BALLET ARIZONA

DONOR IMPACT REPORT

Artistic Director Q&A: *Daniela Cardim*

Executive Director Letter: *Jami Kozemczak*

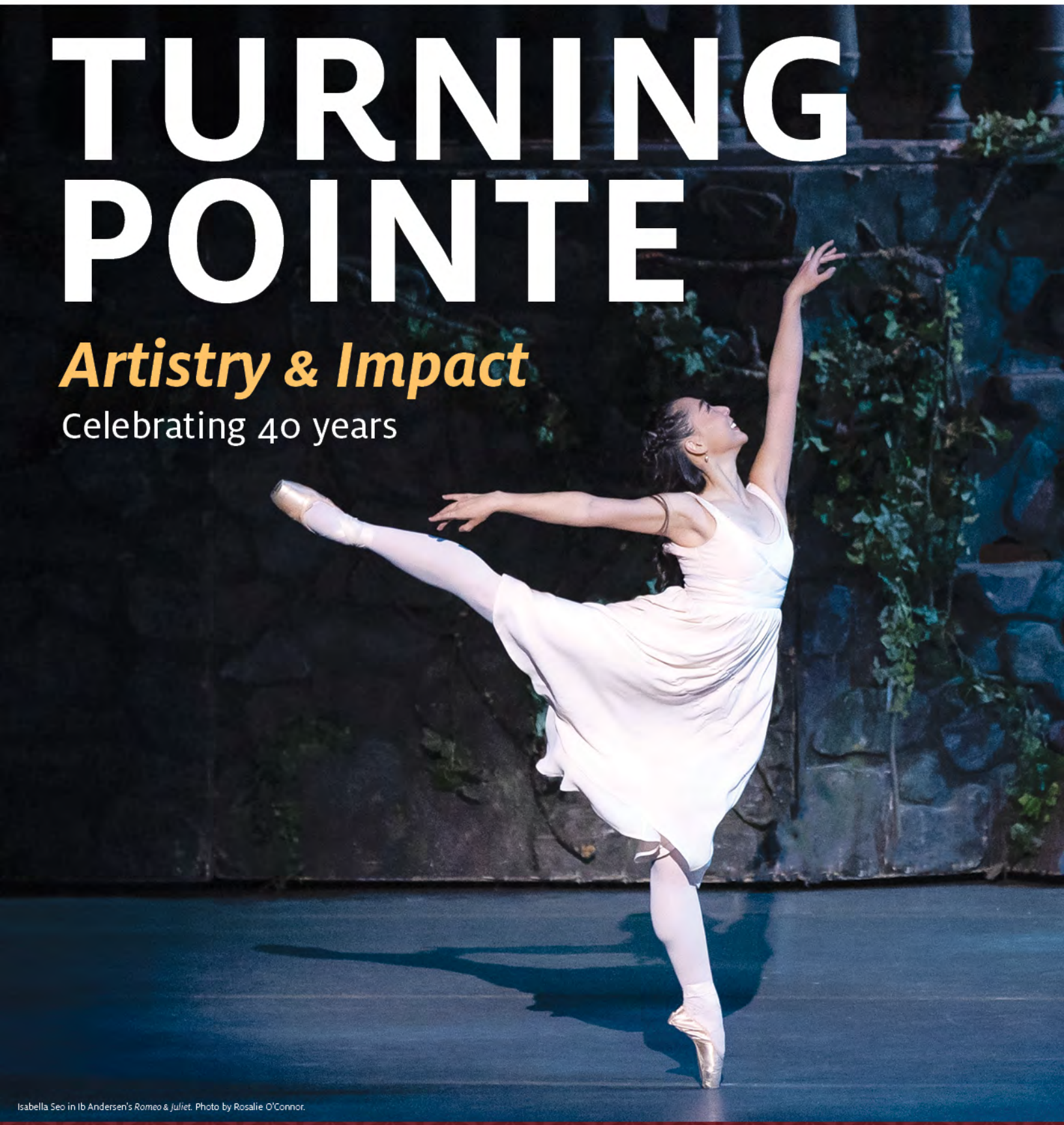
In the Spotlight: *Gail Passey-Reed*

Behind-the-Scenes: *40 Years of Ballet Arizona*

TURNING POINTE

Artistry & Impact

Celebrating 40 years



Isabella Seo in Ib Andersen's *Romeo & Juliet*. Photo by Rosalie O'Connor.

