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## **The School of Ballet Arizona Appoints New School Director**

*James Payne to Lead Elite Ballet School Beginning May 27*

**PHOENIX** – [The School of Ballet Arizona](#), the official training school of Ballet Arizona, is excited to announce the appointment of its new school director, James Payne, who will assume the position beginning May 27.

The School of Ballet Arizona offers comprehensive ballet education for students of all ages and skill levels, from beginner to pre-professional. The School's curriculum emphasizes classic ballet technique, artistry and performance opportunities, guided by experienced faculty who bring professional expertise to the studio. With a commitment to excellence and individual growth, The School fosters a love for dance while preparing students for a future in the arts or beyond.

A respected figure in ballet education boasting over 35 years of professional experience in the art, Payne comes to Ballet Arizona from Ballet West in Salt Lake City, Utah, where he served as the Principal Faculty and Trainee Coordinator at the organization's Academy for three years.

The move represents a homecoming for Payne, who began his training in Phoenix with Russian choreographer and dancer, Michel Fokine's great niece Nina Marlow before moving on to a performing career with Ballet West (1989-1994) and Houston Ballet (1994-2001), which afforded him the opportunity to perform internationally, working with exceptional choreographers and coaches.

Excelling at both classical and contemporary work allowed him to perform soloist and principal roles in all the classics as well as work by Ben Stevenson, Christopher Bruce, Ronald Hynd, George Balanchine, Val Caniparoli, Glen Tetley, William Forsythe, John Neumeier, Eugene Loring, Helgi Tomasson, Peter Martins, Jiri Kylian, Trey McIntyre and more.

Upon his retirement from the stage, Payne served as Houston Ballet's company manager and then co-founded and directed a student performing company and school for 17 years in the Woodlands, Texas. He has choreographed and produced five full-length ballets and many one-act ballets, and has also served as Philadelphia Ballet's School Director, Houston Ballet Academy faculty, and sat on the board of the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

Today, Payne continues to serve as a master teacher and judge for Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) and repetiteur for renowned dancer Trey McIntyre, staging his ballets internationally. After his family, Jim's biggest passion is teaching and mentoring the next generation of artists.

"It is with both humility and excitement that I accept the position of School Director. I am deeply honored by the confidence that Daniela Cardim and Jami Kozemczak have placed in me to lead this team into the future. The School plays a pivotal role in the overall growth and long-term success of the Ballet Arizona, and we have a unique opportunity to elevate The School of Ballet

Arizona to the next level,” said Payne. “While this will certainly be a challenging endeavor, I bring years of experience in building and leading schools, and I am confident that together as a team, we will combine our expertise, creativity, and dedication to create a destination School that will usher in the next generation of dancers.”

“It is with great excitement that we welcome James Payne as the new School Director for the School of Ballet Arizona,” said Jami Kozemczak, executive director of Ballet Arizona. “James brings a wealth of experience, passion and vision to this role. His dedication to the development of young dancers and his commitment to excellence align perfectly with our mission to foster the next generation of artists. Under his leadership, the school will continue to grow and thrive, providing exceptional training and opportunities for all our students.”

For more information about The School of Ballet Arizona, please visit <https://balletaz.org/school/>.

### **Ballet Arizona**

Since 1986, Ballet Arizona has been dedicated to preserving and celebrating classical dance while creating new and innovative works. Under the new artistic direction of internationally acclaimed choreographer Daniela Cardim - a former soloist with the Ballet of Municipal Theatre of Rio de Janeiro and Dutch National Ballet - Ballet Arizona is excited to follow her lead to the future of dance in Arizona. During its 38th season, the Valley’s professional ballet company will present *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, the U.S. premiere of *Frida*, *Spring Mix*, *All Balanchine* and *Eroica*. The School of Ballet Arizona, under the direction of Maria Simonetti, promotes access to the art form of ballet through dance education, with a focus on excellence in the form, directing each student to a life-long love of dance. Following this vision, Ballet Arizona connects to more than 22,000 children and families every year through its free and low-cost outreach programs. For more information, visit [balletaz.org](https://balletaz.org).

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