





















McCALLUM THEATRE

PALM DESERT choreography festival 2026

SATURDAY 7 PM **NOVEMBER 14** | SUNDAY 4 PM **NOVEMBER 15**















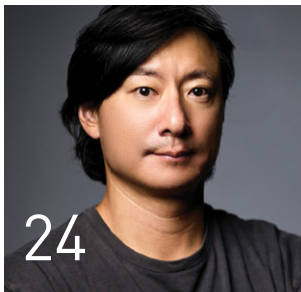












SATURDAY FINALISTS

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

JESSICA LIU is from Salt Lake City, Utah and graduated cum laude from the University of Utah (BFA Ballet, BS Exercise Physiology). She is currently part of the dance ensemble of Nationaltheater Mannheim in Germany. She previously performed across the USA and world with BODYTRAFFIC, SALT Contemporary Dance, and Oakland Ballet Company, among others. Jessica has presented choreography in the USA and Germany, including Palm Desert Choreography Festival and festivals in Karlsruhe and Heilbronn. Additionally, her film, *Buoyancy* was selected for multiple international film festivals and named a finalist for best independent short film at Dance Camera West in Los Angeles.

NOELLE KAYSER is a Chicago-based choreographer working in dance, opera, and film. She is the inaugural resident choreographer for Open Space, a Whim W'Him Choreographic Shindig winner, a BalletX Choreographic Fellow, a Jacob's Pillow Choreography Fellow and a BalletCollective Commission for Developing Choreographers recipient. She has served as a Ballet Mistress at the Lyric Opera and is currently the Artistic Liaison for South Chicago Dance Theatre. Noelle was 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 throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.

DEANNA STANTON recently completed her thirteenth season with Ballet Arkansas. In addition to performing, Deanna has a passion for choreographing. She has had the privilege of creating works for Dumbo Dance Festival, Texture Contemporary Ballet, Small Plates Choreography Festival, Red Rocks Dance Festival, Dance City Festival, Iowa Choreography Festival, Oklahoma International Dance Festival, Contemporary Dance Choreography Festival, New Century Dance Project, the Rhode Island Women's Choreography Project, The Young Choreographers Festival and eight works for Ballet Arkansas. Deanna won the Rocky Mountain Choreography Festival and has also created two full-length ballets; *The Little Mermaid* and *Cinderella*.

NATASHA ADORLEE is an Emmy Award-winning choreographer, filmmaker, and composer based in San Francisco. Her work has been commissioned by Tulsa Ballet, BalletX, Kansas City Ballet, Richmond Ballet, Oklahoma City Ballet, Joffrey Ballet's Winning Works, and companies internationally. She choreographed and produced *A Peanuts Symphony* with the San Francisco Symphony, and her original music has been featured by Pixar Animation Studios. Her films have received numerous international awards, including Best Short at the San Francisco Dance Film Festival. A National Choreographers Initiative alum and Jacob's Pillow Choreographic Fellow, Adorlee creates multidisciplinary works spanning choreography, music, film, and visual design.

GABRIEL CANEPA is a Portland, OR-based dancer and choreographer currently dancing with NW Dance Project, under the direction of Sarah Slipper. Originally from Houston, TX, he continued his studies at the Juilliard School, before dancing professionally with Peridance Contemporary Dance Company and Visceral Dance Chicago. Over this time, he has had the opportunity to perform works by Ohad Naharin, Ihsan Rustem, Gustavo Ramirez-Sansano, Caroline Finn, Ethan Colangelo, Robert Battle, and others.

ASHLEY ROLAND is a true American original. With an unparalleled imagination and an acuity in both choreography and theatrical effect, she creates work that is unbridled, ebullient, and unabashed, resonating deeply with audiences around the world. Ashley is the recipient of numerous awards, including an Emmy for her work on ISO's *Episodes*, and an American Choreography Award for her work on the BodyVox/Mitchell Rose film series *Modern Daydreams*. Ashley co-founded BodyVox in 1997 with Jamey Hampton.

MORGAN A. WILLIAMS is a performer, choreographer, and creative movement director whose career spans commercial and concert dance. His earlier training came from Joffrey Ballet and Hyde Park School of Dance. He has performed with multiple concert dance companies including Dance Kaleidoscope, Joel Hall Dancers & Center, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater, Eisenhower Dance Detroit, and Visceral Dance Chicago. His commercial credits include *So You Think You Can Dance*, MAC Cosmetics, ESPN, and the television show *Empire*. In 2019, he founded Water Street Dance Milwaukee, recognized by *Dance Magazine* as a "25 to Watch" company. Morgan's choreography has been presented nationally, with commissions from leading companies and universities across the United States.

MATÉ SZENTES is a Hungarian-born dancer and choreographer based in Los Angeles, California. After an accomplished performing career with Hungarian National Ballet, Sacramento Ballet, and Richmond Ballet, he began choreographing in 2016. His work has since been presented by Los Angeles Ballet, Ballet Orange County, Richmond Ballet, and independent project-based companies. His choreography blends his classical ballet foundation with contemporary movement and a distinctive artistic voice. Szentes was a finalist at the Palm Desert Choreography Festival in 2022 and 2023, and his works have been invited to the North Coast Dance Festival in Michigan and Balletfest in Long Beach, California. He continues creating work as a freelance artist.

ALEXANDRA LIGHT is originally from Washington, DC. After over a decade as principal dancer with Texas Ballet Theater under the late Ben Stevenson, OBE, she took her final bow in 2025 to focus fully on choreography. Her work has been commissioned by Terminus Modern Ballet Theatre, Martha Graham Dance Company's Lamentation Variations project, Texas Ballet Theater, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, among others. Her choreography has been developed through residencies with Jacob's Pillow, Moulin/Belle, Sitka Center, Frank Lloyd Wright Martin House, the Volland Foundation, and more. She is based in New York City.

BEN NEEDHAM-WOOD is an Emmy award-winning choreographer and filmmaker. His works have been presented nationally by such companies as Amy Seiwert's Imagery, Bruce Wood Dance, Dance Theatre of San Francisco, Dimensions Dance Theatre of Miami, Kansas City Ballet, Louisville Ballet, Smuin Contemporary Ballet, and Boulder Ballet, among others. His creations have been featured on TV networks, commercial airlines, film festivals, and galas. Some choreographic honors include commissions by the National Choreographers Initiative in Irvine, CA, and the Community Commissioning Residency Artist at the National Center for Choreography (NCCAkron) in Akron, OH. Ben is the Artistic Director of Boulder Ballet.