FALL 2026



A season that feels both celebratory and full of possibility.

Welcome to Ballet Arizona's 40th Anniversary Season. This milestone belongs to everyone who has been part of our journey—the artists who have brought our stages to life, the audiences who have filled our theaters, and the extraordinary community whose belief in this company has sustained it for four decades.

As I begin my third season as Artistic Director, I feel especially grateful to be part of this moment. This season brings together beloved classical ballets, works that have shaped Ballet Arizona's artistic identity, and opportunities to explore new ideas and creative voices. It is a season that feels both celebratory and full of possibility.

Throughout this issue of *Turning Pointe*, we celebrate the people and artistry at the heart of Ballet Arizona. You will hear from dancers past and present, revisit memorable moments from across four decades, and meet some of the individuals whose passion and dedication have helped make this company what it is today.

Forty years of Ballet Arizona would not have been possible without a community that believes deeply in the power of dance. I am grateful to share this milestone with you and even more excited for all that we have yet to create together.

With appreciation,

Daniela Cardim, *Artistic Director*

BEHIND THE SCENES

with Daniela Cardim

Q: As Ballet Arizona celebrates 40 years, how did you approach programming this milestone season?

A: Anniversaries give us an opportunity to stop, reflect on what has been accomplished, and recognize all the people who have helped make an organization what it is today. Forty years is an incredible milestone. I have only been here a little over two years, so I am a very small part of that history, but I think it is important to celebrate it and be grateful for everyone who has contributed to Ballet Arizona along the way.

Artistically, I wanted the season to honor that history while continuing to look forward. I wanted to return to some of the great classical ballets and of course include another work by Ib Andersen, whose artistic legacy remains an integral part of Ballet Arizona. That led us to *Romeo & Juliet*. We also have *Don Quixote*, which is very close to my heart and has not been performed by the company for over a decade.

In the spring, we really get to explore and take some risks. *Pulse* brings together works by George Balanchine, Christopher Wheeldon, and Juanjo Arqués, whose ballet *Fingers in the Air* gives the audience a role in shaping each performance. At Desert Botanical Garden, Nayon Iovino returns with a new commission created especially for a stage unlike any other. And I cannot wait to see what emerges from *Ballet in the Making*, our new choreography lab, where our dancers will have the freedom to experiment, find their own choreographic voices, and create something that is entirely theirs.

Q: We open the season with Ib Andersen's *Romeo & Juliet*. What makes this ballet so compelling?

A: I love *Romeo & Juliet*. It is one of the most beautiful ballets, and Ib's production is so thoughtfully crafted. I had heard so many people speak about how beautiful his version was, and when I finally watched it, I understood why. Now, seeing it come to life in the studios, I feel even more strongly that it was the right work to bring back for this anniversary.

Additionally, Prokofiev's score is a masterpiece. The greatest ballet scores do not simply accompany the choreography; they tell the story. In *Romeo & Juliet*, you can feel the tragedy, the tenderness, and the tension through the music alone. Then you have these enormous, iconic moments, where the music completely transforms the atmosphere.

I performed Lady Capulet earlier in my career, and the scene after Tybalt's death is still one I remember so vividly. Backstage, I would close my eyes and listen as the music built, feeling the tension of everything happening on the other side of the scenery. By the time I stepped on stage, I was already emotionally inside the scene. That is the power of Prokofiev's score, it gives the dancers so much to draw from.

Q: As Ballet Arizona enters its next chapter, what excites you most about where the company is headed?

