

**The Best of the West Comes to The Soraya in February!**

**Two of Western North America's Finest Dance Companies Offer Two Very Different Interpretations of Classic Ballet**

**Ballet West's Magnificently Traditional *Giselle* on Tuesday, February 4 at 8PM**

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**Ballet BC's Elegant New Take on *Romeo + Juliet* on Saturday, February 29 at 8PM and Sunday, March 1 at 3PM**

(Los Angeles, CA) January 17, 2020 – The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts presents two very different works from two of the finest ballet companies in the western half of North America—**Ballet West's** beautifully traditional production of *Giselle*, and **Ballet BC's** stunningly reimagined take on the timeless tale of *Romeo + Juliet*.

*Giselle* is one of the most beloved and enduring cornerstones of classical ballet. Ballet West's sumptuous production is conceived by Adam Sklute, the company's artistic director, with choreography by Sklute after Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot. It will have a single performance on Tuesday, February 4 at 8:00pm. With a music score composed by Adolphe Adam, Ballet West's *Giselle* is a lavish production, complete with a cast of more than 55 dancers, live animals, and opulent sets and costumes.

The *Deseret News* raves, "*Ballet West's Giselle has stunning aesthetics, masterful drama, and heart-stopping choreography.*" The *Salt Lake Tribune* said, "*Ballet West's Giselle is an exquisite version of a classical ballet with modern-day relevance.*"

Ballet BC's *Romeo + Juliet* is a classic yet fresh retelling of Shakespeare's tale of forbidden love with all the familiar characters in a production that had dance lovers and families enraptured at its Vancouver premiere in 2018. The timeless tale of two star-crossed lovers features new choreography by Medhi Walerski, French choreographer and former NDT and Paris Opera ballet dancer, who is one of the most innovative dance makers today. He was recently named Ballet BC's new Artistic Director.

"*Breathtaking,*" said *The Globe and Mail*, choreographer "Walerski has created a powerful and laconic *Romeo and Juliet* that has that elusive quality of feeling new." *Romeo + Juliet* is set to the well-known 1938 score by composer Sergei Prokofiev. Following The Soraya performances, *Romeo + Juliet* will travel to the Sydney Opera House where Ballet BC will have its Australian debut.

"Bringing three full length ballets from three of the greatest ballet companies in western North America is a significant moment for The Soraya," said **Thor Steingraber, Executive Director**. "Our presentation of

Aspen Santa Fe's *Nutcracker* last month was a great success for us and our growing dance audience. Now, we have this opportunity to bring two of the most important pieces in the ballet repertoire from two more groundbreaking dance companies creates an exciting month of dance on our stage."

Single tickets for both Ballet West's *Giselle* and Ballet BC's *Romeo + Juliet* start at \$39 and are currently on sale at The Soraya, (818) 677-3000 and at [TheSoraya.org](http://TheSoraya.org).

### **About Ballet West's *Giselle***

Since its Paris premiere in 1841, *Giselle* has been a triumph with audiences. A love story, a ghost story, and a tale of forgiveness, *Giselle* is about a peasant girl who falls in love with a nobleman, not knowing he is promised to another woman. When she finds out the truth, she goes mad and dies, only to become one of the Wilis, ghostly women who have been betrayed and must spend eternity haunting men.

*Giselle* was the first ballet to feature dancers "on-pointe" – and was done to emphasize the dancer's ghostly movements; it was also the very first ballet to have its own original score. The title role of this ballet has been a touchstone in the legacy of many great ballerinas, who have mastered the technical demands and the emotional depth of the story.

In 2014, Artistic Director Adam Sklute reconceived this ethereal production to present a deeper understanding of *Giselle*'s characters. "*Giselle* is one of the world's oldest classics full of exciting and dramatic dancing, but what really keeps it fresh and alive to this day is the powerful, evocative, and timeless storytelling," explains Sklute. "In my version, I have worked hard to develop the characters in in-depth and unique ways that makes them relatable and brings out the essence and beauty of the story."

Sklute's *Giselle* has themes of passion betrayal and forgiveness form beyond the grave. In the *Utah Standard Examiner*, Sklute added, "My biggest challenge has been getting in to the psychology of this classic. Unlike most ballets, *Giselle* is full of multi-layered characters. When you look at the principal characters in the ballet you can really see them all around us. *Giselle* is a teenage girl who bears the pain of falling in love with some who can't love her back. What teenage girl today hasn't experienced that degree of heartache?"

"At the same time, with additional choreography by Principal Ballet Master Pamela Robinson-Harris, we have expanded the dancing to magnify the scope and scale of the whole production," said Sklute.

