

Q&A:
Artistic Director
Daniela Cardim

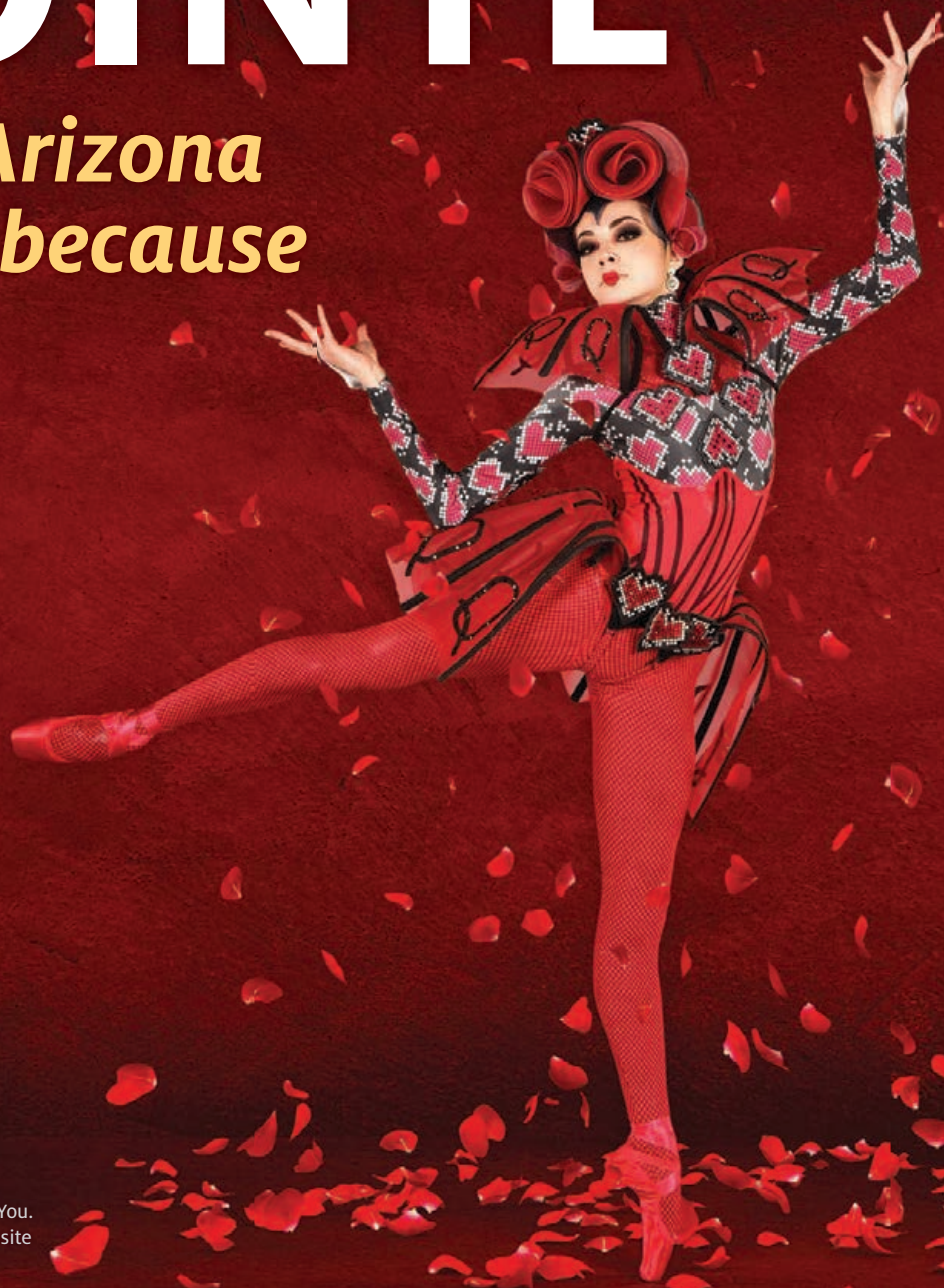
**Letter from the
Executive Director:**
Jami Kozemczak

Corporate Spotlight:
Grand Canyon
University

Production Spotlight:
Live Music

TURNING POINTE

*Ballet Arizona
thrives because
of you.*



Ballet Arizona dancer Cheyenne You.
Photo by Ed Flores, photo composite
by Angie Slade Design.



Your generosity allows Ballet Arizona to create, explore, and connect in meaningful ways.

