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OAKLAND BALLET COMPANY ANNOUNCES SPRING 2014 SEASON

***Oakland-esque* features world premieres by Sonya Delwaide, Molissa Fenley, Robert Moses and Artistic Director Graham Lustig, with guest dancers from AXIS Dance Company and street dance crew Turffeinz**

May 16-17, 2014

Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts, Oakland

Oakland, CA, March 10, 2014 – Oakland Ballet Company presents its spring season program *Oakland-esque*, a portrait in dance of the cultural and natural wonders of Oakland featuring new works by esteemed local choreographers, in collaboration with area composers, musicians, dance companies, visual artists and street dancers. Four world-premiere dance works by choreographers **Sonya Delwaide, Molissa Fenley, Robert Moses** and Artistic Director **Graham Lustig** feature Company dancers with special guest performers from Oakland’s groundbreaking **AXIS Dance Company** and the turf dancers from the popular Oakland street dance crew the **Turffeinz**, with music ranging from grass-roots Oakland hip-hop, to classic Oakland funk, to a new percussion score by area cellist/composer **Joan Jeanrenaud**, performed live by Mills College alumnae. As a company grounded in the cultural life of Oakland for nearly 50 years, Oakland Ballet continues its longstanding support of artistic work of, about, and for the city, asking each choreographer to present their personal artistic vision of Oakland, from fast-moving urban pop culture to historical roots to the meditative splendor of the regional parks. Oakland painter **Sam Renaissance** brings his bold and vibrant vision of city life to the production’s costumes and scenery. Performances of *Oakland-esque* are Friday May 16 at 8pm; and Saturday May 17 at 2pm and 8pm in Downtown Oakland’s historic Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts, 1428 Alice Street. General admission tickets are on sale now, priced at \$35 (\$30 seniors/\$20 ages 17 and under and college students). For more information and to purchase tickets visit www.oaklandballet.org or call (510) 893-3132.

Media:

Turffeinz video “Dancing in the Rain” <http://youtu.be/JQRRnAhmB58>

Sonya Delwaide and AXIS Dance Company <http://youtu.be/jkY2N8-vUVk>

In her first collaboration with Oakland Ballet, acclaimed choreographer **Molissa Fenley** creates a piece inspired by her walks among the Oakland redwoods. In this, her first-ever work set exclusively on male dancers, Fenley conveys the feeling of traversing the Oakland natural landscape, “views constantly shifting from one moment to the next, the natural process of the hills, the switchbacks – what it is like

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spatially to be on a long walk through the woods, and trying to condense that idea onto the stage.” The newly-commissioned music score, by star cellist/composer **Joan Jeanrenaud**, will be performed live by the virtuoso young percussionists and Mills College alumnae **Nava Dunkelman** and **Anna Wray**.

Choreographer **Sonya Delwaide** creates a new work incorporating two guest dancers, **Sonsherée Giles** and **Joel Brown**, from Oakland’s **AXIS Dance Company**, into the ranks of Oakland Ballet’s company dancers. Founded in 1987, and under the leadership of Artistic Director Judith Smith, AXIS was one of the first companies to integrate dancers who were dependent on wheelchairs, crutches, and prosthetic limbs, and in this new piece, Delwaide explores how dancers with mixed-abilities can collaborate with dancers with classical training. Delwaide last collaborated with Oakland Ballet in its 2011 spring season, and here brings her longstanding creative relationship with AXIS – she was the first outside choreographer to be invited to work with them – to initiate this first association between the two prestigious Oakland dance institutions and encourage innovation between them. “AXIS is a great symbol of Oakland,” she says. “AXIS has transformed the dance community at large by taking risks.”

In a new ballet-meets-hip hop collaboration, Artistic Director **Graham Lustig** creates a work that incorporates the thrilling improvisational vocabulary of two street dancers from the dazzling Oakland turfing crew, **Turffeinz**. Local favorites of the Oakland-born street dance style called turfing (“taking up room on the floor”) since one of their online videos went viral (with more than 6 million hits to date), the Turffeinz create improvised choreography with effortlessly-executed backflips, gestures borrowed from ballet and martial arts, and elaborate breakdance-style arm movements. “As a trained ballet dancer and choreographer, the movement of the Turffeinz fascinates and inspires me,” says Lustig. “These guys dance on the tips of their sneakers! Familiar movements we know in the ballet as *relevés*, *pirouettes*, *bourrées* and *piqués* are effortlessly woven into their free-form improvisations. It is beautiful and expresses a joy that is beyond words.”