DANIEL OJEDA is a freelance choreographer from New York. He is a 2026 Joffrey Chicago's Winning Works choreographer, an inaugural artist for the 2026 Artist Haven residency with LED and the Alexa Rose Foundation, a 2025 Carmel Choreographic Fellow, and a recipient of the $10,000 Alexa Rose Light of Day Award. Daniel has made 15 original works for Ballet Idaho and has been choreographing for the company since 2011. His work has been featured all over the US and beyond, including Denver, Seattle, Chicago, New York City, Dallas, and Chile. Daniel is resident choreographer for AVID: Artistic Ventures in Dance.

WELCOME!



PHOTO: MAILE KLEIN

Twenty-nine years ago, this Festival was founded on a simple but powerful belief—that choreographers matter. Today, that belief remains at the heart of everything we do. Each year, we bring together artists at different stages of their careers, creating opportunities for discovery, mentorship, and artistic excellence. It is a privilege to continue this tradition and to welcome you as part of its evolving story.

Across two unforgettable days, we celebrate the dynamic spectrum of dance—from visionaries who changed history to the rising talents defining its future. With more than 170 dancers performing, this year's finalists represent 12 U.S. states, Germany, and Canada. Selected with guidance from a panel of dance professionals and engaged community members, they reflect a vibrant mosaic of movement, artistry, and human expression.

Saturday evening's performance features a bold, breathtaking lineup that pushes the boundaries of contemporary dance. Spanning the striking imagery of post-modern movement to the refined beauty of ballet, the evening is united in a commonality of extraordinary choreography. We continue our celebration of contemporary dance by honoring the genius of our Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, Dwight Rhoden, master choreographer and co-founder of Complexions Contemporary Ballet. Rhoden transformed the landscape of 21st-century dance both choreographically and culturally, infusing modern movement, athletic physicality, and rich multicultural influences into a dynamic, groundbreaking aesthetic.

Sunday afternoon's performance showcases the power of choreographers creating high-caliber work for emerging professional dancers preparing this next generation of talent. The Festival proudly honors these dancemakers who dedicate their careers to guiding dancers onto a professional path both technically and artistically. Because access to concert dance can be limited by geography or resources, our East Valley Dance Project, directed by award-winning choreographer, Jenny Backhaus, provides local youth with a full, professional dance experience from audition to performance. We applaud these young dancers for bravely exploring all that dance has to offer. Read more about this project on page 6.

Beyond the stage, this Festival is dedicated to expanding educational opportunities through workshops and residencies for more experienced dance students. Led by some of our finalist choreographers, visiting and local students explore diverse movement styles and learn repertoire featured throughout the weekend performances. Read more about these workshops on page 19.

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who makes this event possible—from dancers and choreographers sharing their passion to the educators, sponsors, community partners and audience members supporting live dance. We could not do this without you.

Enjoy the show!

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.

CITY OF PALM DESERT
FESTIVAL PRESENTING SPONSOR

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Irene W. & Guy L. Anderson Children's Foundation
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Special thanks to College of the Desert for providing Festival workshop space.

The arts have a special way of bringing people together, inspiring creativity, and enriching our community.

The City of Palm Desert proudly congratulates Dwight Rhoden on receiving the 2026 Lifetime Achievement Award.

We also celebrate the talented artists of the Palm Desert Choreography Festival and thank the McCallum Theatre for helping make our community a place where the arts continue to thrive.

discoverpalmdesert.com



PALM DESERT



From last year's Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, David Parsons, to this year's honoree, Dwight Rhoden, Jeff and I are proud to celebrate extraordinary artistry, the legacy of Dance Visionaries, and the next generation of choreographic talent.

Sempre,

Suellen Richmond
& Jeffrey Bush







2026 LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

DWIGHT RHODEN



CO-FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET

DWIGHT RHODEN 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 Montreal, 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, including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Arizona Ballet, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, BalletMet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Joffrey Ballet, Miami City Ballet, New York City Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, PHILADANCO!, Mariinsky Ballet, Zenon Dance Company, The Washington Ballet, The Houston Ballet and The San Francisco Ballet, among many others.

Rhoden has also choreographed for *So You Think You Can Dance, E! Entertainment's Tribute to Style*, AMICI, Cirque Du Soleil's *Zumanity*, *Mozart: Her Story*, and collaborated with artists including Prince, Lenny Kravitz, Paul Simon, Nina Simone, and many more. He is a recipient of The New York Foundation for the Arts Award, The Choo San Goh Award for Choreography, and The Ailey School's Apex Award, and an Honorary Doctorate from the Boston Conservatory in recognition of his extensive contributions to the field of dance.

Currently he is Adjunct Professor at Howard University, and Artistic Professor of Dance at Chapman University.

> *"One of the most sought out choreographers of the day."*
>
> ***– The New York Times***



AWARD PRESENTED BY
CHRISTINA JOHNSON
Christina is a founding member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet and has been a featured guest artist with numerous companies worldwide, including the Royal Ballet of London. She is now a sought after master teacher, and is featured in Misty Copland's film *Flower*, and book *Black Ballerinas: My Journey to Our Legacy*.

Please take our audience survey

EAST VALLEY **DANCE** PROJECT



COACHELLA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

An important outreach project of Palm Desert Choreography Festival, East Valley Dance Project (EVDP) has served students in Thermal for the past 20 years. Originally a partnership with Desert Mirage High and Toro Canyon Middle schools, the project now also includes students from Coachella Valley High School. In partnership with Backhausdance (Orange County, CA) and under the direction of award-winning choreographer Jennifer Backhaus, EVDP engages East Valley youth in collaborative dancemaking and includes residencies by professional dancers, an audition workshop, and eight intense rehearsals. The project culminates in a performance of an original piece of choreography featuring students from both schools to close out the Sunday Program of Palm Desert Choreography Festival. By participating in the process of crafting a dance, students develop an understanding of its potential as a form of expression, build life skills through collaboration with others, and gain the opportunity to perform onstage at the McCallum Theatre. We are grateful to Jenny, Chi, Mo, Sammi, Adrien and Zachary of Backhausdance for their partnership, leadership, and collaboration on this Project.

East Valley Dance Project wants to thank
Irene W. & Guy L. Anderson Children's Foundation for their generous sponsorship.



