Edinburgh Arts Festival Fringe in Scotland. She has shared her choreographic work at Highways Performance Space, the Electric Lodge, Trolley Dances Riverside, between the tables, Dance on the Edge Festival, Front and Main Festival, and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In March 2022, Julie was the inaugural artist of the Indigenous Dance Residency hosted by the Palm Springs International Dance Festival. The residency culminated in an evening of Julie's choreography that focused on her Indigenous family and the impacts of colonization – including forced relocation and residential boarding schools – and underscored the resilience, tenacity, and persistence of Indigenous peoples.

MOLLY LYNCH is an award-winning choreographer and artistic director, with over thirty-five years of experience creating, producing, and presenting dance. She is currently a Professor in the Dance Department at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at UC Irvine. Ms. Lynch is the Founder and Artistic Director of the National Choreographers Initiative. She was the Artistic Director of Ballet Pacifica from 1988-2003. During her tenure, she established Ballet Pacifica as Orange County's leading professional dance company and one of the area's top arts organizations. She has choreographed ballets for Sacramento Ballet, Ballet Pacifica, Festival Ballet Theatre, Nashville Ballet, BalletMet (Columbus, OH), Dance Collage (Hermosillo, Mexico), Academies of Ballet in Philippines (Manila), and Singapore Dance Theatre. Ms. Lynch was the recipient of the 2001 Choo San Goh Award for Choreography, 2007 Outstanding Arts Organization Award for her National Choreographers Initiative from Arts Orange County, and she was honored with the Irvine Barclay Theatre's prestigious Jade Award for her extraordinary leadership and creativity in 2008. In 2009 and 2014, she received the CTSA Dean's Award for Teaching Excellence from the Division of Undergraduate Education. In 2017, she received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Arts Visionary from Arts Orange County and in October received the 2023 Distinguished Alumni Award for the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at UC Irvine.

KITTY MCNAMEE is an artist, a creator and most importantly a collaborator. Her early years in LA were spent honing her craft as Artistic Director of Hysterica Dance Co., a consistently prolific and creative collective that redefined dance in Los Angeles. Her unique approach to direction and choreography was declared by *Dance Magazine* to possess "an outsize talent for that most elusive gift, originality." Kitty's dance films have screened at over 50 festivals worldwide. She currently has several dance-centric documentary projects in development. Coming to dance late, Kitty's deep appreciation and hunger for engagement has kept her creative practice at the forefront of her life ever since. She is deeply committed to the LA dance community, serving as mentor and advocate for the next generation of dancers and choreographers. Kitty has a long and fruitful relationship with the LA Philharmonic, where she has choreographed, directed, and developed new productions including Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Wing on Wing*, *Rite of Spring*, *The Firebird*, *Bolero* and many more. Opera work includes *Marriage of Figaro*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *La Traviata*, *Don Carlo*, *La Rondine*, *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Tales of Hoffman* for LA Opera, San Francisco Opera, San Diego Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Theater credits include Secret Cinema's groundbreaking live performances with Laura Marling in London, the World Premiere of *Colony Collapse* (commissioned by Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Sense and Sensibility* (South Coast Rep), *The Fantasticks* (Pasadena Playhouse),

Midsummer Night's Dream (LA Phil/Disney Hall), *Man of LaMancha* (Reprise!) and *Sondheim's 75th* (Hollywood Bowl). She moves effortlessly between her work for the stage and campaigns for Target, Adobe MAX, Zimmerman, Mercedes Benz, Grey Ant and Uniglo.

MARGARET SELBY

With a skill for cultivating exceptional talent, Selby manages the careers of leading choreographers, dance companies and theatrical events, supporting performance and touring around the world. Drawing upon her lifelong passion for dance, theater, music and film, in-depth working knowledge of creative development and performance, Selby has a keen eye on today's performance landscape and the care needed to thrive during challenging times. Margaret is a member of APAP (Association of Performing Arts Professionals), ISPA (International Society for the Performing Arts), Midwest Arts XPO, Western Arts Alliance, Dance USA and the Broadway League. She is currently involved in producing a project with the David Bowie estate and continues to work with *Fela!* after two years on Broadway and touring internationally. As a filmmaker, Margaret produced and directed *Everybody Dance Now*, which won a Peabody Award and a Bronze Rose at the Rose d'Or. Her special, *Two by Dove*, for Dance in America won two Emmy Awards (Outstanding Cultural Program and Outstanding Individual Achievement in Choreography). Selby produced the first hip hop musical on Broadway, *Jam on the Groove* with the Rock Steady Crew, which was nominated for a Drama Desk Award and received rave reviews.