Welcome to the Winter 2026 edition of *Turning Pointe*. As the season unfolds, I am continually inspired by the artistry taking shape on our stages and by the extraordinary community of supporters who make this work possible.

We are thrilled to bring *ALICE (in Wonderland)* to the stage through Septime Webre's imaginative interpretation. Classical ballet and contemporary movement come together to create a world that is whimsical, athletic, and full of wonder. With striking designs and vibrant storytelling, this production invites audiences to experience a familiar tale in an entirely new way.

Cacti & Other Works celebrates the breadth of ballet through iconic works by George Balanchine and Hans van Manen alongside Alexander Ekman's bold and playful *Cacti*. Together, these ballets highlight the range and artistic curiosity that define our company today.

In this issue, we also celebrate the partnerships and relationships that strengthen our work beyond the stage. Our continued collaboration with Grand Canyon University reflects a shared belief in the value of meaningful connection through the arts. We also honor the life and legacy of Judie Cosentino, whose transformational generosity will help shape the artistic foundation of each new season.

Every story in these pages reflects one essential truth: Ballet Arizona thrives because of you. Thank you for helping us bring imagination, beauty, and connection to life.

Sincerely,

Daniela Cardim, *Artistic Director*

BEHIND THE SCENES

with Daniela Cardim

Q: What excites you about presenting *ALICE (in Wonderland)* and *Cacti & Other Works* this season?

A: The contrast between them is compelling. Together, they show how many different ways ballet can speak to an audience. *ALICE (in Wonderland)* draws people into a richly imaginative world of storytelling, while *Cacti & Other Works* challenges expectations through abstraction and musical precision. What connects them is the dancers—they are asked to stretch themselves in different directions, technically and artistically. For me, that balance is essential. A season should feel varied, alive, and reflective of where ballet is today.

Q: What do you hope audiences discover beneath the spectacle that is Septime Webre's *ALICE (in Wonderland)*?

A: I hope audiences notice how much craft and discipline live underneath the fantasy. Septime blends highly demanding choreography with storytelling and character-driven movement, often drawing on the ballet canon in playful ways. For ballet lovers, those references add an extra layer of appreciation; for others, the experience simply feels imaginative and joyful.

What makes this ballet especially challenging is how much it asks of the dancers beyond choreography. They must fully commit as actors—embracing humor, exaggeration, and vulnerability in ways that are very different from traditional storybook roles. The men, in particular, are pushed to their limits with many of them taking on multiple characters throughout the evening. Extensive partnering, significant lifting, rapid costume changes, and sustained stamina are required.

This production introduces technical elements Ballet Arizona has never attempted before, including characters flying onstage. It also engages the entire organization,



In Rehearsal ALICE (in Wonderland)



with students from the School performing alongside the company as an integral part of the story. What appears effortless onstage is the result of extraordinary coordination and collaboration, behind the scenes.

Q: *Cacti & Other Works* spans generations of choreographers. What does this range say about Ballet Arizona's artistic identity today?

A: These works are masterpieces in very different ways. George Balanchine's *Apollo* remains timeless – the clarity of the choreography and the purity of the lines still feel incredibly powerful. Hans van Manen's *Concertante* is restrained and abstract, yet emotionally intense. His work is dependent on nuance, musical precision, and intention. The steps may appear simple; without depth and interpretation, the ballet does not exist.

Cacti takes you somewhere completely different. It is playful, rhythmic, and deliberately resists interpretation. The dancers must be precise while embracing humor and spontaneity, often in direct relationship with the musicians onstage. For audiences, it is an invitation to let go and simply experience the moment. Together, these works reflect a company that values tradition, curiosity, and a willingness to explore new artistic terrain.

Q: Why does this moment feel especially meaningful for Ballet Arizona right now?

A: This feels like a moment of growth and openness. We are honoring the traditions that define ballet while also asking new questions about how stories are told and how movement connects to our lives today. Not every work will feel familiar, but each is chosen with intention and care.

What has moved me most is how willing our audience has been to come along on that journey. Ballet should inspire, but it should also reflect the full range of human experience. I am deeply grateful for the trust our supporters place in us, and I believe that trust is helping shape a vibrant future for Ballet Arizona.



In the Spotlight:

Grand Canyon University

Since 2017, Grand Canyon University has been an invaluable partner in advancing Ballet Arizona's mission to ignite the human spirit through the magic of dance. Beginning with one of our most beloved initiatives, *Ballet Under the Stars*, their generosity has grown in meaningful ways, deepening our community impact and supporting our artistic excellence.