DESERT MIRAGE HIGH SCHOOL

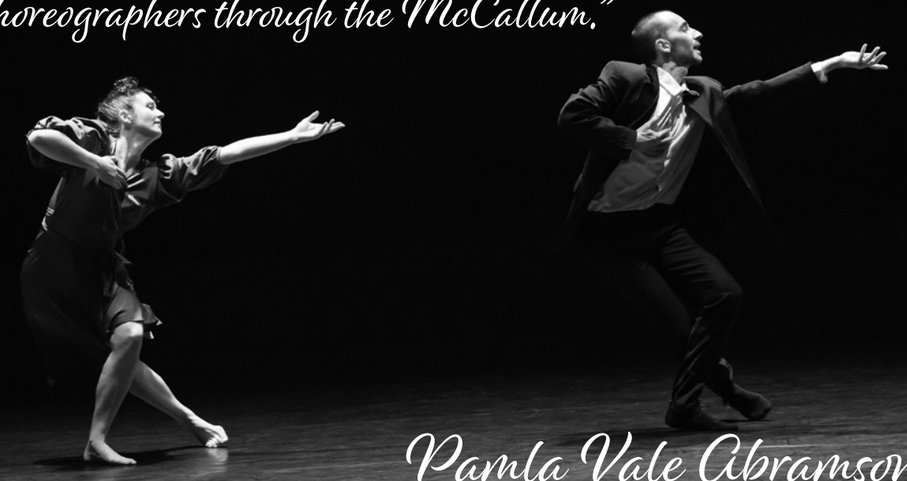
Congratulations
to all dancers in the
East Valley Dance Project!

Anderson Children's Foundation is dedicated to providing for unmet needs of children in areas including health, education, recreation, and the arts.
We support nonprofit programs that nurture and inspire youth of the Coachella Valley.

Opportunities to overcome challenges, develop skills, grow creativity, and expand horizons can transform young lives.
To learn more about us and to apply for a grant please visit
andersonchildrensfoundation.org

Irene W. & Guy L. Anderson
Children's Foundation

"I am honored to be a McCallum Luminary.
Having been a dancer since the age of 7 and
throughout my life it gives me joy to help other dancers
and choreographers through the McCallum."



Pamla Vale Abramson

Outrun the Bear, *Palace*, 2025 Festival Finalist

PHOTO: JINGZI ZHAO

29 Years of Inspiring Movement.
"A heartfelt congratulations
to the artists and visionaries who
bring dance to life on our stage."



Sally & Michael Schreter

Morgan Williams,
Goodbye,
2025 Festival Finalist

PHOTO: JINGZI ZHAO

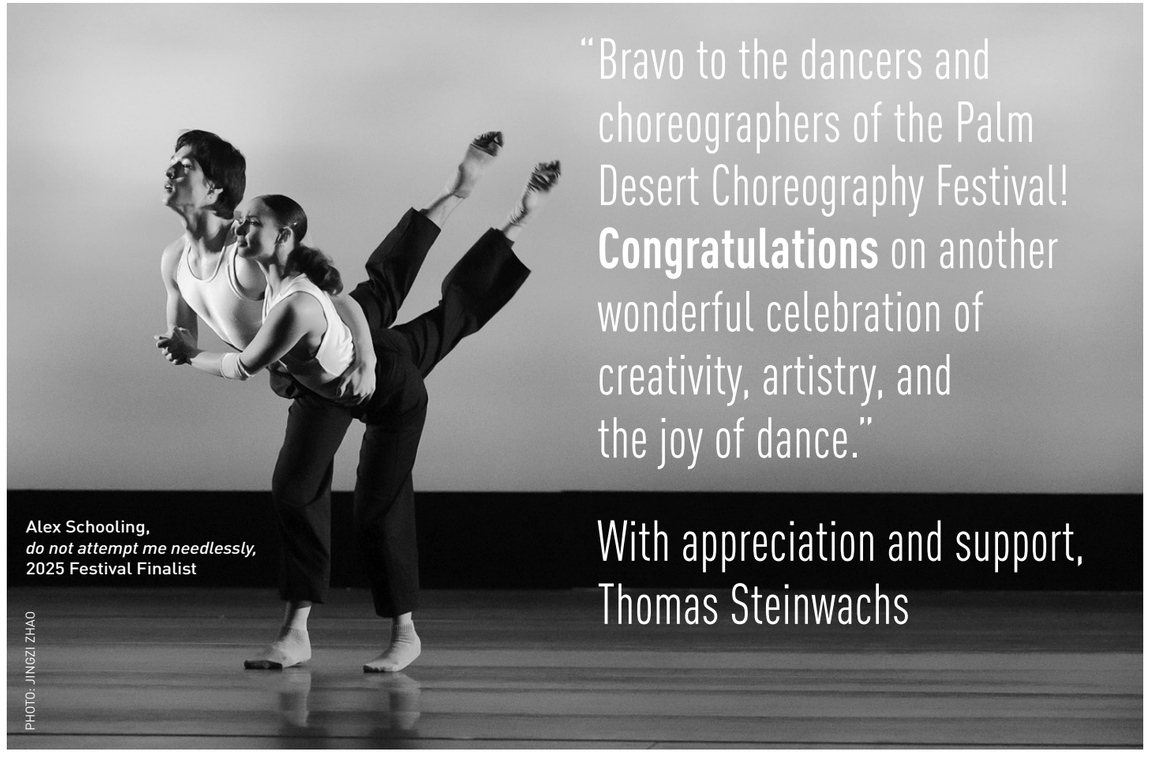
"Celebrating 29 Years of Dance Excellence.
Honoring the artistry, innovation and
passion that make this Festival
a true celebration of movement."

Michael & Tamara Groat



Stellar Dance,
Penumbra,
2024 Festival Finalist

PHOTO: JINGZI ZHAO



"Bravo to the dancers and
choreographers of the Palm
Desert Choreography Festival!
Congratulations on another
wonderful celebration of
creativity, artistry, and
the joy of dance."

