

30th Season

COLUMBIA CLASSICAL BALLET

2026 · 2027

JOSEPH PHILLIPS



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

DON QUIXOTE



A Ballet in Two Acts

KOGER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

OCTOBER 1 & 2, 2026



The Art of
Ballet Gala



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*Siena Appelboun, Trainee with Columbia Classical Ballet,
dancing the Black Swan pas de deux*

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2026 / 2027 SEASON

COLUMBIA CLASSICAL BALLET

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Sergei Zolotarev, *Ballet Master and Rehearsal Director*
Irene Liu, *Resident Choreographer*

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Lawrence Ogina Yuleanne Santos

COMPANY ARTISTS

Jolie Alonso Amy Brooks Lindan Shivar Catherine Sistrunk
Bonnie Spafford Dylan Tobias Zola Weinberg Johanna Yatco
Karina Zolotareva

TRAINEES

Siena Appelbourn Mollie Berk Eliza Blackwell

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Summer, Irene Liu, and Joseph Phillips · Photo by Perry McLeod

A MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

A quarter to ten on Harden Street, in Five Points.

Our new studio is a storefront, and the whole front wall is glass. Company class started fifteen minutes ago, a dozen or more dancers at the barre, our ballet master, Sergei Zolotarev, teaching.

I'm out on the sidewalk with my daughter, Summer, on my hip. People walk by and glance in. A little girl and her mother stop. The girl puts both palms on the window, wide-eyed. She doesn't notice me.

Through the glass, I catch the eye of Irene, who built this with me. She comes to the door, smiling at the girl like she's been expecting her.

"Do you want to come in and watch?"

The girl looks up at her mother. Her mother asks her the same thing. The girl doesn't say a word. She nods.

They come in and stand by the door.

Halfway through the barre I look over. The girl hasn't moved, and one foot under her is pointing. Her mother is watching her daughter the way you watch your kid take her first steps. It's how I watch Summer. At fourteen months, everything she does is new, and all of it is a performance.

At four that afternoon, six-year-olds are at the same barre, in the same spots.

Tonight, the professionals that girl watched through the glass are on this stage.

That studio exists because this season, for the first time, the company and its school are under one board of directors, with one vision. The school trains dancers for this company, and the company is in that studio every morning showing them what they're training for. Our board made it possible.

This company is more than thirty years old, and Harden Street is its first home of its own. *Don Quixote* is the first full-length ballet made there.

Valeri Salnikov is dancing Don Quixote. When I was a boy just starting out, I took class in his studio, down the same street, here in Five Points. Years later he put on his first production of *Don Quixote*, and I danced Basilio, the young hero.

The scenery on this stage tonight is the scenery from that production. I stood in front of it once. Tonight, our dancers do.

They came from Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, New York, and South Carolina. Most of them moved their lives here while we were opening the new space, with a lot still uncertain.

Sergei Zolotarev set this entire ballet from scratch in four weeks. Every run-through went top to bottom. Everyone in this cast knows the whole ballet.

This *Don Quixote* is theirs.

Don Quixote is an old man who believes in the old stories so hard he sees a giant where everyone else sees a windmill. Two kids are in love, and the only grown-up who takes them seriously is the old man everyone is laughing at.

They win because of him.

People walk past that window all day. Some stop and look in. That morning, the girl stopped.

When I was about ten, I sat in the Koger Center and watched a young Cuban dancer named Carlos Acosta dance *Don Quixote* on this stage. He went on to become one of the greatest dancers in the world. That night he jumped and spun in the air, and the sweat flew off him like a sprinkler. I didn't understand how a body could do that. It seemed impossible. I thought of that night when I saw her face.

Giants.

Any weekday morning at 9:30, the window. Bring a child. Stand by the door.

Come in.



Joseph Phillips

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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COLUMBIA CLASSICAL BALLET

DON QUIXOTE

A Ballet in Two Acts

IN CELEBRATION OF HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Staged by Sergei Zolotarev

Choreography after Marius Petipa and Alexander Gorsky

Music by Ludwig Minkus

Scenic Design by Valeri Salnikov

Lighting Design by Marc Hurst

Stage Manager · Marc Hurst

Costume Mistress · Logan Summers Johnson

Props Master · Jodi Moseley

with dancers of the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Betsy Blackmon Dance Program

KOGER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

October 1 and 2, 2026

Act One, about 50 minutes · Intermission, 15 minutes · Act Two, about 40 minutes

Recorded music. Two costumes courtesy of International Ballet, Greenville.

World premiere December 14, 1869, Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow.

Columbia Classical Ballet premiere October 1, 2026, Koger Center for the Arts.



IN LOVING MEMORY

Rich Wandover

This performance, our first since his passing, is dedicated to Rich, who stood with us every step of the way on Harden Street. He was and is our Guardian Angel.

