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OAKLAND BALLET COMPANY ANNOUNCES SPRING REPERTORY SEASON 2019

JAZZ VISTAS

CELEBRATING OAKLAND'S JAZZ HERITAGE

with live music by OAKTOWN JAZZ WORKSHOP and special guest, vocalist TIFFANY AUSTIN

and the premiere of

***THE OAKTOWN BLUES*, with new choreography by BAT ABBIT, VINCENT CHAVEZ,**

RAMONA KELLEY, GRAHAM LUSTIG, NATALYA SHOAF & DAZAUN SOLEYN

Friday–Saturday, April 5–6

Florence Schwimley Little Theater, Berkeley High School

SPRING GALA FUNDRAISER

Saturday, April 13 at the Bellevue Club, Oakland

Oakland, CA, March 6, 2019 – Oakland Ballet Company announces its 2019 Spring Repertory Season, *Jazz Vistas*, a concert of intimate ballet featuring new and recent works by Bay Area choreographers and live music celebrating Oakland's rich cultural heritage as a center of jazz and blues. A new work, *The Oaktown Blues*, will feature choreography by Artistic Director, **Graham Lustig**; Ballet Master, **Bat Abbit**; company dancers, **Vincent Chavez** and **Ramona Kelley**; as well as local choreographers **Natalya Shoaf** and **Dazaun Soleyn**. The music, inspired by West Oakland's history as an African American cultural mecca and incubator of jazz and blues following World War II, will be performed live by a combo musicians from the **Oaktown Jazz Workshop**, directed by **Ravi Abcarian**, with special guest, acclaimed Oakland-based vocalist, **Tiffany Austin**. Lustig also remounts his work, *VISTA*, which had its Bay Area premiere in 2011 in his first season with the company, and is set to the swanky, charmingly quirky music of John Lurie and the Lounge Lizards. Performances are Friday April 5 at 8pm and Saturday April 6 at 3pm and 8pm in the Florence Schwimley Little Theater, Berkeley High School.

“The most special thing about Oakland Ballet Company is the city of Oakland—where it has been, and where it is going,” said Oakland Ballet Company Artistic Director, Graham Lustig. “Music and dance are part of the fabric of this town. *Jazz Vistas* looks back to honor Oakland’s rich cultural heritage, while also looking forward to support the creation of new work by artists living and working in the city today.”

The musicians of Oaktown Jazz Workshop participating in the performance include **bassist Ravi Abcarian** and rising star **vocalist/alto saxophonist Ashanti Johnson**, with others to be announced. Musical selections will include West Coast blues, swing and boogie woogie classics made famous by Sugar Pie Desanto, Ivory Joe Hunter, Saunders King, Big Mama Thornton, Etta James and Lowell Fulson. Lustig has tasked the choreographers creating different sections of *The Oaktown Blues* with mining these classic tunes for contemporary meaning, mirroring the way a jazz musician imbues decades-old standard repertoire with fresh energy and relevance with each new performance.

ANNUAL SPRING GALA

Oakland Ballet Company presents its annual Spring Gala fundraiser event on Saturday April 13 from 6–10pm at the elegant Bellevue Club on Lake Merritt in Oakland. In what has become an Oakland Ballet tradition, the evening is hosted by ABC7 news reporter, Cheryl Jennings, and includes a cocktail and hors d’oeuvres reception; an informal performance featuring highlights from the company’s spring season, *Jazz Vistas*; a sumptuous three-course dinner catered by the Bellevue Club; and a silent auction offering items such as vacation packages, tickets to local sporting and cultural events, luxury goods, and local services. Attendees are invited to dance with members of Oakland Ballet following dinner, with live music provided by Little Jonny and the Giants.

Auction items this year include breakfast for two with Mayor Libby Schaaf, including a private tour of Oakland’s City Hall; tickets to the musical *Hamilton* plus a hotel stay at the Omni; a trip to wine country; and dinner with the City of Oakland firefighters. Guests may also bid to win a cameo role in the company’s annual *Nutcracker* production at the Paramount Theatre this December. The annual gala is an opportunity for ballet lovers to participate in Oakland’s thriving cultural landscape, by supporting Oakland Ballet’s mission to keep world-class ballet accessible and relevant to diverse East Bay audiences. This year’s fundraiser directly supports a range of educational and artistic activities that reach into all corners of the East Bay. “Discover Dance” educational programs - presented in conjunction with the Company’s annual productions - such as *Luna Mexicana* and Graham Lustig’s *The Nutcracker* - serve more than 15,000 schoolchildren annually through both in-school assemblies, in-theater performances, and in-school dance residencies..

This year's Gala Committee includes: Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf, Honorary Chair; Cheryl Jennings, ABC7 News Anchor, Host; Emeryville Mayor John Bauters, Auctioneer; Jennifer Minore and Dana Zuber, Co-Chairs; and committee members, Deborah Gerstel, Dale Marie Golden, Catherine Haley, Marlene Henderson, Ashok Katdare, Jayne Modean, Carolyn Rinetti and Heather Rowden. The 2019 Gala is sponsored by Bridge Bank, Oakland Athletics, US Bank and Wells Fargo.