GCU's early investment helped ensure the long-term success of *Ballet Under the Stars*, a signature program that brings free, high-quality performances to public parks across the Valley each fall. By removing financial and geographic barriers, the program introduces thousands of community members to an evening of exceptional dance and shared cultural connection. For many, it is their first time experiencing ballet, creating a welcoming entry point into the arts for people of all ages and backgrounds.

One of the highlights of these performances is *Class Act*. This

companion program introduces students from Title I schools to the fundamentals of classical ballet and the experience of learning and performing choreography for their families and neighbors. With the support of partners like GCU, these young dancers experience the pride of stepping onstage, building confidence, creativity, and a lasting sense of accomplishment.

In recent seasons, GCU has expanded its partnership to include support for Ballet Arizona's mainstage productions. Last season, the University proudly sponsored Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Frida*, a bold, original work inspired by the life and art of Frida Kahlo. Their support helped bring this visually striking and emotionally resonant story to life, underscoring a shared dedication to bold artistry and culturally meaningful storytelling.

"Grand Canyon University is proud to support Ballet Arizona and its

commitment to making the arts accessible to all," says Christel Mosby, GCE's Chief Marketing Officer.

This season, GCU's generosity continues with their sponsorship of Septime Webre's *ALICE (in Wonderland)*, an imaginative and visually stunning addition to Ballet Arizona's repertoire. By supporting these performances, GCU plays a direct role in bringing high-caliber performances to the stage and creating immersive experiences that captivate audiences of all ages.

For more than seven years, GCU has demonstrated a deep belief in the power of dance to connect, inspire, and uplift. Ballet Arizona is grateful for this enduring partnership and the future it helps make possible.



"From the joy of Ballet Under the Stars to the excellence of their mainstage productions, Ballet Arizona enriches our community through creativity, education, and cultural engagement. We believe supporting the arts is an investment in a vibrant, inspired Arizona."

~ Christel Mosby, GCE's Chief Marketing Officer





LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jami Kozemczak

A New Year of Firsts, Growth, and Gratitude

This past year truly became a year of firsts. And as we all know, every milestone begins with a first step.

We are just coming off the highest-grossing production of Ib Andersen's *The Nutcracker* in Ballet Arizona's history, welcoming more than 35,000 patrons to share in the magic of the season. We are especially proud that this cherished tradition continues to introduce new families and first-time attendees to the art form, shaping a broader and more inclusive future for ballet in our community.

Another meaningful first arrived with *The Sleeping Beauty*, marking Daniela Cardim's debut work as Artistic Director. Her luminous vision and artistry launched the season in grand style, setting a bold tone for what lies ahead and reaffirming our commitment to classical excellence paired with fresh perspective.

This season also reflects intentional growth within our company. We welcomed five new dancers and continue to deepen our artistic bench—investing in the versatility and longevity of our artists as we expand the scope of our repertoire. That commitment is already resonating with audiences, from the nearly sold-out premiere of Septime Webre's *ALICE (in Wonderland)* to two additional premieres in March that will introduce works by Alexander Ekman and Hans van Manen to Ballet Arizona for the first time.

Beyond the stage, our Community Engagement team achieved a powerful first with the inaugural sensory-friendly adapted performance of *The Nutcracker*. Families shared heartfelt appreciation for a performance environment where they felt welcomed and comfortable – underscoring how access and inclusion strengthen not only our audiences, but our mission.

Honoring tradition while embracing renewal, we returned to the historic Arizona Biltmore for our annual *Dance With Me* gala – where this celebration first began decades ago. It was a remarkable evening, raising more than \$500,000 in support of our mission and honoring Emerita Board member, Joan Berry, and her husband, Charlie, for their extraordinary generosity and dedication spanning more than 40 years.

One of my most meaningful “firsts” – and one that continues to require your support – was the launch of our employee

retirement match program. This initiative reflects a long-term investment in the well-being of our dancers and staff, recognizing that sustaining artistic excellence begins with nurturing the people who carry our work forward.

As I reflect on the year, here are my takeaways:

- The more tickets we share with deserving families, the more our audiences grow.
- The more we invest in our people, the higher the caliber of our artistry.
- The more time we spend in the community, the more people discover, and fall in love, with Ballet Arizona.

Thank you for being part of every first, every step forward, and everything still to come.

