

Artistic Director Q&A:  
*Daniela Cardim*

Executive Director Letter:  
*Jami Kozemczak*

Celebrating Excellence:  
*2026 Hazel Hare Awards*

Nurturing Artists:  
*School of Ballet Arizona*

# TURNING POINTE

*Where Dreams  
Take Flight*



Ballet Arizona dancer Erin Mesaros. Photo by Ed Flores, photo composite by Angie Slade Design.



***At Ballet Arizona, we believe  
this is where dreams take flight.***

Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of *Turning Pointe*. As we near the end of the season, I am filled with gratitude for the artistry, dedication, and shared sense of purpose that continue to define Ballet Arizona.

We return to Desert Botanical Garden with *Ballet in Bloom*, a program that reflects both the beauty of our surroundings and the evolving language of ballet. Performing in this setting invites us to experience dance differently – more open and deeply connected to the world around us.

This season has challenged our dancers in new ways. Each production has required something different of them, asking for a shift in how they approach the work. It is in that process of exploration and transformation that ballet remains alive.

Beyond the stage, we have also seen how meaningful it is to create space for more people to experience dance. Whether through performances, education programs, or community engagement, these moments remind us that the arts have the power to connect, uplift, and inspire in ways that stay with us.

At Ballet Arizona, we believe this is where dreams take flight—onstage, in the studio, and in the lives of those we reach. Thank you for believing in this company and the role we play in our community.

With appreciation,

Daniela Cardim, *Artistic Director*

## BEHIND THE SCENES with Daniela Cardim

**Q: What inspired the repertoire for *Ballet in Bloom* at Desert Botanical Garden?**

**A:** I was thinking about what works best at Desert Botanical Garden – something open, uplifting, and engaging. Lar Lubovitch’s *Concerto Six Twenty-Two*, set to Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto, has a lightness and warmth that feels perfectly suited to that environment. It’s playful and expansive without being overwhelming, and his choreography captures that balance beautifully.

This ballet has stayed with me for many years. I performed it early in my career and never forgot the experience of dancing it. Even now, it still feels timeless. The movement reflects the music with such integrity – never forcing a narrative, but allowing audiences to interpret what they see in their own way.

My ballet, *Reset*, offers a different energy. It was originally created for West Australian Ballet in an outdoor venue, so it naturally translates to Desert Botanical Garden. The music by Gabriel Prokofiev blends classical structure with electronic elements, creating something rhythmic, dynamic, and unexpected.

Together, these works show two very different, but equally compelling, ways of experiencing ballet, highlighting both the tradition and evolution of the art form.

**Q: This will be the U.S. premiere of *Reset*—how does it feel to bring your work to the Ballet Arizona stage?**

**A:** It’s exciting, but also personal. As Artistic Director, I spend much of my time shaping the overall vision of the company, so returning to the studio as a choreographer feels different. There is a level of vulnerability in that process, because you are sharing something that comes directly from you.

What I've enjoyed most is being back in the studio with the dancers in a creative way. *Reset* asks them to move differently – there is a looseness and a sense of rhythm that comes from the music – and they have embraced that challenge fully. It's been rewarding to see them take ownership of the work and bring their own artistry into it.

At the same time, it has reminded me how important it is to balance both roles. I love choreographing, but it requires a great deal of time and focus, so it needs to live in specific moments within the season. That balance allows me to support the company while still continuing to create.

**Q: As you reflect on your second season as Artistic Director, what stands out most?**

**A:** I'm most proud of the consistency and level of performance across the entire organization. The dancers and the team have delivered every production with care, focus, and a willingness to grow.

*The Sleeping Beauty* was a meaningful starting point – it allowed me to build a strong foundation with the dancers and establish a shared understanding of style and precision. Later in the season, *ALICE (in Wonderland)* challenged the company in completely different ways, both technically and theatrically. It required a very specific balance in performance – finding the right point between restraint and expression—and the dancers rose to that challenge beautifully. The audience response was incredibly rewarding.