A: Someone told me when I became Artistic Director that it takes two or three years to really get going. I understand that now. In my third season, the picture feels much clearer—not only what I want to strengthen, but where I see opportunities for growth.

What excites me most is being able to look further ahead and imagine what Ballet Arizona can become. We have wonderfully creative dancers, a team that continues to grow stronger and so much potential artistically. I feel like we have built a strong foundation, and now we can really start thinking about where we want to go next.



Ballet Arizona dancers Jillian Barrell and Nayon Iovino in Romeo & Juliet. Photo by Rosalie O'Connor.



"I came to Ballet Arizona in 1997 and somehow, nearly 30 years have passed! I have seen this company through so many different stages—directors, generations of dancers, and so much growth and change. But through all of it, what has kept me here is the work. I love being in the studio, helping dancers grow, and always finding ways to make the work better. I am proud of how far Ballet Arizona has come and grateful to have had a front-row seat for so much of its history."

– Maria Simonetti, Rehearsal Director & Principal Repetiteur
Joined Ballet Arizona: 1997

"Ballet Arizona has truly become a home to me. I dedicated my body and soul to performing, learning, and creating, and it filled my heart in return. I've had the chance to perform alongside so many incredible artists and learn from wonderful choreographers and coaches, especially Ib Andersen, with whom I spent 12 years in the studio and learned so much. I'm deeply grateful for all the people across this organization who have shared my passion for dance, and I feel so lucky to continue being part of Ballet Arizona today—choreographing new works and collaborating with our Artistic Director, Dani. Cheers to 40 years and many more!"



– Nayon Iovino, Resident Choreographer & Former Company Dancer
Joined Ballet Arizona: 2012



"There are a lot of moving pieces behind every Ballet Arizona performance and even more people working incredibly hard to make sure the audience never notices them. What I love most about this job is the team of people I get to work alongside and watching everyone bring their expertise together to make the seemingly impossible happen onstage. After all these years, there is still nothing quite like calling a show and watching a little bit of stage magic come together. I wouldn't trade my view from backstage for anything!"

– Laura Cadieux, Stage Manager
Joined Ballet Arizona: 2009



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jami Kozemczak

The Stories We Tell

As we embark on Ballet Arizona's 40th Anniversary, I find myself reflecting on a theme that has surfaced again and again over the past several months: The Power of Storytelling.

Nearly everyone connected to Ballet Arizona has a story to tell.

I have heard them from board members reflecting on what called them to serve: a desire to give back, to ensure the arts remain a thriving part of our community and economy, or, in one touching example, a father who found an entirely new way to connect with his daughter through their shared love of ballet.

I spent an afternoon listening to stories from our longest-tenured employee, Gail Passey-Reed, who has been with Ballet Arizona for 42 years. She blows kisses to the portrait of the Rosenbergs every time she is in our downstairs conference room, remembering how they once funded dancer payroll when the company was on the verge of bankruptcy.

Then there is Dorie, who proudly informed me that she is certain she was Ballet Arizona's very first subscriber—which means she, too, is celebrating her 40th season.

Other stories remind us just how remarkable it is that we are here today.

A colleague recently found an article tucked inside a book in her father's home. Published in *The Scottsdale Tribune* on September 16, 2000, its headline read, "Ballet Arizona on last financial legs." The company had announced that without $60,000 to meet payroll, it would be forced to close its doors. One dancer captured what was at stake: "This is not just a paycheck for us. This is part of our soul." ...twenty-six years later, that sentence resonates deeply.

Our art form so often tells stories without words. Yet when we hear from those who danced, watched, volunteered, worked, served, gave and believed, we begin to understand Ballet Arizona's extraordinary impact across four decades.

I have my own Ballet Arizona story.

My first performance was a magical evening at Desert Botanical Garden in 2012 for the world premiere of *Topia*. I remember describing what I experienced that evening with two words: transcendent beauty.