Jami Kozemczak, Executive Director





Celebrating the Life & Legacy of Judie Cosentino



“Her life was art — in the paintings she created, the music she cherished, the compassion she showed to every living being. May every note from the orchestra and every step our dancers take echo her spirit — creative, tenacious, and forever inspiring.”

— Jami Kozemczak,
Executive Director, Ballet Arizona

Ballet Arizona is honored to celebrate the life of Judie Cosentino, a devoted patron whose generosity and love for the arts continue to resonate throughout our organization and Arizona’s cultural community. Judie believed deeply in the power of artistic expression—not only as entertainment, but as a vital force that connects and elevates the human spirit.

Born in San Francisco, Judie’s life carried her across the country—from Chicago to decades in New York City—before she ultimately made Arizona her home in the 1990s. Her life was infused with creativity. An artist in every sense of the word, she painted and sculpted, finding meaning in the arts for their ability to elevate culture and illuminate beauty in everyday life. Music held a special place in her heart, and she approached the performing arts with both reverence and joy, valuing the shared experience that brings artists and audiences together.

Judie was deeply engaged in the communities she supported, building

lasting relationships with the artists, musicians, and organizations she believed in. Her generosity touched Ballet Arizona, The Phoenix Symphony, KBAQ, Arizona Theatre Company, and the Humane Society—reflecting both her devotion to the performing arts and the compassion she carried into every aspect of her life. Through this wide-ranging support, Judie demonstrated a deep respect for the creative process, the people behind it, and the shared humanity that connects us all.

In recognition of Judie’s lifelong love of ballet, classical music, and live performance, Ballet Arizona is honored posthumously establish the **Judie Cosentino Endowment Fund**, supporting the company’s October production in perpetuity. The opening of each season at Symphony Hall will celebrate her memory and the artistic traditions she held dear, carrying her legacy forward at the moment a new chapter begins.

Judie’s generosity leaves a lasting imprint on Ballet Arizona. We are deeply grateful for her life, her artistry, and her unwavering commitment to the transformative power of the performing arts.

Scan the QR code to learn more about how you can create a lasting impact through Ballet Arizona’s Legacy for Dance program.



When Music Breathes & Ballet Comes Alive

At its core, ballet is a living conversation between movement and sound, one that comes alive most fully when music is performed live. In those moments, the orchestra does more than accompany the dancers; it breathes with them, shaping tempo, emotion, and storytelling in real time. Live music does not simply support ballet, it animates it.

When dancers perform to a live orchestra, every performance becomes a shared act of creation. Subtle shifts in tempo, the swell of a phrase, or the tension of a held pause invite dancers to listen and respond in the moment. This dynamic exchange deepens musicality, sharpens intuition, and heightens presence on stage. For audiences, the effect is equally powerful. Live music fills the hall with energy that recordings cannot replicate, transforming each performance into a singular, unrepeatable experience that is felt as much as it is heard.

Ballet Arizona’s upcoming production of *ALICE (in Wonderland)* offers a vivid

George Balanchine once said, “Dancing is music made visible,” – a sentiment that has defined ballet for generations.