Guest Artist and Collaborator Bios

The West Coast's fastest rising jazz vocalist, **Tiffany Austin** combines classic jazz tradition with a deep love for blues, spirituals and contemporary soul. Hailed as a "fully formed masterpiece" by *All About Jazz*, Tiffany's latest release, *Unbroken*, has earned positive reviews from both *Downbeat* and *Jazziz*, and reached #16 on the Jazz Week radio chart. Austin has performed with jazz luminaries Cyrus Chestnut, Rodney Whitaker, Carl Allen, Roy Ayers and John Handy, collaborates frequently with Bay Area bandleader Marcus Shelby, and has performed at venues including Birdland NYC, Dizzy's NYC, SFJAZZ, and Walt Disney Music Hall in Los Angeles. Born and raised in South Los Angeles, Austin is a graduate of UC Berkeley's Boalt School of Law, Austin decided to forgo a career as a lawyer to focus on music.

Oaktown Jazz Workshop (OJW), directed by Ravi Abcarian, is a non-profit, community based, cultural education organization dedicated to passing on the tradition of jazz music to young people through music instruction and educational presentations. Founded in 1994 and based in Oakland, California, OJW celebrates jazz music as an American indigenous art form of profound and artistic significance. A complex and enjoyable music as well as an important indicator of American history, jazz offers a rich legacy that has touched the lives of each generation and continues to be a critical component of contemporary culture.

Bat Abbit's professional career as a dancer began with the Nashville Ballet, continued with North Carolina Dance Theatre where he was a soloist, and finished with American Repertory Ballet. He has performed roles such as Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and created the roles of Fritz and the Nutcracker in Graham Lustig's *The Nutcracker*. Since becoming a Ballet Master, he has staged Lustig's *Evening* and *Cinderella* for Singapore Dance Theatre, and countless other ballets for American Repertory Ballet. Abbit's own works as choreographer include *Jump, Frog, Jump!* for young audiences and a full-length *Coppelia* for Carolina Ballet. In 2011 he became Oakland Ballet's Education Coordinator and Ballet Master.

Vincent Chavez was born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His dance education has been generously funded and nurtured through full tuition scholarships from the following dance institutions: Dance Theater Southwest, Ballet Hispanico, Academy of Nevada Ballet Theatre and Alonzo King LINES Ballet Training

Program. His professional experience includes New Mexico Ballet Company (2003-2007), Nevada Ballet Theatre (2007-2011), Robert Moses' Kin (2012-Current) and Oakland Ballet Company (2013-current). Since Vincent joined OBC he has danced in works by Robert Moses, Molissa Fenley, Val Caniparoli, Janice Garrett/Charles Moulton and Graham Lustig. In addition to company life, Vincent works independently as a Bay Area dance artist, teaching, choreographing, collaborating with various projects and performing as a guest artist.

Ramona Kelley is from Berkeley, CA where she began her training at Berkeley Ballet Theater. She went on to earn a BFA in dance from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts where she performed in works by William Forsythe and Ronald K Brown. Ramona danced the principal role of Betsy in the touring production of Twyla Tharp's *Come Fly Away* and went on to dance with the Tharp company creating new roles in addition to performing repertory works. She has danced leading roles with Oakland Ballet since 2013 and was honored with Dance Europe's 'Outstanding Performance by a Female Dancer' for her work in Lustig's 2017 production of *Consort*. She has taught master classes in Tharp technique across the country and is on the summer ballet faculty at NYU's Tisch Dance.

Natalya Shoaf is a freelance California-based movement specialist, choreographer, teacher, and dancer. She has worked and performed with dazaun.dance and El Wah Movement Dance Theater, and has been invited to present her work in the Black Choreographers Festival (San Francisco and Oakland), LEVYsalon (San Francisco), and CHOPSHOP: Bodies of Work (Washington). She has choreographed for San Francisco music group, Con Brio's latest music video, "Body Language," and hopes to adapt more of her choreography for film. A native of Los Angeles, Shoaf began her training at Los Angeles County High School of the Arts, and has been a Bay Area resident since graduating from the Alonzo King LINES BFA program.

Dazaun Soleyn, artistic director of dazaun.dance, graduated as the University of South Florida with a BFA in Modern Dance Performance and Choreography. Upon graduation Dazaun was accepted as a Trainee at the Alonzo King LINES Ballet Training Program, where he has performed works by Sidra Bell, Kara Davis and Maurya Kerr. Dazaun has also attended Springboard Danse Montréal where he performed works by Shannon Gillen's VIM VIGOR Dance Company. His teaching credits include the Alonzo King LINES Ballet Training Program, University of South Florida, Gibney Dance Center, America Ballet School, Dance Mission Theater, and ODC Commons. Dazaun has also been featured in Red Medjellekh's Dancers Vs. Trump dance on film video, which has over 1.3 millions views on the internet.

