



NEWS RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Marie Estrada | (818) 677-6691
marie.estrada@csun.edu

Gary Murphy | (213) 700-9645
gmurphypr@gmail.com

GRAHAM100, a Three-Year Celebration of the Martha Graham Centenary Premieres at The Soraya!

Season Opening Night Features GRAMMY Award Winner Gabe Witcher and his Bluegrass Sextet, and Wild Up, Conducted by Christopher Rountree
Sat, Sep 30 at 8pm

(Los Angeles, CA) September 7, 2023— **The Soraya** opens its 2023-24 season with a history-making performance featuring the nation’s oldest dance company. The Martha Graham Dance Company turns 100 and launches its three-year centennial celebration at The Soraya on Saturday, September 30, a celebration that will subsequently travel to theaters around the nation and be celebrated worldwide.

GRAHAM100 will stretch over three years, and the first year’s theme is ***American Legacies***. To inaugurate that celebration, The Soraya presents a program that spans more than 100 years— from an early work performed by Graham in 1915 Los Angeles, to a new rendering of Agnes de Mille’s groundbreaking ***Rodeo***.

Continuing The Soraya’s tradition of pairing live music with the Graham performances, musical ensemble [Wild Up](#), with Artistic Director and Conductor [Christopher Rountree](#), will join the dancers to provide a live performance of the Carlos Chavez score for ***Dark Meadow Suite***. For *Rodeo*, a new musical arrangement of Aaron Copland’s original score will be composed and performed by fiddler [Gabe Witcher](#) who will be joined by his bluegrass ensemble. This new musical rendering was co-commissioned by and will be recorded at the Soraya, in preparation for ongoing touring, a significant contribution to the Graham centenary.

“The Martha Graham Dance Company has made The Soraya its West Coast home since 2015, and now audiences can expect to experience the beauty of the Martha Graham Dance Company at The Soraya through our 2025-26 Season,” said Thor Steingraber, The Soraya

Executive and Artistic Director. “The early days of Graham’s life as a dancer were spent right here in Southern California, and so The Soraya ensured that Los Angeles plays a major role in the Martha Graham Dance Company’s centenary.”

In a recent interview with The Soraya, Janet Eilber, artistic director of the Martha Graham Dance company, said the company takes pride in knowing it is the oldest in the United States—and the legacy deserves more than just one celebration when it turns 100 in 2026. “A celebration encompassing 100 years of artistic innovation informed by vast social, political, and technological changes, needs a broader canvass than one season can provide!” Eilber said.

GRAHAM100 Program at The Soraya

The First Season: The 2023–24 season, *American Legacies*, will focus on Martha Graham’s social activism, Americana, modernism, and her artistic collaborators. Main stage performances at The Soraya will include:

- ***Serenata Morisca (1915)***, choreographed by Ted Shawn
- ***Dark Meadow Suite (1946)***, choreographed by Martha Graham
- ***Rodeo (1942)***, choreographed by Agnes de Mille
- ***Maple Leaf Rag (1990)***, choreographed by Martha Graham

With a nod to Graham’s California roots, the program opens with *Serenata Morisca*, a solo created by Graham’s teacher and mentor, Ted Shawn. Shawn and his wife, the great American dancer Ruth St Denis, founded the Denishawn School in downtown Los Angeles in 1915. Their students included Graham and others who went on to pioneer American modern dance such as Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman.

Serenata Morisca will be followed by the *Dark Meadow Suite*, a collection of highlights from *Dark Meadow*, premiered by Graham in 1946. The score for the work was composed by Carlos Chavez who received one of the first commissions of music for the new art form of modern dance from the Library of Congress. He was the preeminent Latin American composer of the day and Graham requested that the library commission his music for her.

Dark Meadow Suite will be followed by the brand-new production of Agnes de Mille’s 1942 classic, *Rodeo*, with Aaron Copland’s iconic score reorchestrated for a six-piece bluegrass ensemble by the multi-instrumentalist and composer/arranger Gabe Witcher, opening conversations about the Black origins of that musical form.

The program closes with *Maple Leaf Rag* with a score by Scott Joplin. In this work, the last dance Martha Graham created before her death in 1991, she makes fun of her own serious reputation, and remembers the early days of her revolution when the only thing that could relieve her creative gloom was Scott Joplin’s music.

Sep 30th Program Note - Janet Eilber, MGDC

“All the elements of our new production of Agnes de Mille’s *Rodeo* are designed to broaden the conversation about this iconic work of Americana while remaining true to de Mille’s humorous and heartfelt story about a young, independent misfit searching for love.

The new dreamlike costumes by Oana Botez suggest a fond remembrance of time and place rather than the actuality. They invite us into an intimate sense of community while the digital art of Beowulf Boritt’s stage design calls up the vastness of the American southwest.

Gabe Witcher’s new bluegrass arrangement of the entire Copland score marks a world premiere. The respected de Mille repetiteur Diana Gonzalez is the force behind the idea of our Bluegrass *Rodeo*. She and the Director of the de Mille Working Group, Anderson Ferrell, brought the project to us. As part of *GRAHAM100*, we are interested in reframing iconic works of the 20th Century in ways that expand our views of that time and offer a more inclusive history.