Beyond the stage, one of the most meaningful moments for me was our sensory-friendly performance of *The Nutcracker*. Creating a space where more people can access and experience dance is essential to our mission. The feedback we received was deeply moving and a reminder that the arts should be available to everyone.



Ballet Arizona dancers Leticia Endler and Ethan Price.  
Photo by Ed Flores, photo composite by Angie Slade Design.

# DANCE WITH ME

## BALLET ARIZONA'S 2026 GALA

This past January, Ballet Arizona welcomed supporters, artists, and community leaders to the Arizona Biltmore for the 2026 *Dance With Me Gala*, an evening that celebrated the power of philanthropy and the individuals who make this work possible.

Chaired by Board Member, Carla Cohen, the event raised more than \$500,000 – making it one of the highest-grossing gala in Ballet Arizona's history. These funds directly sustain performances, education programs, and community engagement efforts across the Valley.

At the heart of the evening was a tribute to longtime supporters **Joan and Charlie Berry**, whose extraordinary commitment to Ballet Arizona spans four decades.

Joan, a founding board member, played a pivotal role in the 1986 merger of three small companies that became Ballet Arizona. From the very beginning, Joan and Charlie believed in what ballet could be in this community, and their investment of time, leadership, and generosity helped bring that vision to life.

**Their impact is both far-reaching and deeply personal. Known for their warmth, authenticity, and passion for the art form, Joan and Charlie have introduced countless individuals to ballet, sparking curiosity and building lasting connections.**

Their support has opened doors for dancers, students, and families – creating opportunities that extend far beyond the stage.

They have also played an important role in shaping Ballet Arizona's artistic future. As champions of new work and creative development, Joan and Charlie understand that sustaining the art form requires both honoring tradition and investing in what comes next. Their support has helped bring new choreography to life, including serving as producing sponsors of Naylor Lovino's first full-length story ballet, *Moving Movies* – a reflection of their belief in artistic innovation. That same commitment continues into the upcoming season, where they will serve as sponsors of *Don Quixote*.

For those within the Ballet Arizona community, their presence has set a powerful example. Their commitment reflects a belief that supporting the arts is not a single act, but an ongoing investment in people, creativity, and possibility. It is a legacy defined not only by generosity, but by the relationships they have built and the lives they have touched.

As Ballet Arizona approaches its 40th anniversary, the Dance With Me Gala served as a powerful reminder that the organization's strength lies in the dedication of supporters like Joan and Charlie, whose impact continues to shape its future.





# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Jami Kozemczak*

## Collaboration Elevates & Transforms

Thank you for being part of our 2025–2026 Season. Because of you, Ballet Arizona continues to ignite the human spirit through the magic of dance. Your generosity makes every performance, every student experience, and every moment of inspiration possible.

As we reflect on the past year, one theme rises above all others: collaboration. It is the driving force behind our continued growth, innovation, and impact.

This season, our partnership with The Phoenix Symphony exemplifies what is possible when two performing arts institutions come together in pursuit of excellence. Their world-class musicians bring our performances to life, elevating our art form in a way that is truly unmatched. As President and CEO Peter Kjome shares, *"the longstanding partnership between the Phoenix Symphony and Ballet Arizona enriches the lives of many thousands of people of all ages across our community each year. When our musicians and Ballet Arizona's dancers come together, audiences experience something powerful that neither organization could offer alone. We are deeply grateful for this enduring collaboration."*

That spirit of collaboration is reflected in our ongoing partnership with the Phoenix Youth Symphony Orchestras (PYSO), led in part by our conductor, Matthew Kasper, who also serves as PYSO's Artistic Director. Together, we have created meaningful opportunities for young musicians and dancers to share the stage, gaining invaluable experience through collaboration and learn from one another.

This work has also received national recognition at the World Wide Women's Film Festival, where a short film celebrating women artists earned the 2026 Audience Choice Award. As Kasper reflects, this collaboration offers *"an unparalleled experience...to present something truly remarkable to the community. It is my hope this collaboration can serve as a blueprint for companies and youth orchestras across the country to bring something this unique to their communities."*

Our commitment to education is equally rooted in partnership. For more than 35 years, we have worked alongside Arizona School for the Arts, providing students with access to professional expertise and mentorship that extends beyond the classroom. These partnerships ensure that students are not only introduced to dance, but are supported as they grow within it.