With appreciation and support,
Thomas Steinwachs

Alex Schooling,
do not attempt me needlessly,
2025 Festival Finalist

PHOTO: JINGZI ZHAO

Saturday

SATURDAY **NOVEMBER 14, 2026**

$10,000 **Grand Prize**
$5,000 **Second Place**
$2,500 **Ensemble Finalist Award**
$2,000 **Small Group Finalist Award**
$1,500 **Duet Finalist Award**

Opening Remarks by
KAJSA THURESSON-FRARY VICE PRESIDENT-EDUCATION

ACT ONE

PERSONA
Choreographer **DANIEL OJEDA**
Music ***String Quartet No.4 Prometheus: VII. Allegro Groove, String Quartet No. 4 Prometheus: VI. Tempo Rubato, String Quartet No. 5 Waniyetu: VII. Aggressive, String Quartet No. 4 Prometheus: V. Andantino,*** **all composed by Mark Mellits, performed by Quatuor Debussy**
Lighting Design **Jesse Campbell**
Costume Design **Daniel Ojeda**
Dancers **Arimee Gambill, Graciela Portillo, Jonatan Lujan, Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin**

GHOST
Choreographer **BEN NEEDHAM-WOOD**
Company **Boulder Ballet**
Music ***Nuvole Bianche*** **by Ludovico Einaudi**
Dancers **Julia Meister, Ben Rabe**

BEEF
Choreographer **MORGAN A. WILLIAMS**
Company **Water Street Dance Milwaukee**
Music **By Drake & Kendrick Lamar, arranged by David Schocke**
Lighting Design **Isaac Norman**
Costume Design **Kate Alava**
Dancers **Freddy Aguirre, Kate Alava, Abby Hermans, Teresa Noonan, Keith Smith**

SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT
Choreographer **ALEXANDRA LIGHT**
Music **Original Score by Aleya Neivandt-Brown**
Lighting Design **Truly Cates**
Costume Design **Lauren Carmen**
Dancers **Lilit Hogtanian, George Sanders**

DUST
Choreographer **NOELLE KAYSER**
Company **nk+ collaborators**
Music ***Rising Water*** **by Andrew Bird,** ***The Harbinger*** **by Julianna Barwick**
Lighting Design **Jackie Fox**
Costume Design **Amanda Gladu**
Dancers **Jacob Beasley, Ashley Rivette**
Dancers courtesy of Whim W'Him Seattle Contemporary Dance

OCTANE
Choreographer **NATASHA ADORLEE**
Company **Houston Contemporary Dance Company**
Music ***Long 6*** **by Michael Wall,** ***Reimagined*** **by Natasha Adorlee,** ***Last Life*** **by Ori Lichtik,** ***Put Your Head On My Shoulder*** **by Paul Anka**
Dancers **Dominic Askew, Dylan Croy, Annabelle Daniels, Devon Drybread, Jen Kim, Avery Moore, Niyah Pratt, Vivian Shock, Dwain Travis**

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

GARDEN OF SYNAESTHESIA
Choreographer **ASHLEY ROLAND**
Company **BodyVox**
Music ***String Quartet in F Major, M. 35: III. Très lent*** **by Maurice Ravel**
Lighting Design **James Mapes**
Costume Design **Ashley Roland**
Dancers **CJ Burroughs, Mia Crider, Daniel Kirk, Jillian St. Germain, Haiou Wang**

AFTERLIFE
Choreographer **MATÉ SZENTES**
Music ***Fugue in D minor*** **by J.S. Bach, arranged by F. Busoni for piano**
Lighting Design **Maté Szentes**
Costume Design **Maté Szentes**
Dancers **Skylar Campbell, Julianna Generoux**
Dancers courtesy of Royal Winnipeg Ballet

HEK FAN MENG AH?
Choreographer **JESSICA LIU**
Music **Original composition by Louis Oehl featuring** ***Frustration***, ***Dedicated to the One I Love*** **by The Mamas & The Papas**
Lighting Design **Wolfgang Schüle**
Costume Design **Jessica Liu with Julia Headley**
Dancers **Paloma Galiana-Moscardó, Irene Garcia Torres, Richard Oberscheven, Sarah Wünsch, Hiyori Yamamoto**

CUENTA CONMIGO
Choreographer **GABRIEL CANEPA**
Music ***Hagamos un Trato*** **by Mario Benedetti,** ***Otra Vez*** **by Guty Cárdenas,** ***Tonada de Luna Llena*** **by Simón Díaz**
Dancers **Gabriel Canepa, Kalli Loudan**
Dancers courtesy of NW Dance Project

INNOCENT THORNS
Choreographer **DEANNA STANTON**
Music ***Violin Concerto No. 1: III. Quarter Note=ca.150 - Coda. Quarter Note = 104*** **by Philip Glass**
Dancers **Angelina Broad, Brittany Dowdy, Demetrious Reed, Scott Reed** *(courtesy of The Joffrey Ballet),* **Cassandra Thoms, Harry Warshaw** *(courtesy of Ballet Memphis)*

2026
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT
AWARD presentation

DWIGHT RHODEN
COMPLEXIONS Contemporary Ballet

Presented by **Christina Johnson**
Tribute video courtesy of **Selby Artists Management and COMPLEXIONS Contemporary Ballet**
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 Evan Trubee, Mayor, City of Palm Desert**

JUDGES
Joseph Carman
Daniel Ezralow
Robert La Fosse
Debra Levine
Molly Lynch



Julie McDonald, 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award recipient presenting the Lifetime Achievement Award to Toni Basil in 2022.

Please take our audience survey

PALM DESERT CHOREOGRAPHY FESTIVAL

Sunday

SUNDAY **NOVEMBER 15, 2026**

$3,000 **Grand Prize**
$1,500 **Second Place**
$1,250 **Ensemble Finalist Award**
$1,000 **Small Group Finalist Award**
$750 **Duet Finalist Award**

Opening Remarks by
KAJSA THURESSON-FRARY VICE PRESIDENT-EDUCATION

PASSING THROUGH

Choreographer **GUNTA LIEPINA MILLER**
Company **Premier Youth Dance Company**
Music ***Piano Concerto No 25 in A. Major, K. 488:2 Adagio*** **by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**
Lighting Design **Martha Carter**
Dancers **Kazuma Brailsford, Esme Chou, Ujin Erdenehkuu, June Freeman, Chihiro Fuke, Arabella Kim, Yesoul Kim, Phoebe Lee, Grace Li, Harmony Lim, Isabella Pinto, Daisy Qian, Liefie Wateska, Emma Won**

AND FIVE...SIX...SEVEN EIGHT

Choreographers **ERICKA J. BROWN IN COLLABORATION WITH DANCERS**
Music ***one, two, three*** **by Kenichi Kasamatsu and** ***Complications*** **by avex ROYALBRATS ft. Kenichi Kasamatsu**
Lighting Design **Ericka J. Brown**
Costume Design **Ericka J. Brown and dancers**
Dancers **Charlotte Burink, Chloe Cruz, Taylor Hill, Chloe Jimenez, Dalia Popok Romero**