We hope our new production of *Rodeo*, which also features the most diverse cast to have ever performed the work, will resonate with today’s conversations about gender and inclusion while celebrating Agnes’s timeless and timely story about a young person, who feels unable to fit in, finding community on their own terms through dance.”

History of collaboration between Martha Graham Dance and The Soraya

An important creative partner of Martha Graham Dance Company since 2015, The Soraya will premiere the first-ever performance of the three-season **GRAHAM100** celebration which marks the company’s seventh appearance at the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts which is located on the campus of CSUN/Northridge, CA.

Additionally, **the *American Legacies*** will be the sixth collaboration by three major arts organizations—Martha Graham Dance Company, the Los Angeles-based Wild Up music collective, and The Soraya—which began in 2017 with the premiere of *Woodland* and followed in 2020 with the digital composition *Immediate Tragedy* which was inspired by archival remnants of Martha Graham’s *Immediate Tragedy*, a solo she created in 1937 in response to the Spanish Civil War.

The Soraya prioritizes providing live musical accompaniment for its dance performances, and this is especially so with the Martha Graham Dance Company (MGDC). Over the years The Soraya has commissioned several artists, including jazz pianist Jason Moran and Christopher Rountree and Wild Up, to create studio-quality recordings, and new or reimagined musical compositions for the company. This will continue with the recording of Gabe Witcher and his

sextet's reimagined bluegrass version of *Rodeo*, which will be recorded after premiering at The Soraya on Sept. 30. The piece will then tour worldwide with the company as it continues its 23-24 tour.

MORE DETAILS

- For complete details about the three-season 100th Celebration, please visit the [Martha Graham Dance Company website](#). For the company's initial GRAHAM100 press release, please [click here](#).
- For **Christopher Rountree** bio information visit [Rountreemusic.com](#).
- For **Gabe Witcher** bio information visit [gabewitcher.com](#).

CALENDAR LISTING

Sat Sep 30 | 8pm

Signature Series | Great Hall

[GRAHAM100: American Legacies](#)

[With Gabe Witcher and Wild Up, conducted by Christopher Rountree](#)

The nation's oldest dance company turns 100, and The Soraya kicks off the 3-year celebration. For Opening Night, The Soraya presents American Legacies, a program that spans more than 100 years, from an early Ted Shawn piece performed by Graham in Los Angeles in 1915, to a new rendering of Agnes de Mille's groundbreaking *Rodeo*, with updated stage design and the world premiere of a new bluegrass adaptation of the original Aaron Copland score. Since 2015, the Martha Graham Dance Company has had its West Coast home at The Soraya and keeping with its tradition of presenting the Company with live music, The Soraya has invited **Wild Up** to join for the fifth time, as well as fiddler **Gabe Witcher**, and his bluegrass sextet.

Tickets: \$49-\$129

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

Website: www.thesoraya.org

Phone: 818-677-3000

For tickets and interview requests, please contact:

Marie Estrada, Communications Associate, The Soraya
P: 818-677-6691 | E: marie.estrada@csun.edu

Gary W. Murphy, Consultant
P: 213-700-9645 | E: gmurphypr@gmail.com

For questions or ticket information, visit www.TheSoraya.org or call the Ticket Office at (818) 677-3000. Office hours are 11a-4p, Tuesday through Saturday. [ACCESS YOUR PRESS KIT HERE](#).

About the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for The Performing Arts (The Soraya) is an award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre that opened in 2011 and was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers. In 2017, a transformative gift by Younes and Soraya Nazarian dubbed the venue The Soraya, from its former “Valley Performing Arts Center.” A vibrant performance program has served to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and its 1.8 million residents, and further establish The Soraya as one of the top arts companies in Southern California.

The Soraya’s 2023-24 Season boldly advances the immersive sound of big orchestras; the free flow of jazz; an array of dance, and a cultural bounty drawn from the well of world traditions. The Soraya continues its vigorous commitment to innovating, excelling, and amplifying access by offering a wide variety of performances that reflect LA’s many distinctive communities and featuring new and original work from the Los Angeles region as well as artists from around the world.

Located on the vibrant campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya and the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication share an integral link that enhances student opportunities in the arts and performing arts. This partnership fosters academic opportunity and artistic excellence, elevating the talents of CSUN’s students.

A \$5 million contribution from record producer and former California Lieutenant Governor Mike Curb was pivotal in ensuring The Soraya was completed and opened in 2011. For his founding support and in acknowledgment of the integral relationship between the Mike Curb College and The Soraya, Mike Curb is recognized as one of The Soraya’s Cornerstone Benefactors. The relationship between The Soraya and the Mike Curb College continues to grow, with robust offerings for students through master classes, student tickets, concerts of student ensembles, and students appearing alongside renowned artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Aida Cuevas, and Martha Graham Dance Company.

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