### **About Ballet West**

For more than 50 years, Ballet West has ranked among the top professional ballet companies in America, entertaining and exciting audiences worldwide. They are regulars at the Kennedy Center and are known for classical ballets as well as new cutting-edge creations.

Since 2007, Sklute has introduced the elegant historical masterpieces from the great Ballets Russes of the early 20th Century and continues to preserve Ballet West's classical legacy, while further energizing and expanding Ballet West's remarkable repertoire with works by the most renowned choreographers of today including Ulysses Dove, Jiri Kylian, Mark Morris, Twyla Tharp, and Stanton Welch. Sklute has

further strengthening Ballet West's heritage by introducing new creations by local, national and international choreographers.

With 40 company members, 10 second company members, and a thriving academy that trains dancers of all ages, many of whom have gone on to professional careers with Ballet West and companies around the world. Ballet West ranks among the top professional ballet companies in America. Since its inception, the Company has had five artistic directors – its founder Willam Christensen, Bruce Marks, John Hart, Jonas Kåge and currently Adam Sklute, each who have helped to build Ballet West's unique and expansive profile.

### **About Adam Sklute, Ballet West Artistic Director**

Adam Sklute was named Artistic Director of Ballet West in 2007. Since then he has expanded Ballet West's repertoire, visibility, and overall outlook with exciting company premieres, increased touring and public exposure, and greater focus on Ballet West Academy.

In his 10 years at Ballet West, Sklute has presented more than 60 world and Utah premieres. He has presented 27 works never before performed by Ballet West by such renowned historical choreographers as Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, Bronislava Nijinska, and Michel Fokine. At the same time, he has also expanded contemporary repertoire from Jiří Kylián, Mark Morris, and Twyla Tharp, to name a few. He has commissioned 12 world premieres by leading choreographers such as Val Caniporoli, Nicolo Fonte, Jessica Lang, Matthew Neenan, and Helen Pickett. In 2012, Sklute named Nicolo Fonte Resident Choreographer for Ballet West.

Sklute has reintroduced lost elements of Ballet West founder Willam Christensen's beloved production of *The Nutcracker* and recently oversaw new sets and costumes for this acclaimed classic; the first new designs in almost 30 years. He also produced the reconstruction of Christensen's 1967 *The Firebird*. He has conceived and produced critically acclaimed new productions of *Swan Lake* (2010) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (2011), and *Giselle* (2014) and launched Ballet West's Family Series featuring Ballet West II and Academy dancers.

Notably, Sklute developed the Company's wildly successful annual Innovations program, designed to nurture and present new creations by Ballet West Artists and emerging Utah, national, and international choreographers. Based on the success of Innovations Sklute ushered in two major new initiatives – Ballet West's National Choreographic Festival, bringing together dance companies from around the country to share the stage with Ballet West all presenting new and innovative creations; and Works from Within a touring program presenting exclusively World Premieres by Ballet West Artists.

### **About Ballet BC's *Romeo + Juliet***

*"The vision of love that Shakespeare gave us in this master work is very precious. It is like holding a jewel in your hand that needs to be protected."* —Medhi Walerski

Martha Schabas in the *Globe and Mail* said *Romeo + Juliet* is *"Dramatically vibrant. Unforgettable. Visionary. Walerski sinks deep into his dancers' bodies and reimagines this centuries-old story at a real physical level ... choreography that would be compelling on a soloist and is doubly captivating to see on a*

*group, sometimes synchronized and other times in staggered counterpoint. Mr. Walerski has given Romeo some particularly lush choreography as a young man falling in love for the first time... hard to believe [but] Act 2 was even stronger."*

*Globaldancer* said this production "might have just set a benchmark for *Romeo and Juliet* productions in contemporary ballet [with] articulate choreography that found new depth and vibrancy in the characters."

For centuries, the tale of tragic "star-crossed lovers" has inspired many an artist. Compelling in its timeless relevance, this deeply human story captures audiences with enduring themes of love, fate and family. In *Romeo + Juliet*, Walerski offers a fresh and bold retelling of this classic story of forbidden love that continues to resonate today.

After sold out performances for the world premiere, Ballet BC returns to this iconic story set to Sergei Prokofiev's stunning score. Artfully crafted by Medhi Walerski, an original voice in international dance, his innovative retelling of the full-length classic brings together dazzling scenes woven with unpredictable and complex imagery. Along with evocative set and lighting design by Dutch designer Theun Mosk, Walerski conjures a thought-provoking and contemporary approach to *Romeo + Juliet*.