Dancers courtesy of Riverside City College and Cal State University Long Beach

TORN

Choreographer **AMY NAKAMURA**
Company **Mt. SAC Repertory Dance Company**
Music ***Torn*** **by Nathan Lanier**
Lighting Design **Nolan Catingub**
Costume Design **Amy Nakamura**
Dancers **Martin Carrillo, Charley Crampton, Ally Dolliver, Janai Johnson, Chloe Lu, Masynn Milbry, Cassie Sanchez, Mia Sanford, Bella Villaluna, Melody Wilson, Brielle Winfield**

IN YUN

Choreographers **KENNEDY BARRY & SKYLAR PETERSON**
Company **The BP Project**
Music ***Mad Rush*** **composed by Phillip Glass & Lisa Moore**
Dancers **Kennedy Barry & Skylar Peterson**

PALOMA QUERIDA (BELOVED DOVE)

Choreographer **MICHELLE MANZANALES**
Company **The University of Utah School of Dance**
Music ***Paloma Negra*** **by Tomás Méndez,** ***La Llorona*** **performed by Luis Mars**
Lighting Design **Jared Moore, reimagined by William Peterson and Michelle Manzanales**
Costume Design **Branimira Ivanova, realized by the University of Utah School of Dance Costume Shop with hand-painting by Clover Kelly**
Dancers **Soloist: Madison Taylor. Ensemble: Anna Grace Cox, Maclean Dennis, Evelyn Dodge, Leila Grider, Anna Jeong, Hannah Kiers, Lyndsey Wilmes**

M

Choreographer **TYLER SCHNESE**
Company **Repertory Ballet Ensemble (Utah Valley University)**
Music ***10 d E A T h b R E a s T⚄⚄, 715 - CRΣΣKS, and 33 "GOD"*** **by Bon Iver**
Lighting Design **Peter Leonard**
Costume Design **Carla Summers and Tyler Schnese**
Dancers **Kenna Jane Francis, Hope King, Diana Lau, Rylinn Levie, Natalie Pitcher, Andy Sefcik**

WINTER WONDERLAND

Choreographer **NATALIE WILLES**
Company **Carousel Dance Company**
Music ***Winter Wonderland*** **by Felix Bernard and Richard Bernhard Smith, performed by Johnny Mathis.** ***Frosty The Snowman*** **by Jack Rollins and Steve Nelson, performed by Fiona Apple.** ***Silent Night*** **by Franz Xaver Gruber, performed by Sara McLachlan.**
Lighting Design **Jim Smith**
Dancers **Gia Arenas, Malani Ault, Eve Avner, Lilika Caldwell, Ava Dzilvelis, Madeline Foerster, Lindsay Freund, Charlie Hoffman, Joceline Horowitz, Arabella Keane, Noelle Levis, Ivee Manubay, Saylor Rowe, Anika Scearce, Rhiya Senthil Prabu, Naomi Shalev, Meadow Silbert, River Silbert, Jayla Smith, Scarlett Strain, Korinne Tetlow, Jayla Toledo, Juliet Toledo, Gracie Tunick, Leah Tunick, Ahtziry Vidal, Tensley Wolf, Willa Wydra**

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

THE REMEMBERED

Choreographer **MICHELLE SHEAR**
Company **Mt. SAC Repertory Dance Company**
Music ***Eclipse*** **by Helen Jane Long**
Lighting Design **Nolan Catingub**
Costume Design **Michelle Shear**
Set Design **Ethan Shear**
Dancers **Olivia Cobos, Chloe Lu, Cassie Sanchez, Melody Wilson**

STIGMA

Choreographer **KALLY JONES**
Company **School of Soul**
Music ***Hi Ren*** **by Ren**
Costume Design **Kally Jones**
Dancers **Ligia Espinoza, Mia Jensen, Kally Jones, Emma Palma, Adrien Palomino**

Dancers courtesy of RACE dance collective, OK

DISPARATE + INSEPARABLE

Choreographer **SEYONG KIM**
Company **Western Dance Project**
Music ***Vedro con mio diletto*** **by Antonio Vivaldi**
Costume Design **Seyong Kim**
Dancers **Olivia Erlandson, Keira McDonald, Halle Sisson, Brandon Wolfington**

Dancers courtesy of Western Michigan University

WHO DOES YOUR LAUNDRY?

Choreographer **JENEANE HUGGINS**
Company **Kagami**
Music ***Mum Does The Washing*** **by Joshua Idehen**
Costume Design **Jeneane Huggins**
Dancers **Julian Adame, Madison Baranowski, Francesca Bliven, Aylin Franco, Livia Good, Hailey Goodro, Skylee Gordon, John Gray, Abby Groh, Kamiali Harworth, Lily King, Isabella Magilong, Sofia Martinez, Francisco Montenegro, Aaliyah Perry, Ariana ponticello, Charlie Sanchez-Razo, Gabriella Segars, Jaylaa Thomas, Farah Tolbert, Ayelin Vaquez, Trinity Washington**

OLD RELIGION

Choreographer **JACOB GUTIÉRREZ-MONTOYA**
Company **Hawkins School of Performing Arts**
Music ***Old Religion*** **by Florence Welch and Aaron Dessner**
Lighting Design **Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya**
Costume Design **Jacob Gutiérrez-Montoya**
Dancers **Eryka Batayola, Aevlyn Bluette, Brooklyn Broussard, Juniper Clayton, Autumn Co, Shabnam Dehquanzada, Lyric Fernandes, Isabella King, Rosie Kraushar, Audrey Lewin, Bethany Masten, Anna Paredes, Alexis Powell, Ashlyn Saia, Lexi Schnell, Bryn Skaff**

NEMESIS

Choreographers **ROBERT RIMMER, CAROLYN TELLEZ, DANNY INESTROZA & LYSSY SALVADOR**
Company **Summit Contemporary Fusion Group**
Music ***Nemesis*** **by Benjamin Clementine**
Dancers **Nayah Acosta, Jared Butac, Allison Cautin, Krystin Didenhover, Kylie Estrada, Caden Gomez, Mila Gonzales, Vero Hong, Zoe Ibanez, Danny Inestroza, Emily James, Saehee Jong, Caitlin Larsen, Raina Lee, Ariatna Martinez, Randy Phalouka, Milagros Ramos, Lyssy Salvador, Nick Sarroca, Carolyn Tellez, Sara Zizzo**