We are also expanding how and where dance is experienced through our collaboration with Desert Botanical Garden. What began as a bold artistic vision has evolved into something distinctly Arizonan. As the Garden's President & CEO Chris Kline notes, this partnership creates moments *"bigger than either institution could deliver alone, bringing art, nature, and community together in ways that inspire people and strengthen Arizona's cultural fabric."* Within this setting, ballet becomes inseparable from its surroundings, shaped as much by the environment as the movement itself.

These collaborations extend far beyond the stage. Through partnerships with 17 local school districts and six municipalities, we provide dance education and performances in communities where access has been limited. Our Angel Night program works with more than 80 nonprofit organizations, ensuring that individuals and families across the Valley can experience the joy of live performance.

Collaboration requires trust, shared vision, and a willingness to think beyond what is possible alone. Because of you, we continue to build partnerships that strengthen Arizona's cultural landscape—creating opportunities for connection, creativity, and growth.

And together, we will keep rising.

Jami Kozemczak, Executive Director



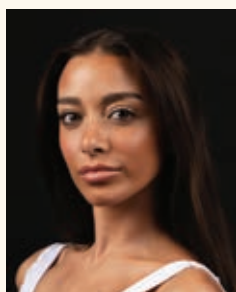
# 2026 Hazel Hare Award of Artistic Excellence



Established in 2018, the award honors two dancers whose spirit echoes the strength, dedication, and passion that Hazel exemplified throughout her entire life.

A devoted supporter of Ballet Arizona since 1996, Hazel was a woman of remarkable character and unwavering love for ballet. Through her estate, the Hazel A.S. Hare Charitable Trust, she arranged a transformational gift, an endowment of more than \$4 million. As the largest single gift in Ballet Arizona's history, it helps sustain the artistry that inspired her for decades.

Traditionally awarded to one male and one female dancer, this year's honor reflects a shift under Artistic Director Daniela Cardim, who chose to recognize two female dancers. The 2026 recipients, Madison Penny and Alli Chester, were awarded at the Dance With Me Gala in January.



Madison, an Arizona native, began her training at a young age and committed to ballet by age 8. She quickly earned international recognition, receiving top honors at competitions including the World Ballet Competition and Youth America Grand Prix. She later trained at The Royal Ballet School in London, graduating in 2022, before dancing

with Birmingham Royal Ballet and Atlanta Ballet, where she performed soloist roles. Now back in her home state, Madison continues her artistic growth with Ballet Arizona.



Alli, also from the Phoenix area, began her training with The School of Ballet Arizona at age 12 and later continued at Houston Ballet Academy's Professional Program. She returned to Ballet Arizona in 2020 to dance with the Studio Company. She accepted a contract with the Company in 2021 and performed a

wide range of classical and contemporary repertoire over five seasons. She took her final bow in March during *Cacti & Other Works* at the Orpheum Theatre.



*"Madison has stepped up, jumping into a principal role she had not been casted for initially. She was able to grow in the role and deliver beautiful performances. There is still a lot of room for growth for this dancer, so I hope this prize will not only acknowledge her accomplishments but also encourage her to keep working hard and developing as an artist."*

– Daniela Cardim



*"Alli is an extremely versatile dancer, and for this reason is cast in almost every ballet we do, whether classical or contemporary. This makes her incredibly valuable to the company. She is also a very good team player, always bringing a positive energy to the group, working hard, and never showing that she is tired."*

– Daniela Cardim

# DANCER SPOTLIGHT

## **A Fond Farewell** **Alli Chester**

After five seasons with Ballet Arizona, Alli Chester prepares to retire, marking the close of a journey that began at the School of Ballet Arizona and came full circle on the company stage. As she looks ahead to her next chapter, she reflects on her ballet career the path that has shaped her.

### **Looking back, how has dancing with Ballet Arizona impacted your life?**

Dancing with Ballet Arizona has impacted my life in every way. I joined the company in 2021, but my first performance with Ballet Arizona was *The Nutcracker* in 2012.