SUBMISSIONS SCREENING PANEL

Stephen Agisilaou
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Laura Bellows
Aaliyah Cota-Griffin
Gail DeZon
John Ferrare
Olga Morales
Shea New
April Rhodes
Heaven Rodriguez
Sue Roginski
Kajsa Thuresson-Frary

PROGRAM DESIGN Mark Duebner Design

INTRODUCTORY SLIDES VanSant Studios

PHOTOGRAPHY Jingzi Zhao

Coeta Barker offered her support when Shea New had an idea for a choreography festival.

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**PALM DESERT
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 SAT, NOVEMBER 8 • 7PM
 SUN, NOVEMBER 9 • 4PM



MOMIX: ALICE
 Down the
 Rabbit Hole
 FRI, DECEMBER 5 • 8PM



**TANGO
 AFTER DARK**
 TUE, JANUARY 27 • 7PM



COMPAGNIE HERVÉ KOUBI
 SOL INVICTUS
 SUN, FEBRUARY 1 • 3PM



BODYTRAFFIC
 THU, APRIL 2 • 7PM



PARSONS DANCE
 WED, APRIL 15 • 7PM



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McCALLUM THEATRE PRESENTS
PALM DESERT festival
choreography
 2025



WORKSHOPS WITH FESTIVAL FINALISTS **FREE!**



ZACHARY GROENEWOLD
 Saturday Nov 1 Noon -1:30pm
 Hip Hop

This workshop will challenge every dancer with dynamic movement combinations that focus on rhythm and musicality, encouraging individual style while incorporating the foundations of Hip Hop. Zachary obtained his Master's degree in Dance Education from the University of Northern Colorado, has danced for Team Millennia, Axxiom Dance Collective, and Kings & Queens, and is currently a faculty member at Orange Coast College, Cal Poly Pomona, and Mt. San Antonio College.



JA COLLECTIVE
 Saturday Nov 8 1:15- 2:45pm
 Hip Hop/Contemporary

Step into the creative pulse of Aidan Carberry and Jordan Johnson. This boundary-pushing dance duo is known for their work with half-alive, Frank Ocean, Paul McCartney, Apple, and Gucci. With roots in contemporary and Hip-Hop, embody the JA aesthetic as you dive into their signature movement style and explore the choreographic tools and techniques that drive their work at the intersection of physicality, emotion, and visual storytelling.



NOELLE KAYSER
 Saturday Nov 8 11:30am -1:00pm
 Contemporary

Join Noelle Kayser, an award-winning choreographer, director, and multi-disciplinary performer based in Chicago, for a workshop that blends technical precision with expressive artistry. Dancers will be guided through a contemporary warm-up, before diving into phrase work inspired by her Festival piece. Noelle is the resident choreographer for Open Space, a Whim W'him Choreographic Shindig winner, and a Choreographic Fellow of Jacob's Pillow, and BalletX 2025.



OUTRUN THE BEAR
 Sunday Nov 9th 1:15-2:45pm
 Contemporary

In this explorative workshop, Megan and Ilya share tools and researched approaches to contemporary movement that invite dancers to discover a wide range of movement qualities, textures and dynamics within their physicality. The class moves through stages of improvisation and phrase work designed to tune the body, ignite curiosity, and sharpen our internal engines, culminating in the exploration of repertoire from one of Outrun The Bear's most recent creations.

**OPEN TO ADVANCED
 DANCERS OF ALL STYLES,
 AGES 12 & UP**

Space is limited.
 Reservations required.
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Tessa Gregory-Walker
 Manager - Education Programs
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McCALLUM THEATRE

MISSION STATEMENT

The McCallum Theatre's mission is to educate and entertain the public by offering a variety of performing arts experiences that reflect the diversity of people, interests and tastes of the communities and constituents served by the Theatre.

McCALLUM THEATRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

73000 Fred Waring Drive
Palm Desert, CA 92260

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Christopher Camu, Charline Price, Thomas Miller, Marlon Seperak, Donal Stanton, Rico Garza, Barry Bieda

Bartenders

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SUNDAY FINALISTS

Continued from inside front cover

MARTIN ORTIZ TAPIA, hailed by *Dance Magazine* as “The Swiss Army Knife of Chicago Dance,” is a versatile performer with over 15 years of professional experience. He earned his BFA from the University of Wisconsin and trained with Luna Negra Dance Theater and Thodos Dance Chicago before touring with Giordano Dance Chicago for nine years. His musical theatre credits include *West Side Story*, *Champion*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Newsies*, *Cabaret*, *Mary Poppins*, *Evita*, and *A Chorus Line*. His film work includes choreography and performances in *Good Enough: The Musical* and *Moving In: The Musical*.