FESTIVAL OUTREACH PRESENTATION

EAST VALLEY DANCE PROJECT

JOY IN FIRST PERSON

Artistic Director **JENNIFER BACKHAUS**
Rehearsal Coordinator **CHIHIRO SANO**
Choreography **MO GOODFELLOW, SAMMI WAUGH, ZACHARY MEDINA, ADRIEN PADILLA**
Company **East Valley Dance Project**
Music ***El Flamenco* by MESTIZA & Aaron Sevilla and *Tamacún* by Rodrigo & Gabriela**

DANCERS
Coachella Valley High School
Andrea Ceballos, Andrew Carranza, Audrey Ramos, Carolina Cota, Chloe Smith, Delalia Nunez, Dulce Hernandez, Eduardo Mendoza, Ellina Marie Rodriguez, Esperanza Miranda, Fernando Hernandez, Genesis Vargas, Iliana Morena-Rojas, Itaty Haro, Jay Areola, Kailynn Felix, Kain Gil, Kianna Vargas, Kimberly Aguilera-Andrade, Lauren Salado, Marbella Raya, Natalie Diaz Valadez, Rey Ramirez, Sarah Montoya, Sofia Chavez

Desert Mirage High School
Achtli Flores Leal, Adallany-Ontiveros Medina, Alexa Arteaga, Alexa Magana, Amairany Ortiz, Amy Pacheco Centeno, Analia Urias, Aolanis Beltran, Azul Sandoval, Briceyda Aguilar, Brisa Mora, Chelsy Lopez Guido, Emely Hernandez, Emily Izar, Esmerelda Farias, Gretel Rubio, Itzell Torres, Itzia Rodriguez, Jacqueline Lopez Pacheco, Katty Elizavvaraz, Lizbeth Rodriguez, Monserrat Martinez, Nadia Pacheco, Nathalie Zavala, Perla Mojica-Chavez, Ruby Valdez, Sarai Lopez, Tifani Aguilar, Valeria Izar, Valeria Miranda, Yunnuen Orozco

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 Mayor Pro Tem Joe Pradetto, City of Palm Desert**

JUDGES

Jennifer Backhaus
Joseph Carman
Daniel Ezralow
Robert La Fosse
Roberta Shaw

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Laura Bellows
Aaliyah Cota-Griffin
Gail DeZon
John Ferarre
John Goodwin
Joe Istre
Olga Morales
Shea New
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Heaven Rodriguez
Sue Roginski
Ellen Shiffman
Kajsa Thuresson-Frary

PROGRAM DESIGN Mark Duebner Design
INTRODUCTORY SLIDES VanSant Studios
PHOTOGRAPHY Jingzi Zhao

Over the past 29 years the Festival has...

> presented the works of **835** choreographers

> presented **831** pieces of choreography

> awarded **$965,975** to deserving choreographers

> served **20,732** workshop/residency participants

> honored **27** Lifetime Achievement Award recipients

> served **49,536** 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 Glorya Kaufman
2019 Rennie Harris
2022 Toni Basil
2023 Helgi Tomasson
2024 Nappytabs
2025 David Parsons
2026 Dwight Rhoden

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 o4
2025 ***The Rate We Change*** – Kellie St. Pierre/Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company

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
2025 ***Thread Lightly*** – Madison Lucas & Ella Melideo

JUDGES

JENNIFER BACKHAUS is the Founder and Artistic Director of Backhausdance, a critically acclaimed contemporary dance company based in Orange County. 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 20th 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.

ROBERT LA FOSSE joined New York City Ballet in 1986 as a principal dancer after a nine-year career with American Ballet Theatre, which he joined in 1977. For the Broadway stage, Mr. La Fosse starred in *Bob Fosse's Dancin'* and *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*, for which he received a 1989 Tony Award nomination for Best Actor in a Musical. In addition to his performing career, Mr. La Fosse is also an established choreographer who has created over 100 works for ballet, opera, musical theater, film, and television. He performs in the New York City Ballet's annual production of George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker* as Herr Drosselmiere. He stages the ballets and theater choreography of Jerome Robbins throughout the world.

DEBRA LEVINE, a Los Angeles dance critic, has contributed feature writing and dance criticism to the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Long Beach Press Telegram, Dance Magazine, Huffington Post*, and more, for over four decades. She has produced dance/film events at The Museum of Modern Art, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, UCLA Film & Television Archive, interviewing dance-world celebrities and icons to include classic Hollywood dance stars to myriad dance company artistic directors and choreographers. Grants and support have included a Fellowship from The Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU, UCLA Thayer research grant, Levitt Family Foundation, and Cecil B. DeMille Foundation. The founder of *arts•meme*, a fine arts blog, her long-awaited first book, *JAZZED*, the biographer of the choreographer Jack Cole, was published by University Press of Kentucky in August 2026. Debra is delighted to be part of the celebrated Palm Desert Choreography Festival.

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. This past summer she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from CORPS de Ballet International.

ROBERTA SHAW is a dance educator/artist who works between the art forms of dance and film. She has created and screened dozens of choreographic works, presenting her films nationally and internationally. She has danced for many choreographers including Neil Greenberg, Maria Gillespie (ONI Dance), Bebe Miller, Victoria Uris, Rebecca Pappas, Kristina Isabelle's HiJinks Dance, Dance Brigade, and many others. She has enjoyed choreographing musical-theatre productions, including *Urinetown, Ride The Cyclone*, and *Oklahoma*, and commercials including Pasadena's "Keep the Change" campaign. She has taught dance and media arts for 25 years at schools including CalARTS, Pasadena City College, UC Irvine, UCLA, The Ohio State University, La Salle College in Singapore, and La Salle High School in Pasadena, CA. She holds an MFA from The Ohio State University, a BA from UC Berkeley, and a teaching certificate from American Ballet Theatre. She has served as adjudicator for American College Dance Festival (ACDA), and on selection committees for Dance Camera West and the Utah Dance Film Festival. Robbie is embarking on a new chapter having recently relocated to the High Desert, and is thrilled to share her life's passion of teaching dance at The College of the Desert, starting Spring, 2027.



Rennie Harris, 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient with presenter Brenda Dixon-Gottschild.