Two Turffeinz dancers, **Rayshawn “Looney” Thompson** and **Garion “Noh Justice” Morgan**, will join company dancers in a new work that celebrates the similarities between the two dance art forms. “I’m interested in showing the world how versatile turf dancing is,” says Thompson. Thompson began dancing while at student at Oakland High School, later trained in hip hop dance with Jeriel Bey, and was a member of Oakland’s first-ever turfing group, the Architeckz, before founding the Turffeinz. Morgan, who has won many dance battles up and down the West Coast, has appeared on MTV and BET, performed at community events and local venues like the Oracle Coliseum, Southern Exposure Gallery, and Oakland Museum of California Art, and tours as a dancer with the rap artist E-40. For Morgan, working with Oakland Ballet is of interest for him to grow as an artist: “This collaboration with the ballet will not only develop my dance style, but also discipline my dance state of mind,” he says.

Robert Moses’ new piece reflects on Oakland’s rich history as a center of funk and soul music in the 1970s and beyond, by incorporating the music of Oakland-raised artists such as electric “slap” bass pioneer Larry Graham, Jr., of the iconic bands Sly and the Family Stone and Graham Central Station.

As part of its “Discover Dance” educational outreach program, Oakland Ballet will hold an educational dress rehearsal performance exclusively for East Bay middle school students on Friday, May 16 at 1:30pm. This program for 300 young members of the local community will provide a unique opportunity

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for the students to learn about dance and interact with the artists during an open discussion with Mr. Lustig, the choreographers, dancers and musicians.

ABOUT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR GRAHAM LUSTIG

An internationally-recognized choreographer and teacher, Graham Lustig danced with the Dutch National Ballet and the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet before embarking on a freelance career as choreographer that has encompassed more than sixty works over four continents. As a young dancer Lustig was coached by Kurt Joos, Ninette de Valois, John Taras, Kenneth MacMillan, Nicholai Beriosov and Rudi van Dantzig, and worked with Galina Samsova, Eva Evdokimova and Rudolf Nureyev.

Lustig was Choreographer-in-Residence at the Washington Ballet, and served for eleven years as Artistic Director of the American Repertory Ballet, where he expanded the organization's education and outreach programs, touring the company to New York City venues such as the Joyce Theater and Symphony Space as well as nationally. In addition to ballet and contemporary dance works, Lustig has also directed and choreographed *West Side Story*, and choreographed *The Boyfriend*, *Aida*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Carmen*, *Ariodante* and *Francesca di Rimini*.

Since his appointment as Artistic Director of Oakland Ballet Company in 2010, Lustig has presented four seasons of his *Nutcracker* and two spring repertory productions, *Forwards!* (2011) and *Diaghilev Imagery* (2013), including newly-commissioned works by Sonya Delwaide, Robert Moses and Amy Seiwert. Lustig's ballet *Infinitum* was included in the West Wave Dance Festival (2011) and he initiated Oakland Ballet Company's annual summer *Ballet Boot Camp*, a two-week dance and choreography workshop now in its fourth year, as well as ballet technique classes held weekly on Saturdays at Oakland School for the Arts. In 2010 Lustig founded his own non-profit dance organization, Lustig Dance Theatre, encompassing a dance and wellness studio, plus a professional dance company dedicated to serving the central New Jersey community.

GUEST CHOREOGRAPHER BIOGRAPHIES

Sonya Delwaide, Associate Professor in the Mills Dance Department, has earned acclaim as a choreographer, teacher and performer within the United States and Canada over her more than three-decade career. A native of Quebec, she has resided in the Bay Area since 1996. In that time, Delwaide has received a Bay Area Goldie Award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian, was named in the 2001 "Top 10" list in the San Francisco Chronicle and in Dance Magazine's 2002 "Top 25 People to Watch." She was awarded a prestigious Isadora Duncan award in 2011. As a choreographer Delwaide has created more than 70 pieces on companies such as Oakland Ballet, Ottawa Ballet, L'Ecole Supérieure des Grands Ballets Canadiens, Hubbard Street, AXIS Dance Company, Berkeley Ballet Theater and Compagnie de Danse L'Astragale (for whom she was the artistic director from 1992 to 1999), among others. She was a winner in the 2006 New American Choreographic Talent organized by Ballet Austin and the 2000 winner of Hubbard Street National Choreographic Competition.

Choreographer and performer **Molissa Fenley** has choreographed over 75 works in her 36-year career. On the dance faculty at Mills College since 1999, she divides her time between Oakland and

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New York City. She formed Molissa Fenley and Company in 1977, and has been commissioned by The Kitchen, Dance Theater Workshop, American Dance Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Jacob's Pillow, to name a few; and has created work for companies such as Ohio Ballet, the Australian Dance Theatre and the Deutsche Oper Ballet of Berlin. Fenley has collaborated with visual artists and composers such as Henryk Gorecki, Richard Long, Alvin Lucier, Kiki Smith, Laurie Anderson and Philip Glass. She has earned multiple Bessie Awards, and is a recipient of a Rome Prize (2008) and Guggenheim Fellowship (2008).