When I was 11-years-old, it became my dream to one day be on that stage as a professional. I have spent the past 14 years devoted to that very dream, and it is such an honor to be able to say that my dream came true. The audiences and supporters make it possible for each of us to live those dreams.

I also feel very blessed that Phoenix is my hometown – being able to perform for my friends and family has meant so much to me.

### **Of all the roles you've performed, is there one that holds a special place in your heart?**

I can honestly say that every role I have had the opportunity to dance has been meaningful to me, but one that has always been extra special is performing as a Snowflake in *The Nutcracker*. My family took me to *The Nutcracker* for the first time when I was four years old. My mom loves to tell the story of how, unlike my squirming

siblings, I sat still through the entire show – completely in awe. The snow scene was always my favorite part, so it was incredibly surreal for me to perform in that scene many years later.

### **What led to your decision to retire, and what excites you about this next chapter?**

My decision to retire was years in the making. I have always known that I would like to have a second career after ballet, and it has always been a goal of mine to dance five years as a professional if I was able. This is now my fifth season, and the timing feels very right. The past five years have been a dream. This final season has been especially meaningful, and I am feel lucky to be retiring on a high-note.

I am now excited to discover what my “Act II” has in store. There are no words to describe my gratitude for Ballet Arizona – I will always be a fan of this company, just as I have been since I was four years old.



“Alli’s journey is a beautiful reflection of what Ballet Arizona stands for. Watching her grow from a dedicated student in our School for many years, to a remarkable Company artist has been incredibly special. She has been a joy to work with in the studio—curious, focused, committed, always striving to grow. She will be deeply missed by all of us who have had the privilege of working alongside her. We wish her the very best for this next chapter, knowing that she will continue to inspire others wherever her path leads. She will always be part of the Ballet Arizona family.”

– Maria Simonetti, Rehearsal Director

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SHOWCASE



**EDUCATE**



**INSPIRE**



**IMPACT**

**W**hat began as a long-held vision has quickly become one of Ballet Arizona's most meaningful performances. Now in its second year, the Community Engagement Showcase highlights the power of dance to connect and uplift communities across the Valley.

This year, the program expanded to two performances in one day, reflecting both increased demand and the growing reach of Ballet Arizona's community programs. "Programs like this don't usually reach our neighborhoods—and ballet, especially, is something many of them have never had access to," shared a Driven to Dance parent. "We're truly grateful they had the chance to be a part of it."

At its heart, the showcase is a living expression of Ballet Arizona's belief in "ballet for everyone." Featuring participants from programs including Adaptive Dance, Dance for Parkinson's Disease, Native American Hoop Dance, and Driven to Dance, the performance brings together a wide range of voices, abilities, and experiences.

Behind these moments is a network of people that makes it all possible. Within that network, our donors play a critical role in sustaining and expanding these programs, ensuring access to high-quality dance education and performance opportunities. Through this support, we are able to create inclusive, meaningful experiences that prioritize both artistic excellence and community connection.

As the Community Engagement Showcase continues to grow, it serves as a reminder that dance is a universal language – one that belongs to everyone.

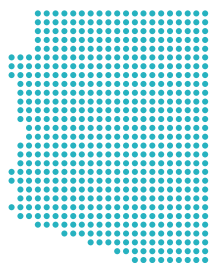


THE DIANE & BRUCE HALLE  
FOUNDATION

*Special thank you to the Diane & Bruce Halle Foundation for being the official Community Engagement sponsor of Ballet Arizona*



REACHED **135** SCHOOLS



**26,500**  
**ARIZONA**  
**RESIDENTS**  
served across  
**18 programs**



**675**  
**HOURS**  
spent engaging  
with the community



**240**  
**DAYS**  
of programming



*“As I recall, my last ballet class was around 1979 – over 45 years ago...”  
“Gratitude for your program and instruction that is allowing me to re-start, review, and re-build as much as I can in my late 60’s. Physicality is one goal, but to emote to the music – to dance – is my greatest joy. Thank you for the opportunity.”*