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MAGICAL CHRISTMAS BALLET
Wednesday, December 16, 2026 • 3pm & 7pm
Sponsor: City of Rancho Mirage



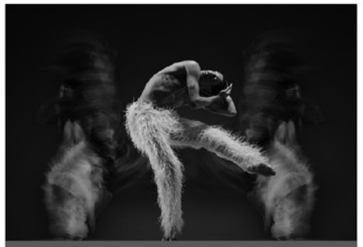
BALLET HISPÁNICO NEW YORK
Wednesday, January 27, 2027 • 7pm



SERGIO BERNAL & COMPANY
Tuesday, February 9, 2027 • 7pm



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DE MONTE CARLO
Tuesday, February 23, 2027 • 7pm



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PALM DESERT choreography festival 2026

McCALLUM THEATRE

WORKSHOPS WITH FESTIVAL FINALISTS

FREE!



JESSICA LIU - Contemporary

Saturday Nov 14 11:30am -1pm

Jessica Liu is a performing artist currently engaged with the Nationaltheater Mannheim in Germany. She has previously performed across the USA and world with BODYTRAFFIC, SALT Contemporary Dance, and Oakland Ballet Company, among others. Her professional and educational experience come together in an athletic and expressive movement language that demonstrates precision as well as fluidity. This 90-minute contemporary dance workshop will focus on understanding body coordination as a foundation for impulse and movement initiation. Incorporating elements of floor technique and building into expansive phrase work, the class is designed for intermediate to advanced dancers. The workshop will culminate in learning an excerpt of *Hek Fan Meng Ah?* choreography, featured in Saturday's performance.



MORGAN WILLIAMS - Street Dance Fusion

Saturday Nov 14 1:30pm - 2:30pm

Join Morgan Williams, visionary Artistic Director of Water Street Dance Milwaukee for a contemporary-fusion masterclass. This 60-minute workshop will take dancers through a fusion-based warm-up that incorporates elements of ballet technique, features modern floor work, and finishes with a combination focused on musicality, athleticism, and dynamic movement with sections of repertoire from Morgan's finalist choreography, *BEEF*. Morgan started his professional career with Dance Kaleidoscope in Indianapolis, IN, and has since been engaged with numerous renowned concert dance companies and commercial projects, including work with Visceral Dance Chicago, Detroit Met Dance, So You Think You Can Dance, and the hit TV show Empire.



NATASHA ADORLEE - Contemporary Fusion

Sunday Nov 15th 1:15pm - 2:45pm

Drawing from the physical language of *OCTANE*, this 90-minute workshop explores athleticism, speed, and physical intensity. Through movement phrases and interactive exercises, dancers will work with momentum and responsiveness, moving between individual physicality and the energy of the group. The workshop will build toward learning material directly from *OCTANE*, giving participants an embodied experience that challenges them both mentally and physically. Natasha took home the Grand Prize at Palm Desert Choreography Festival 2024. A National Choreographers Initiative alum and Jacob's Pillow Choreographic Fellow, Adorlee creates multidisciplinary works spanning choreography, music, film, and visual design.

OPEN TO INT / ADV DANCERS OF ALL STYLES, AGES 12 & UP

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Reservations required.
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Palm Desert

REGISTER

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Manager - Education Programs
tessagw@mccallum-theatre.org

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The McCallum Theatre's mission is to entertain, educate and enrich the Coachella Valley community through world-class performances, critically-acclaimed education experiences and serving as the desert's premier performing arts center.

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SUNDAY FINALISTS

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

AMY NAKAMURA received her training from the Joffrey Ballet, has a BA in Dance from CSUF and an MFA in Dance from UCI where she was awarded the Leo Freedman Foundation Fellowship for choreographic excellence. She received Grand Prize and Runner Up Awards at the Division II Palm Desert Choreography Festival as well as seven finalist awards. Amy is currently a tenured professor at Mt. San Antonio College with past teaching institutions at UC Irvine, Chapman University and the Orange County School of the Arts. Students can be seen in *Hamilton, Wicked, Taylor Swift ERAS Tour* and Nederlands Dans Theater.

MICHELLE SHEAR is the Dance Department Chair at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, CA. She received her BA in Dance from California State University Fullerton and MFA in Dance from the acclaimed Mills College in Oakland, CA. As a professor for over 20 years; she enjoys working on special projects, dance photography, collaborations and has written a bilingual children's book, *Kate Takes A Dance Class*. This is her third year presenting work at the Palm Desert Choreography Festival, and she thanks the organization for providing a platform to showcase dance artists.

JACOB GUTIÉRREZ-MONTOYA is the Artistic Director of The Sacramento Dance Theatre and the Hawkins School of Performing Arts in Folsom, CA. As a resident choreographer at B Street Theatre, he has crafted innovative works that resonate with diverse audiences. His choreography has been showcased by esteemed organizations such as the Sacramento Ballet, Broadway Sacramento to the New York Musical Festival, and the Scottish Fringe Festival in Scotland. With a passion for storytelling through movement, Jacob continues to inspire and elevate the performing arts community, fostering creativity and collaboration in every project he undertakes.

GUNTA LIEPINA-MILLER is a Latvian dance artist, Fulbright scholar and the Artistic Director of Premier Youth Dance Company. She got her MFA in Dance at UC Irvine and studied in J. Vitols Latvian Academy of Music and CODARTS in The Netherlands. Gunta's works have been showcased in USA, Latvia, Lithuania, Thailand, China, Italy, Bulgaria, and Israel. Gunta was one half of a choreographic duo whose reimagined *Nutcracker* ballet was nominated for the Latvian Dance Awards and received the audience choice award. Her choreography and dancers were featured on the TV show *Dance Revolution* in Lithuania. She has been awarded the second place at Palm Desert Choreography Festival, YAGP and UBC Best Choreographer Award.

SUMMIT CONTEMPORARY FUSION GROUP (ROBERT RIMMER, CAROLYN TELLEZ, DANNY INESTROZA, LYSSY SALVADOR) was established in 2025 with the mission to unite the contemporary and hip hop dance communities. The team is geared towards training its company members towards a diverse training program to promote the strength in covering a broad spectrum of dance genres. They believe in creating a safe space for dancers whilst prioritizing their wellbeing, humanity, and artistry.

KALLY JONES is a Tulsa-based artist who truly encompasses the term Renaissance Woman. She graduated from RSU with her BFA and since then has worked as an independent contractor painting, dancing, and as a photographer. She is currently working with Philbrook Art and Gardens as an art handler, as well as a teacher, performer, and choreographer with RACE Dance Collective in Oklahoma City, and co-directing the dance company School of Soul in Tulsa, OK.