Since founding Robert Moses' Kin in 1995 in San Francisco, choreographer **Robert Moses** has created numerous works of varying styles and genres for his highly praised dance company. His work explores topics ranging from oral traditions in African American culture, and the life and work of author James Baldwin, to the dark side of contemporary urban culture, and the complexities of parentage and identity. Moses has collaborated with Margaret Jenkins, Alonzo King, Sara Shelton Mann, Joanna Haigood, SoVoSo, Marcus Shelby, Keith Terry, Frank Boehm, Somei Yoshino Taiko Ensemble, Bill Morrison, Kid Beyond and Youth Speaks. Moses has choreographed for San Francisco Opera, Philadanco, Cincinnati Ballet, Transitions Dance Company of the Laban Center, African Cultural Exchange (UK), Oakland Ballet, Moving People Dance, and Robert Henry Johnson Dance Company, among others. He has choreographed for film, theater and opera, for Lorraine Hansberry Theater, New Conservatory Theater, Los Angeles Prime Moves Festival (L.A.C.E.), and Olympic Arts Festival.

OAKLAND BALLET DANCERS FOR 2014 SPRING SEASON

Oakland-esque features company dancers: Victoria Jahn, Emily Kerr, Stephanie Salts, Megan Terry, Sharon Wehner, Vincent Chavez, Evan Flood, Barry Kerollis, Marte Madera and Matthew Roberts.

ABOUT OAKLAND BALLET COMPANY

For nearly fifty years, Oakland Ballet Company has maintained its commitment to inspiring the East Bay community and beyond by keeping the tradition of ballet exciting, vibrant and accessible, mainly through the presentation of works of the Diaghilev repertoire and modern masterpieces. Oakland Ballet was founded in 1965 by Ronn Guidi, and gained international recognition through its historical reconstructions of ballets from the legendary Ballets Russes of Serge Diaghilev; its mounting of classic works of Americana; and its creation of innovative contemporary choreography.

In 2000, Ronn Guidi retired and Karen Brown succeeded him as Artistic Director. Brown continued Oakland Ballet's commitment to performing great works of classical ballet, and focused especially on the work of local and contemporary choreographers. Oakland Ballet closed in 2006, but was revived in 2007 with Guidi returning as Artistic Director. Since its rebirth, Oakland Ballet Company has brought its classic mix of drama and family classics to the Oakland and East Bay communities and continues a longstanding partnership with Michael Morgan and the Oakland East Bay Symphony.

A cornerstone of Oakland Ballet Company's legacy has been engagement with the community. OBC's "Discover Dance" community outreach program features educational programs at East Bay schools,

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Oakland Ballet Company

Celebrating Dance for Over 45 Years

Graham Lustig, Artistic Director

educational in-theater performances, free performances throughout the community, such as the Oakland Art Murmur and Oakland Pride Festival, ticket donations to season performances and scholarships to OBC training programs. In 2010, the Oakland Ballet Company welcomed Graham Lustig as Artistic Director. Lustig's career as a dancer, artistic director and choreographer parallels Oakland Ballet's tradition of presenting historically vibrant work while championing new choreography.

Oakland Ballet's spring season is supported by Chevron, the City of Oakland Cultural Funding Program, the San Francisco Foundation, Bank of America, Clorox, the East Bay Community Foundation, the Matson Foundation, Wells Fargo, Kaiser Permanente, Shorenstein Properties, Cypress Security, Highland Partners, Recology, Signature Development Group and Webcor Builders.

TICKETS

Tickets for *Oakland-esque* are on sale now, and priced as follows: \$35 General Admission / \$30 Seniors / \$20 Children 17 and under and students (College students with valid ID) Tickets may be purchased on the Oakland Ballet Company website at www.oaklandballet.org

VENUE INFORMATION

Oakland Ballet Company's spring season takes place in the intimate 350-seat theater of the beautifully-renovated Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts (formerly Alice Arts Center), located in historic Downtown Oakland. The Malonga Center is located at 1428 Alice Street, within blocks of the 12th Street/Oakland City Center BART Station. Several parking garages are nearby.

CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

What: Oakland Ballet Company presents *Oakland-esque*

Program: New Work by Graham Lustig (world premiere)
New work by Sonya Delwaide (world premiere)
New work by Molissa Fenley (world premiere)
New work by Robert Moses (world premiere)

When: Friday May 16 at 8pm; Saturday May 17 at 2pm and 8pm

Where: Malonga Casquelourd Center for the Arts, 1428 Alice Street, Oakland CA

Tickets: Tickets are \$35 (\$30 seniors/\$20 children and students); available online at www.oaklandballet.org

Description: Oakland Ballet Company presents *Oakland-esque*, a dance portrait of Oakland featuring world premieres by Sonya Delwaide, Molissa Fenley, Robert Moses and Graham Lustig, with guest dancers from AXIS Dance Company and street dance crew Turffeinz.

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