GILLMER DURAN, originally from Barquisimeto, Venezuela, has danced with the National Ballet of Caracas, Tulsa Ballet, and for eight seasons with Eugene Ballet Company. Recognized for his versatility, he has performed works by Vicente Nebrada, Nicolo Fonte, Robert Battle, Mauricio Wainrott, Edwaard Liang, Jessica Lang, and Toni Pimble. In 2010, he was named Artistic Director and resident choreographer of Alaska Dance Theatre, later creating for Eugene Ballet, Ballet Des Moines, Northwest Arkansas Ballet Theatre, and Ballet Arizona Studio Company. He holds a BFA from Saint Mary's College of California, and currently teaches at the School of Ballet Arizona and Arizona School for the Arts.

HANNAH MILLAR is the Artistic Director of Imprints Dance Company and an award-winning choreographer whose work has earned a Gold Telly Award, Gold Muse Award, and recognition at the ICU World Championships. She has presented work at Dance at the Odyssey, MashUp Contemporary Dance Company, and New Century Dance Project, and has choreographed commercials for Chukchansi Casino and Resort and the City of Ontario. Hannah holds certifications in Yoga, Reiki and Qigong and is currently pursuing training in the Feldenkrais Method to build on her background in athletic training. She is dedicated to helping dancers move with greater authenticity, freedom, and presence.

LIAN LONG XUAN is a movement artist from Singapore whose work bridges street dance and concert dance. Now based in Philadelphia, he is pursuing a BFA in Dance at Temple University. Beginning his journey as a B-boy rooted in hip-hop culture, Lian actively participated in community events and competitions. In 2019, his encounter with contemporary dance marked a pivotal shift in his artistic path. Expanding his practice beyond performance, he now explores choreography and creation, integrating the raw, communal energy of breaking with the structural and theatrical dimensions of concert dance to develop a distinct, intersectional artistic voice.

JAYDE SPIEGEL is a Los Angeles-based dancer, choreographer, and performance artist. She earned her BFA in Dance from CSULB in May 2024, and has performed across Southwestern U.S., as well as internationally in San Juan Sacatepéquez, Guatemala, and Kiel, Germany. Jayde's choreography has been

presented in Los Angeles, Brooklyn, and Lucca, Italy, in festivals and specialized studies and her work in choreography, sound design, and costuming earned Gala selections at ACDA's 2023 and 2024 Baja Conferences. In her hometown, Las Vegas, she contributes to multimedia gallery spaces, most recently debuting a solo exhibition featuring live performance and video installation.

ASHTON TITUS is a dancer, choreographer, and teacher based in Southern California. Born and raised in Folsom, California, she trained at Hawkins School of Performing Arts for 13 years under the mentorship of Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya. She received her BFA in Dance Performance from Chapman University in 2024 and has had the privilege of dancing across the U.S. and UK. Her choreography has been recognized at choreography festivals including MashUp's International Women's Day Dance Festival (2025). In addition to freelance dance and choreography, Ashton teaches at The Wooden Floor in Santa Ana and for Backhausdance as a Teaching Artist.

MELISSA BOBICK is an Associate Professor at the University of Utah and an experienced dance educator and facilitator. She earned her BS in Ballet from Indiana University, Bloomington, and an MFA in Choreography from the State University of New York at Purchase. An American Ballet Theatre Certified and Affiliate Teacher, she previously served on faculty at Ballet Hispánico in New York and was a Choreographic Development Resident at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. Her choreography has been presented nationally at Detroit Dance and Breaking Ground Festivals, and she has created works for Eugene Ballet, Ballet Idaho, and Ballet Nacional Dominicano.

MICHELLE SHEAR is the current dance department chair at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California. She received her BA in Dance from California State University Fullerton and MFA in Dance from the acclaimed Mills College in Oakland, California. She has been a professor for over 20 years. Beside her teaching, she also enjoys working on special projects and collaborations, such as her bilingual children's book, *Kate Takes A Dance Class*. This is Michelle's second year presenting work at the Palm Desert Choreography Festival and she thanks the organization for this platform to showcase dance artists.

