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For Immediate Release

**MC CALLUM THEATRE'S PALM DESERT CHOREOGRAPHY FESTIVAL
ANNOUNCES FINALISTS AND THE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT**

24 ORIGINAL CHOREOGRAPHERS ARE FINALISTS IN THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL

**Dwight Rhoden, Co-Founding Artistic Director and Principal Choreographer of
COMPLEXIONS Contemporary Ballet, to be honored with the 2026 Lifetime
Achievement Award.**

November 14 & 15, 2026 at the McCallum Theatre.

Tickets are now on sale for both public events.

FINALISTS AND TICKETING <https://www.mccallumtheatre.org/productions/palm-desert-choreography-festival/>

LINK TO PHOTOS <https://photos.app.goo.gl/xCC4evqKjaBjSbQn9>

Palm Desert, CA (August 31, 2026) – A dynamic live platform for dancemakers and dancers to showcase their work, **Palm Desert Choreography Festival** powerfully engages audiences around dance in the Coachella Valley.

The Festival features a choreography competition in two divisions, offers education opportunities including workshops and residencies, and honors those who have made outstanding contributions to dance through the Lifetime Achievement Award. The City of Palm Desert is the Presenting Sponsor.

This year, the Festival will bestow its 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award to legendary choreographer **Dwight Rhoden**, Co-Founding Artistic Director & Principal Choreographer of COMPLEXIONS Contemporary Ballet. Dwight has established a remarkably wide-ranging career, earning distinction from The New York Times as “one of the most sought-out choreographers of the day”. Rhoden began dancing at age seventeen, and performed with Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Les Ballet Jazz De Montréal, and as a principal dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

In 1994, alongside **Desmond Richardson**, he founded COMPLEXIONS Contemporary Ballet, bringing their unique brand of contemporary ballet to the world, forging a center for innovation and cutting-edge programming. Rhoden’s choreography has been the lynchpin of the company's repertory development. In three decades, he has created over 100 ballets for COMPLEXIONS, as well as for numerous other companies.

“For more than 25 years, the Palm Desert Choreography Festival has celebrated choreographic excellence and artistic discovery. With the support of our donors and community, the Festival continues to create meaningful opportunities for artists while showcasing Palm Desert as a vibrant center for the arts,” says **Kajsa Thuresson-Frary**, McCallum Theatre’s Vice President of Education.

“That enduring commitment to artistic excellence is reflected in this year’s finalists,” says **Shea New**, Festival Founder and Artistic Director. “Their works are distinctive, thoughtfully crafted, and representative of the exciting range of choreographic voices shaping dance today. The Festival proudly honors all choreographers, those who work with professional dancers but also those who dedicate their careers to guiding dancers onto a professional path both technically and artistically.”

“In addition to being an incredible show, Palm Desert Choreography Festival facilitates authentic connections between dancers, dance presenters, and other choreographers that have the potential to grow into future opportunities.”

CLICK HERE TO VIEW A FULL LIST OF FINALISTS

Link: <https://www.mccallumtheatre.org/productions/palm-desert-choreography-festival/>

Following a rigorous screening process involving more than 150 submissions, this year's Finalists were curated with guidance from a panel of dance professionals and engaged members of the dance community and hail from 12 states across the U.S., Germany, and Canada. Over \$55,000 in cash awards will be given to deserving choreographers to further their work. Winners are announced at the conclusion of each performance. Finalists include festival favorites as well as many choreographers new to the Festival whose works promise to engage, provoke, and entertain.

Now in its 29th year, Festival has attracted over 47,000 audience members, has placed 807 choreographers in the limelight and has granted over \$900,000 in cash awards.

Those attending the Saturday event will witness the work of eleven distinct dancemakers, competing for the \$10,000 Grand Prize and \$5,000 Second Place awards, and the Lifetime Achievement presentation to Dwight Rhoden.

On Sunday, the audience will experience thirteen genre-spanning finalist choreographies and the presentation of an original dance performed by local students from East Valley Dance Project. This outreach program gives student dancers from Desert Mirage and Coachella Valley High Schools in Thermal an opportunity to explore and create with professional choreographers over eight weeks, culminating with a performance on the McCallum stage, alongside Festival Finalists. Sunday's finalists compete for the \$3,000 Grand Prize and \$1,500 Second Place Award.

Tickets for Palm Desert Choreography Festival are available now at McCallumTheatre.org, or by calling the Box Office at (760) 340-2787. Tickets may also be purchased in person at the Box Office (73000 Fred Waring Drive, Palm Desert CA 92260). Accepted payment methods are cash, personal check, VISA, MasterCard, Discover, and American Express. Tickets for the Saturday evening Division I performance are priced at \$34-\$69, and tickets for the Sunday afternoon Division II performance are priced at \$29-\$64.

The McCallum Box Office is currently open Monday-Friday from 12:00 noon-5:00 pm. The Box Office is closed on all major holidays, and hours vary on show days.

Sponsorships ranging from \$250 to \$15,000 are available, and any financial support makes it possible to bring this Festival to our community. All sponsors receive tickets to the Festival, along with recognition and invitations to Festival events, based on giving level. For more information about sponsorship opportunities, contact **Craig McGaw**, Director - Sponsorships, at cmagaw@mccallum-theatre.org or by calling (760) 423-5527.

www.mccallumtheatre.org

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