I could never have imagined that just a few years later, I would have the privilege of helping ensure that same beauty continues for generations to come. And whether at Desert Botanical Garden, Symphony Hall or throughout our community, I continue to experience that feeling today.

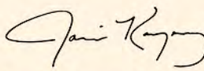
Now, as we celebrate 40 years, I ask you to share your story with us.

What was your first Ballet Arizona performance? Who introduced you to ballet? Was there a dancer, production or moment you will never forget? Perhaps Ballet Arizona became part of a family tradition, inspired you to give back, or simply brought beauty into your life when you needed it most.

Because Ballet Arizona's story was never written by one person. It has been written by all of us... and after 40 extraordinary years, we are still writing it together.

It is a privilege to celebrate this milestone with you all and I can't wait to see what more there is to come.

With gratitude,



Jami Kozemczak, *Executive Director*

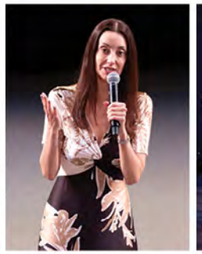


P.S. I would love to hear your Ballet Arizona story! Send me an email or letter, share your story on social media, or write to us at **questions@balletaz.org**.

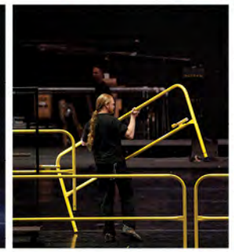
Celebrating BALLET ARIZONA







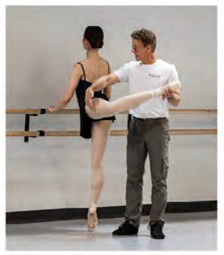

























onstage and behind the scenes



Reflecting on 40 years with
Gail Passey-Reed

For more than four decades, Gail Passey-Reed has been a familiar face at Ballet Arizona, taking on countless roles as a dancer, teacher, administrator, mentor, and even headpiece designer! From the company's earliest days in small studios to the thriving organization it is today, she has witnessed its remarkable growth and inspired generations of dancers and students.

As Ballet Arizona celebrates 40 years, Gail reflects on the people and pivotal moments that have shaped the company.



Q: You've been part of Ballet Arizona since the very beginning. Can you paint a picture of what the company was like when it was founded?

A: I started as a dancer with the company in August 1985. Our first studio was at 15th Avenue and Thomas. Whenever we needed to rehearse large scenes like Snowflakes or the party scene in *The Nutcracker,* we had to go to Phoenix College or Metro Tech High School because there simply wasn't enough room in our small studio.

I remember being so excited when we moved into our current location. After many attempts to find a larger building, Carlos Valcárcel put me in a hard hat and walked me through this building. I was floored. Seeing all the studios, offices, storage and the costume shop was a huge upgrade.



Q: When you look back over the past 40 years, what has been the most remarkable change you've witnessed? What has stayed the same?

A: Definitely how much everything has grown. I've worked with six or seven school directors and five company directors, plus an interim, so I've seen many changes and different chapters. I love the direction the company is taking now. Daniela is honoring the past while expanding the company and its repertoire, and it's wonderful to see.

The School has also expanded tremendously, with more students and more levels. I especially love that we now have Studio Company. It gives dancers who have worked so hard an important step before they enter Ballet Arizona or another professional company. I also love that we're expanding our outreach to include people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to study ballet. Ballet can be a very elite art, and things like tuition and pointe shoes can be expensive, so making those opportunities more accessible is important.

With all this change, our mission and values still remain the same. There's still that magic of dance and the inspiration of the next generation. I've been here for 41 years, and I'm definitely what you would call a "bun head." Ballet is so beautiful, and I love watching each generation of dancers come through our doors. I hope to pass some of that passion on to the next generation through my teaching.

Q: Many of our donors believe they're investing in the future of dance. From your perspective as someone who has taught generations of students, what impact does their support have on the dancers who walk through our doors?

A huge impact. Donor support helps us reach students who might not otherwise be able to dance through opportunities like scholarships. Their support also provides important future resources such as housing for Studio Company and dancers, and costumes.