ALEX SCHOOLING, from Lancaster, PA, studied at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet and holds a BFA in Dance Performance with a minor in Peace and Conflict Studies from Butler University. She has danced with companies including Push/Fold, The Holding Project, Zikr Dance Ensemble, and spent nine seasons with the Oklahoma City Ballet, where she showcased a wide range of repertoire. She has choreographed works for Oklahoma City Ballet, PDX Contemporary Ballet, Central OK Ballet Theater, and Race Dance Collective. In 2025, she was a finalist at the Red Rock Dance Festival and was nominated as a Kirkpatrick Foundation Emerging Artist Fellow.

Choreographer photos can be found on the front cover - just match up the number!

ELLA/MADISON. Los Angeles-based dancers and choreographers **ELLA MELIDEO** and **MADISON LUCAS** blend film and movement to create precise, interdisciplinary work. Ella is pursuing a BFA in Dance at the University of Southern California Glorja Kaufman School while earning a master's degree from the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business. Madison is pursuing a BA in Dance at the University of California, Los Angeles. Collectively, they have performed for artists including Sia, Mariah Carey, Martin Short, and Todrick Hall, and choreographed for CONGRESS: Legalize Dance, half-alive, Mergui, and Sacha Carlson. They strive to use their passion for innovation to bridge the worlds of Concert and Commercial dance.

JACOB GUTIÉRREZ-MONTOYA is a celebrated choreographer, dancer, and arts leader dedicated to using movement as a catalyst for connection and change. He is the founding Artistic Director of Sacramento Contemporary Dance Theatre, Artistic Director of Hawkins School of Performing Arts, and a creative force in Sacramento's cultural landscape. Jacob holds four international choreography titles from the International Choreographers Festival and has presented work on Italian National Television, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and will debut choreography in China in 2026. Honored nationally and locally, he continues to craft powerful, mission-driven dance that inspires and transforms communities.

RILEY HART is a proud Coachella Valley native with over 15 years of dance training and remains devoted to growing as a performer, choreographer, and educator. Her pre-professional training began in 2021 under Michael Nickerson-Rossi at Palm Springs Dance Academy and Cristina McKeever at Aztec Arts Academy, experiences that shaped her technical foundation and artistic voice. Currently pursuing an associate degree in Health and Science at College of the Desert, Riley deepens her understanding of the human body while nurturing her passion for helping others heal, strengthen, and grow through movement. She is especially dedicated to teaching and creating choreography that explores emotional and physical depth.

ZACHARY GROENEWOLD is a dance educator and choreographer based in Southern California. He is currently a faculty member at Orange Coast College, Cal Poly Pomona, and Mt. San Antonio College. Zachary obtained his Master's in Dance Education from the University of Northern Colorado. As a performer, he has danced for Team Millennia, serving on their artistic board from 2012-2014, Axiom Dance Collective, and Kings & Queens. His choreography was runner-up for the 2024 Palm Desert Choreography Festival. In addition, his works *Focus* (2018) and *Law of the Jungle* (2025) received high praise from the ACDA and were selected for national performances at the Kennedy Center.



WHY?

- > Ensure support and attention to dance in the Coachella Valley
- > Create venues for dance companies and choreographers
- > Educate young dancers to the potential of dance as a career by providing opportunities for learning, performing and networking with professionals and by exposing them to a variety of dance styles
- > Encourage and ensure new dance audiences by bringing dance to the general public



Sean Aaron Carmon
Vittica Ballet
Roulette
2nd Place, 2024

PHOTOS: JINGZI ZHAO

HISTORY

The Festival, founded by choreographer Shea New in 1998, has grown tremendously in size, respect and support, in part due to the stellar talent that it has attracted. It began as a joint effort between the College of the Desert and the City of Palm Desert, with McCallum Theatre’s Education Department lending its support in the second year. The idea grew out of the need to provide emerging choreographers with support and opportunities to showcase their art. In 2002, the Festival was fully incorporated as a McCallum Theatre program and has since expanded its reach with a number of dynamic community projects.

WHAT?

- > A choreography competition
- > Dance projects, workshops, master classes and special presentations
- > Public acknowledgement and recognition for choreographers via honorary and financial awards including a lifetime achievement award for outstanding contributions to dance



Natasha Adorlee
Concept o4
*Blooming Flowers
and the Full Moon*
Grand Prize, 2024

“ Participating in the Palm Desert Choreography Festival was such a rewarding and inspiring experience. Being in community with fellow creators and immersed in such a supportive environment is vital to growth as an artist. Thank you for providing this invaluable space and for an unforgettable experience! ”

– Natasha Adorlee/Concept o4
Grand Prize, 2024



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