– Creative Aging Participant



*“THANK YOU for making possible this adaptive performance. It was truly special and I am so thankful to have been able to have this option available for my younger brother who otherwise could not partake. It was so moving to see so many families with their loved ones coming to enjoy the adapted performance.”*

– Sensory Adaptive Performance Attendee



*“This program welcomes children and their parents to be part of the world of ballet in such an easy way. It comes to their community and leaves the door open, it lets them know that they can participate if they want. It’s very subtle and very powerful. As a Latino man and as a father, I’m incredibly grateful that Ballet Arizona does what they do.”*

– DanceAZ Parent

## *Creating Opportunity Through Training and Access*



**A**t the School of Ballet Arizona (SBAZ), growth is not a single moment, but a progression. It unfolds over time through opportunity, access, and a consistent investment in each student's potential. From a first introduction to dance to advanced study and pre-professional development, SBAZ provides a pathway where students can continue to build, refine, and expand what is possible for themselves.

That pathway has become increasingly intentional. With the launch of the Studio Company in 2014, Ballet Arizona created a critical bridge between student and professional life—one that allows dancers to deepen their skills while gaining performance experience. This season, the introduction of the Professional Day Program has further strengthened that continuum, offering dedicated students the opportunity to work at a higher level within a structure designed to support

serious pre-professional growth. Together, these programs reflect a commitment not only to developing dancers, but to supporting their progress at every stage.

The impact of that investment is visible across the company today. Fourteen current Ballet Arizona dancers were once members of the Studio Company, and for four of them, that journey began at SBAZ at an early age. These are not isolated stories, but the result of a sustained focus on cultivating talent from within and creating pathways for students to continue advancing.

Company Dancer Jordan Islas is one example of that path. His introduction to dance came through Ballet Arizona's DanceAZ school residency program, where he first encountered ballet in a classroom setting. What began as a moment of curiosity grew into a lasting interest, leading him to continue his



SBAZ students. Photos by Rosalie O'Connor and Brianne Bland.

studies at SBAZ, progress into the Studio Company, and ultimately join Ballet Arizona as a company dancer.

Jordan is not alone. Since the development of the DanceAZ program, seven students have gone on to continue at the School of Ballet Arizona—an outcome made possible through scholarship support that allows students to remain engaged and committed to their development.

For families, that access is essential, ensuring that high-quality arts education is not limited by financial circumstance. For donors, investing in the School is not only about access—it is about honoring a lifelong connection to the art form and supporting its future.

*“Richard Stahl enjoyed performances at Ballet Arizona for many years. After his passing, the Richard P. Stahl Charitable Fund wished to celebrate his love of ballet, and we were delighted to do so by supporting the David Hallberg Scholarship Fund at*

*SBAZ. These scholarships will help ensure the excellence of the School and Ballet Arizona for many years to come.”*

—Mel Reese, Trustee of the Richard P. Stahl Charitable Fund

Support like this does more than sustain programs—it shapes lives. It allows students to imagine a future they may not have seen for themselves and gives them the tools to pursue it with confidence and purpose.

Not every student will go on to dance professionally, and that is not the measure of success. What remains, for all of them, is something deeper: discipline, resilience, creativity, and a connection to the arts that stays with them long after they leave the studio.

At the School of Ballet Arizona, dreams are not defined by a single outcome. They are discovered, challenged, and carried forward—taking flight in ways that are as individual as the students themselves.

**BALLET ARIZONA**  
**2026-2027 SEASON**

**ROMEO & JULIET**  
October 22 – 25, 2026

**THE NUTCRACKER**  
December 11 – 27, 2026

**DON QUIXOTE**  
February 11 – 14, 2027

**PULSE**  
April 1 – 4, 2027

**DESERT LINES**  
May 12 – 29, 2027

**BALLET IN THE MAKING**  
June 12, 2027

**Tickets:** [balletaz.org](http://balletaz.org) | 602.381.1096



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**2026-2027**

**BALLET ARIZONA**

**40th Anniversary SEASON**



Ballet Arizona dancer Leticia Endler. Photo by Ed Flores, photo composite by Angie Slade Design.