About Artistic Director Graham Lustig

Since he joined as Artistic Director in 2010, a position which became full-time in the 2016/17 season, Graham Lustig has revitalized Oakland Ballet Company and helped the organization reclaim its position as a leading San Francisco Bay Area arts institution and first-rate dance company. Lustig's stewardship has brought the company long-term vision and a reputation for nurturing community-based programming, deep audience engagement, and organizational stability. For nine seasons, Lustig has presented his critically-acclaimed production of *The Nutcracker* at Oakland's Paramount Theatre, as well as an annual spring season rooted in contemporary works, including *Scene and Heard* (2018); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2017); *A Cappella: Our Bodies Sing* (2016); the 50th anniversary program, *Five Decades of Dance* (2015), which won an Izzie Award; *Oakland-esque* (2014), *Diaghilev Imagery* (2013) and *Forwards!* (2011). *Luna Mexicana*, Lustig's dance celebration of the Day of the Dead, made its highly successful Oakland premiere in 2016 and has become a fall tradition. *Jangala*, inspired by Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, had its West Coast premiere in March 2018.

In collaboration with several East Bay school districts including Oakland, Castro Valley, Dublin, Hayward, Livermore, New Haven (Union City), Pleasanton, Richmond, and San Leandro Unified School Districts, under Lustig's watch Oakland Ballet has expanded its educational outreach program, *Discover Dance*, to provide educational arts programs to more than 24 area schools annually. Educational events such as in-school assemblies, open rehearsals and student matinees reach more than 15,000 local school children each year.

About Oakland Ballet Company

For more than 54 years, Oakland Ballet Company has inspired the East Bay community and beyond by keeping the art of ballet exciting, relevant and accessible, primarily through the presentation of works of the Diaghilev repertoire and modern masterpieces. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Graham Lustig since 2010, the Company has renewed its commitment to artistic excellence with imaginative programs that engage contemporary audiences—through close relationships with living choreographers, the commissioning of new works, innovative collaborations with diverse artists and communities, and compelling educational programs that cultivate the next generation of dance lovers.

A cornerstone of Oakland Ballet Company's legacy has been engagement with the community. Oakland Ballet's *Discover Dance* outreach program features educational programs at East Bay schools; educational in-theater performances; free performances throughout the community at events such as the Oakland Art Murmur and Oakland Dance Festival; ticket donations to season performances; and scholarships to company training programs.

Oakland Ballet's 2018/19 season sponsors include: Chevron, US Bank, the Walther and Elise Haas Fund, California Arts Council, the City of Oakland Cultural Funding Program, the City of Emeryville, Clorox Company Foundation, the David and Lynn Kravis Family Foundation, Snider and Associates, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, the Bernard Osher Foundation, Matson, Douglas Parking, and TMG Partners.

Ticket Information

Tickets for **Jazz Vistas: Oakland Ballet Company Spring Repertory Season** on Friday, April 5 at 8pm and Saturday, April 6 at 3pm and 8pm in the Florence Schwimley Theater, Berkeley High School are \$25-50, with discounts available for seniors, college students, and children under age 18. Tickets are on sale now, available at the door and in advance at brownpapertickets.com.

Tickets for **Oakland Ballet's Spring Gala** on Saturday April 13 from 6–10pm at the Bellevue Club are priced at \$200-\$250; tables of 10 are \$2,500. All tickets are on sale now, online at www.oaklandballet.org; by phone at 510-893-3132; or by mailing a check to Oakland Ballet at 2201 Broadway, Suite LL17, Oakland CA 94612.

CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

What: Oakland Ballet Company Presents *Jazz Vistas: Spring Repertory Program*
When: Friday, April 5 at 8pm and Saturday, April 6 at 3pm and 8pm
Where: Florence Schwimley Little Theater, Berkeley High School
1930 Allston Way, Berkeley CA 94704
Tickets: Tickets are \$20-50, with discounts available for seniors, college students, and children under age 18. Tickets are available at www.brownpapertickets.com.
Information: Call 510-893-3132, write info@oaklandballet.org, or visit www.oaklandballet.org
Description: Oakland Ballet Company's Spring Repertory Season, *Jazz Vistas*, celebrates Oakland's rich cultural heritage as a center of jazz and blues, and features new and recent works by Bay Area choreographers with live music by members of Oaktown Jazz Workshop and guest vocalist, Tiffany Austin. For more information, visit www.oaklandballet.org.

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What: Oakland Ballet Company Spring Gala Fundraiser
When: Saturday April 13, 6:00–10:00 p.m.
Where: The Bellevue Club, 525 Bellevue Ave, Oakland, CA 94610
Tickets: Tickets start at \$200, on sale now, online at www.oaklandballet.org; by phone at 510-893-3132; or by mailing a check to Oakland Ballet Company at 2201 Broadway, Suite 206, Oakland CA 94612.
Information: Call 510-893-3132, write info@oaklandballet.org, or visit www.oaklandballet.org
Description: Oakland Ballet Company's Spring Gala Fundraiser features a cocktail reception, dinner, silent auction, live music, dancing, and performance highlights, with proceeds supporting the company's spring season, and educational outreach programs.

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