JENEANE HUGGINS is a choreographer, educator, and Dance Conservatory Chair at the Las Vegas Academy of the Performing Arts. She holds a dual MFA in Dance and Theatre from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and currently serves as a judge and choreographer for Youth America Grand Prix. Huggins creates work for her arts collective, Kagami, and has trained with artists from the Martha Graham Institute, Jacob's Pillow, and Bates Dance Festival, where she received a fellowship. Drawing from Gaga, Graham, Laban, Ballet, Jazz, Performance Art, and Contemporary techniques, her choreography is driven by diverse perspectives, inventive movement research, and creative collaboration.

TYLER SCHNESE (he/they) is an Assistant Professor of Ballet at Utah Valley University and a choreographer, scholar, and movement director. Tyler holds a BFA from SUNY Purchase and an MFA in Ballet and a Graduate Certificate in Gender Studies from the University of Utah. They performed as a soloist with Hessisches Staatsballett in Wiesbaden, Germany, and Gibney Dance Company in New York City. Their choreography has been commissioned by Repertory Dance Theatre, where they won the Regalia Choreography Competition. Tyler was selected as New England Ballet Theatre's Emerging Choreographer for the 2026–2027 season.

THE BARRY PETERSON PROJECT (KENNEDY BARRY & SKYLAR PETERSON) is a collaborative dance initiative founded in 2025 by Kennedy Barry and Skylar Peterson. They aim to create work rooted in honesty and vulnerability and to connect with audiences through athletic movement. Their choreographic voice stems from a desire to push the boundaries of concert work in the Southern California landscape. They envision the BP Project growing beyond their performances to become a creative entity that choreographs, directs movement, and develops original work for a wide range of creative endeavors. The BP Project's *In-Yun* was awarded Judges' Choice and Audience Choice at Red Rock Dance Festival 2026.

MICHELLE MANZANALES is a Mexican American, Tejana, y Chicana choreographer from Houston, TX. Ballet Hispánico of New York's Rehearsal Director and Artistic Associate for seven seasons followed by eight years as Director of their School of Dance through 2025, Manzanales is now pursuing an MFA from the University of Utah. With works created for the Paul Taylor Dance Company and Oregon Ballet Theater among others, her choreography has been presented internationally by venues such as BAAND Together Dance Festival at Lincoln Center, NYC Center's Fall for Dance, Cervantino Festival (Mexico), International Baltic Ballet Festival (Latvia), and Dance Victoria (Canada).

NATALIE WILLES, raised in Hollywood, was born into dance, beginning her journey at her mother's studio. At 15, she received the prestigious Spotlight Award for Non-Classical Dance, launching her professional career. She later trained with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and became the youngest Radio City Rockette in company history. Her credits span Broadway, film, television, and live events, including *Movin' Out, Jersey Boys, Ted 2, Coco Live*, and the Academy Awards. A passionate educator and mentor, Natalie is also Founder and President of The Ishan Foundation, providing inclusive programs and advocacy for the neurodivergent community through dance, connection, and self-expression.

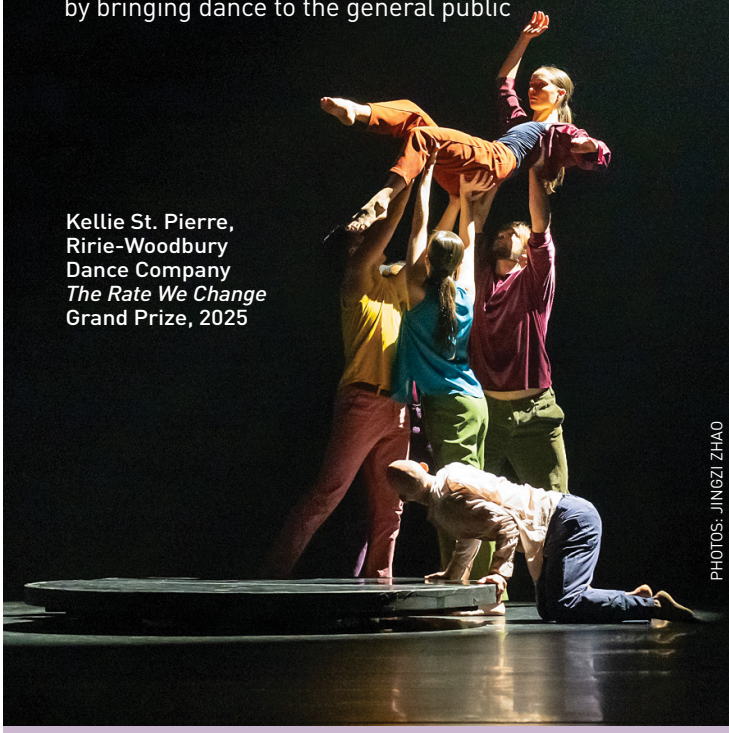
ERICKA JENAE BROWN was introduced to dance at age five through her church's dance ministry and has cultivated a lifelong passion for movement and artistry. She received her formal training at A. B. Miller High School before continuing her studies at Riverside City College and pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Dance at the University of California, Riverside. Ericka has choreographed and performed with numerous dance companies, presenting work at the American College Dance Association and performing as a soloist throughout the country. She currently serves as an adjunct dance professor at Riverside City College and Mt. San Jacinto College.

SEYONG KIM is Associate Professor of Dance at Western Michigan University and International Visiting Professor at Sung-shin Women's University in Seoul, South Korea. A resident choreographer with Wise Ballet Theater in Seoul, he has presented choreographic works internationally at venues and festivals including Landestheater Coburg (Germany), JueDai Taipei International Dance Festival, International Contemporary Dance Festival of Mexico City, ProArteDanza (Canada), Battery Dance Festival, Palm Desert Choreography Festival, American Dance Guild Festival, Washington International Dance Festival, Detroit Dance City Festival, Boston Contemporary Dance Festival, CrossCurrent Asian American Dance Festival, and Movement Research at Judson Church. He holds an MA in Dance Education from New York University.

McCALLUM THEATRE

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



Kellie St. Pierre, Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company
The Rate We Change
Grand Prize, 2025

PHOTOS: JINGZI ZHAO

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



Aiden Carberry & Jordan Johnson,
JA Collective, *Castling the Unknown*
2nd Place, 2025

"I am beyond honored to have received the award and was truly stunned. What a beautiful win for Ririe-Woodbury and myself together, and we will forever remember this moment. Thank you for such a positive experience within the team, community, and festival."

– Kellie St. Pierre/Ririe-Woodbury
Grand Prize, 2025

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.

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McCALLUM THEATRE

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Palm Desert, CA 92260

McCallumTheatre.org

McCallum Theatre is a 501(c)(3) non-profit performing arts center.