It's all part of making the experience better and helping Ballet Arizona move forward. We can dream, but donors help fuel those dreams.

Q: What gives you the most hope or excitement as Ballet Arizona begins its next 40 years?

A: I'm excited to see Ballet Arizona honor its past while continuing to grow. I'm especially excited about the international choreographers Daniela is bringing in to expand the company's repertoire. It's exciting to see the company continuing to grow artistically. When we did *Frida,* for example, it was amazing. I love seeing the possibilities for the future

Q: If you could share one message with the Ballet Arizona community, what would you want them to know?

A: The first thing that came to my mind was, "It takes a village." Every single person in this organization and every single donor is important, whether they're giving $5, $500 or $5 million. It all counts, and it all helps.

Everybody should be appreciated because it truly takes a village to make Ballet Arizona what it is and what it will become.

Now in her 42nd season, Gail's perspective comes back to one simple truth: it takes a village. Every dancer, teacher, staff member, volunteer, family member, patron, and donor plays a role in sustaining Ballet Arizona and helping it grow. As we look toward the next 40 years, your support continues to fuel the dreams of the dancers and students who will carry the magic of dance forward.

40 Years of ARTISTRY

For 40 years, the people of Ballet Arizona have brought artistry to life—onstage and behind the scenes. Through extraordinary performances, shared experiences, and lasting connections, their talent and dedication have shaped our story and enriched our community.

1986
Three companies unite. Ballet Arizona is born.

1992
Michael Uthoff becomes Artistic Director.

1997
Ballet Under the Stars launches.

1999–2000
Community rallies to save Ballet Arizona.

2000
Ib Andersen becomes Artistic Director.

2003
Andersen's *Romeo & Juliet* premieres.

2006
A new *Nutcracker* takes the stage.

2010
Ballet Arizona performs at the Kennedy Center.

2012
Topia launches Desert Botanical Garden partnership.

2013
Company and School open their new home.

2015
Napoli makes its U.S. premiere.

2016
Ballet Arizona renews its New Works Initiative at Desert Botanical Garden for five more years, beginning with the world premiere of *Round*.

2022
Andersen's *Juan Gabriel* makes its world premiere.

2024
Daniela Cardim becomes Artistic Director.

2025
Frida makes its U.S. premiere.

School announces new Mesa satellite campus.

First sensory-friendly *Nutcracker* performance.

2026
Cardim's *Reset* makes its U.S. premiere.

IMPACT *of one season*

18
Community Engagement
PROGRAMS

26,500
Arizona Residents served

675
HOURS
spent engaging with the community

17
SCHOOL DISTRICTS
reached

4,366
COMMUNITY ANGEL NIGHT
tickets

$130K
scholarship support awarded

BALLET ARIZONA 2026–2027 SEASON

UPCOMING DONOR EVENTS

October 21 *($3,500 & Up)* | Symphony Hall
Romeo & Juliet Dress Rehearsal Viewing

October 22 – 25 | Symphony Hall
Romeo & Juliet

October 22 – 25 *(All Prima Circle Members)* | Symphony Hall
Intermission Receptions at *Romeo & Juliet* *(except Sunday Evening)*

October 22 – 25 *($5,000 & Up)* | Symphony Hall
Backstage Tour at *Romeo & Juliet*

December 11 – 27 | Symphony Hall
The Nutcracker

January 16 *($2,500 & Up)*
Company Class Viewing

January 15 | Arizona Biltmore
Dance With Me – A Ballet Arizona Gala

January 29 | *(All Prima Circle Members)* | Ballet Arizona
Prima Circle Evening & *Don Quixote* Studio Spotlight

celebrating BALLET ARIZONA 40 years

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SAVE THE DATE

JANUARY 15TH 2027

DANCE WITH ME GALA

Celebrating Ballet Arizona's 40th Anniversary Season

GALA CHAIR
Hollie Oviedo

HONORING
Merle & Steve Rosskam