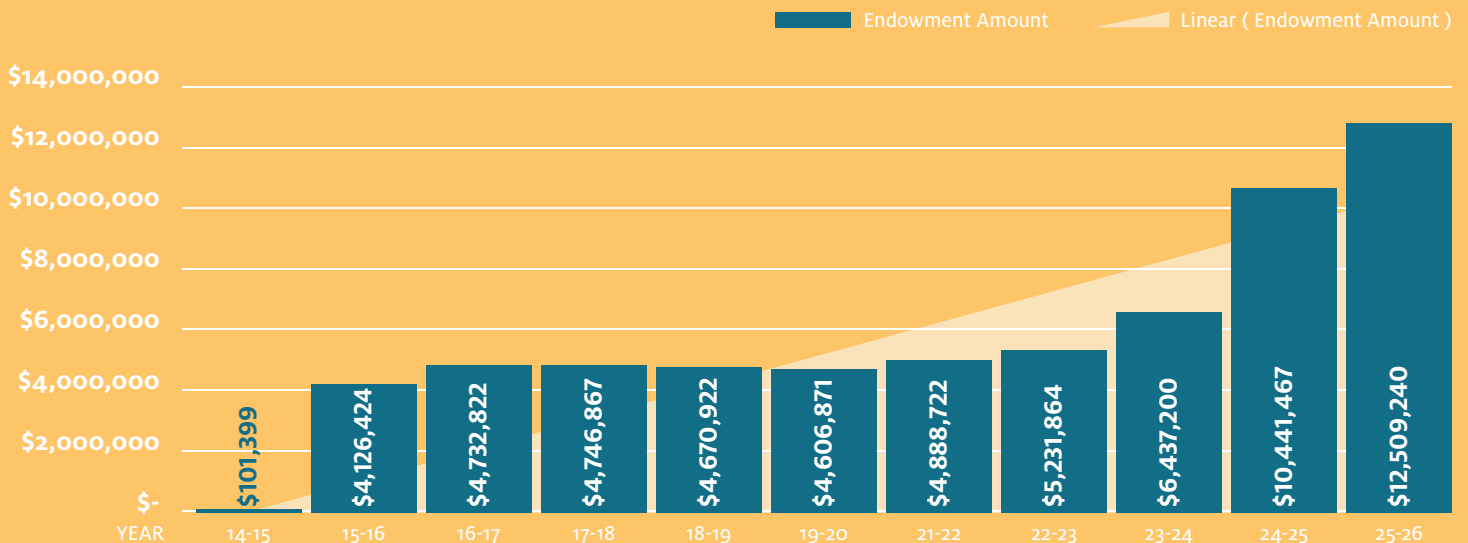
example of how live music elevates storytelling. The ballet’s original score, composed by Matthew Pierce, was created hand-in-hand with Choreographer, Septime Webre, to bring Lewis Carroll’s fantastical world to life. From playful motifs that mirror Alice’s curiosity to darker, dissonant textures that underscore moments of chaos and transformation, the music moves as fluidly and imaginatively as the dancers themselves. Scored for strings and percussion, Pierce’s composition is tonal, athletic, and richly expressive – designed not to stand apart from the ballet, but to exist

in perfect harmony with it.

For dancers, performing *ALICE (in Wonderland)* with live music offers an added layer of discovery. Rather than counting against a fixed recording, they are immersed in a responsive soundscape—one that invites spontaneity and deepened connection to the story unfolding on stage.

Providing live music is both an artistic commitment and a profound investment in the audience experience. It strengthens collaboration between dancers and musicians, builds emotional resonance, and honors ballet as the living art form it is meant to be. Each season, this commitment represents one of the largest investments in the company’s operating budget, with live music costs exceeding \$500,000. In a world increasingly shaped by screens and soundtracks, live music remains rare—and therefore precious. It is a tradition we treasure, one that ensures every performance is not just seen or heard, but truly felt.

THE BALLET ARIZONA ENDOWMENT 11 Year Growth Chart



BALLET ARIZONA 2025–2026 SEASON UPCOMING DONOR EVENTS

February 11 (\$3,500 & Up)

ALICE (in Wonderland) Dress Rehearsal Viewing

February 12 – 15 | Symphony Hall

ALICE (in Wonderland)

February 12 – 15 (All Prima Circle Members) | Symphony Hall

Intermission Receptions at *ALICE (in Wonderland)*
(except Sunday Evening)

February 12 – 15 (\$5,000 & Up) | Symphony Hall

Backstage Tour at *ALICE (in Wonderland)*

March 3 (All Prima Circle Members) | Ballet Arizona

Spring Studio Rehearsal & Luncheon

March 10 (\$500 & Up) | Ballet Arizona

Corps de Ballet Rehearsal Viewing & Breakfast

March 18 (\$3,500 & Up)

Cacti & Other Works Dress Rehearsal Viewing

March 19 – 22 | Orpheum Theater

Cacti & Other Works

March 22 (All Members) | Orpheum Theater

Cacti & Other Works Post-Performance Special Presentation
with Rosalie O'Connor

March 22 (All Prima Circle Members) | Orpheum Theater

Intermission Receptions at *Cacti & Other Works*

BALLET
ARIZONA

2835 E. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85034

Non-Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Phoenix, AZ
Permit No. 1858

CACTI & OTHER WORKS

March 19 – 22, 2026

at Orpheum Theatre

Enjoy the best of contemporary and classical ballets this spring! In this mixed program, Ballet Arizona celebrates masterful and inventive choreography.

FEATURED BALLETS:

Apollo

Concertante

Cacti

Tickets: balletaz.org | 602.381.1096

Opening Night Series Sponsor

F. Francis &
Dionne Najafi



Sponsored in part by

Bob Benson

Dr. Jane Rosenthal

Snell & Wilmer
LAW OFFICES



Ballet Arizona dancers Eastlyn Jensen, Luis Olivera and Genevieve Heron. Photo by Ed Flores.