### **About Ballet BC**

Founded in 1986, Ballet BC has been under the leadership of Artistic Director Emily Molnar since 2009. Ballet BC is an internationally acclaimed collaborative and creation-based contemporary ballet company that is a leader and resource in the creation, production and education of contemporary dance in Canada. Bold and innovative, the Company's distinctive style and approach have made a unique and valuable national contribution to the development of dance. In 2019, the Company was nominated for an Olivier Award for "Best New Dance Production" for their tour to Sadler's Wells in London, which featured *Solo Echo* by Crystal Pite, *16 + a room* by Emily Molnar, and *Bill* by Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar.

Ballet BC's dancers are a group of open-minded and curious artists, each unique for their dynamic movement while sharing an intuitive passion for dance. Ballet BC is committed to its role as a leader in the community through dancer training opportunities, community and audience outreach, and professional development activities.

The Company presents a diverse repertoire of Canadian and international work from the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and is a hotbed for the creation and performance of new works. Since 2009, the Company has developed a repertoire of more than 45 new works by acclaimed Canadian and international choreographers including William Forsythe, Cayetano Soto, Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar, Medhi Walerski, Ohad Naharin, Crystal Pite, Johan Inger, Adi Salant, Emanuel Gat, Gustavo Ramirez Sansano, Jacopo Godani, Company 605, Jorma Elo, Wen Wei Wang, Itzik Galili, Serge Bennathan, Walter Matteini, José Navas, Emily Molnar, Lesley Telford, Nicolo Fonte, Fernando Hernando Magadan, Kevin O'Day, Shawn Hounsell, Gioconda Barbuto, Simone Orlando, Robert Glumbek and Aszure Barton among others.

Under the artistic direction of Emily Molnar, a former member of The National Ballet of Canada, Ballet BC and the Ballett Frankfurt, the Company actively fosters collaborations that support artists,

choreographers and audiences alike, furthering the boundaries of contemporary dance. The company embraces excellence in the practice of contemporary ballet, with its wide diversity of technique and style, honouring its roots and components.

### **About Medhi Walerski, Choreographer and Incoming Ballet BC Artistic Director**

French choreographer, and former NDT and Paris Opera ballet dancer Medhi Walerski will succeed Emily Molnar as Ballet BC's new Artistic Director. His first full season as Artistic Director in the 2020/21 season will coincide with the Company's 35th anniversary.

In working closely with the Company over the past several years, Walerski has a deep knowledge of and respect for the vision that Molnar has maintained, and brings his own highly inspiring vision for the Company. His programming objectives are fresh, collaborative, and ambitious, and will continue to enhance the Company's reputation as a national and international dance organization and ensure the continued path of immense growth.

Walerski launched his dance career at the Paris Opera Ballet, and eventually became a company member with NDT for more than a decade. He made his choreographic debut with NDT in 2008 and since then, Walerski has continued to create for NDT as well as other Companies as an independent choreographer, including Ballet BC. He created the highly successful *Petite C eremonie*, a work that has toured across the globe and remains a highlight of Ballet BC's repertoire.

Walerski has since created a number of works for Ballet BC, including 2018's *Romeo + Juliet* — his first full-length narrative work — which has become the Company's most successful production to date with upcoming performances at The Soraya in Northridge, CA, February 29 - March 1, 2020, and at the Sydney Opera House in Sydney, Australia, June 10-14, 2020.

### **Calendar Listing for Ballet West's *Giselle***

**Date:** Tuesday, February 4 at 8pm

**Venue:** Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)  
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

**Tickets:** **Prices:** Starting at \$39. Prices subject to change.  
**By Phone:** (818) 677-3000  
**Online:** [TheSoraya.org](http://TheSoraya.org)

### **Calendar Listing for Ballet BC's *Romeo + Juliet***

**Date:** Saturday, February 29 at 8PM  
Sunday, March 1 at 3PM

**Venue:** Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)  
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### **About Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)**

The 2019-20 Season marks the ninth year for the award-winning Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts which has quickly become one of the cultural jewels of the greater Los Angeles region. Under the leadership of Executive Director Thor Steingraber, The Soraya continues to expand its programming and outstanding multidisciplinary performances. The Soraya presents a wide variety of performances that not only include new and original work from the Los Angeles region but also work from around the world appealing to all of LA's rich and diverse communities.

Located on the campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya's season offers a vibrant performance program of nearly 50 classical and popular music, dance, theater, family, and international events that have served to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley, and further establish itself as one of the top arts companies in Southern California. The award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and was recently cited by the Los Angeles Times as "a growing hub for live music, dance, drama and other cultural events.

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