DON QUIXOTE

THE CAST

in order of appearance

ACT ONE

Scene One · A Square in Barcelona

KITRI, <i>the innkeeper's daughter</i>	Johanna Yatco [*] / Lisa Kamiya [†]
BASILIO, <i>a poor barber, in love with Kitri</i>	Lawrence Ogina [*] / Luke Slavich [†]
LORENZO, <i>the innkeeper, Kitri's father</i>	Sergei Zolotarev
TERESA, <i>his wife</i>	Kiyomi Mercadante Ramirez
TAVERN BOYS	Viviana Moras, Ellyana Ramirez, Katelyn Reneau
GAMACHE, <i>a wealthy nobleman</i>	Leonardo Victorino
JUANITA, <i>Kitri's friend</i>	Zola Weinberg
PICCINILIA, <i>Kitri's friend</i>	Jolie Alonso
DON QUIXOTE, <i>a knight-errant of La Mancha</i>	Valeri Sahnikov
SANCHO PANZA, <i>his faithful squire</i>	Eduardo Ramirez
SEGUIDILLA	<i>the Ensemble</i>
BLIND MAN'S BUFF	<i>the Ensemble</i>
VILLAGERS	<i>the Ensemble</i>

Scene Two · The Gypsy Camp and the Windmills

GYPSY MAN, <i>leader of the gypsies</i>	Dylan Tobias
GYPSY WOMAN, <i>a fortune-teller</i>	Kiyomi Mercadante Ramirez
GYPSY DANCE	<i>the Ensemble</i>

Scene Three · Don Quixote's Dream

DULCINEA, <i>the Don's ideal beloved</i>	Johanna Yatco [*] / Lisa Kamiya [†]
QUEEN OF THE DRYADS	Yuleanne Santos
CUPID	Christina Grace Duffy
ATTENDANTS	Viviana Moras, Ellyana Ramirez, Katelyn Reneau
DRYADS	<i>the Ensemble</i>

^{*} October 1 and 2, 10 a.m.

[†] October 2, 7:30 p.m. Guest artists courtesy of Ellison Ballet, New York.

Casting subject to change.

DON QUIXOTE
THE CAST

continued

ACT TWO

Scene One · Lorenzo's Tavern

CARMENCITA, <i>a fiery street dancer</i>	Lindan Shivar
GUITAR LADIES	Mollie Berk, Amy Brooks
MERCEDES, <i>Espada's companion</i>	Yuleanne Santos
ESPADA, <i>a celebrated toreador</i>	Dylan Tobias
JIG	Leonardo Victorino, Eduardo Ramirez, Sergei Zolotarev, Kiyomi Mercadante Ramirez
VILLAGERS	<i>the Ensemble</i>

Scene Two · The Wedding

GRAND PAS	Kitri and Basilio
FANDANGO	Morgan Burchette ‡, Rhodes Johnson ‡, Mia Kovalik ‡, Nora Kunkee ‡, Clara Rogers ‡
BRIDESMAIDS	Jolie Alonso, Mollie Berk, Eliza Blackwell, Amy Brooks, Yuleanne Santos, Catherine Sistrunk, Bonnie Spafford, Zola Weinberg, Karina Zolotareva
WEDDING GUESTS	<i>the Ensemble</i>

THE ENSEMBLE

Jolie Alonso	Christina Grace Duffy	Viviana Moras	Catherine Sistrunk
Siena Appelbourn	Christy Hausken	Ellyana Ramirez	Bonnie Spafford
Kathleen Balmer	Rhodes Johnson ‡	April Reneau	Lucille Turner
Mollie Berk	Mia Kovalik ‡	Katelyn Reneau	Zola Weinberg
Eliza Blackwell	Nora Kunkee ‡	Clara Rogers ‡	Fiona Wilk
Amy Brooks	Savannah Mandish	Yuleanne Santos	Karina Zolotareva
Morgan Burchette ‡	Kayla Medlin	Lindan Shivar	

‡ University of South Carolina's Betsy Blackmon Dance Program.

Casting subject to change.

DON QUIXOTE
SYNOPSIS



PROLOGUE

Don Quixote has filled his head with the old books of chivalry. He proposes that his neighbor Sancho Panza join him on a quest to perform heroic deeds in the name of his idealized beloved, the Lady Dulcinea. Sancho agrees, Don Quixote solemnly dubs him his squire, and the two set out in search of adventure.

ACT ONE

Scene One · A Square in Barcelona

The square is buzzing with life on the morning of Kitri's birthday. The innkeeper's spirited daughter is in love with Basilio, a poor barber, who strolls in late; she turns her back on him until he teases and pleads his way back into her good graces, and together they lead the square in a lively dance. Her father, Lorenzo, will not hear of it. He has his eye on Gamache, a wealthy nobleman full of comical airs, and Kitri wants none of him. The town dances a Seguidilla.

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza arrive. The maidens blindfold the stout, simple-hearted Sancho and whirl him around in a playful game, while the old knight, catching sight of Kitri, believes he has found the Lady Dulcinea herself. He kneels and presents her with a flower. In the commotion, Kitri and Basilio slip away together. Lorenzo and Gamache set off in pursuit, and Don Quixote and Sancho follow to protect the young lovers.

Scene Two · The Gypsy Camp and the Windmills

Kitri and Basilio take refuge in a gypsy camp near the old windmills. Don Quixote and Sancho arrive. A Gypsy Man questions the strangers, then the gypsies dance for them. A Gypsy Woman reads the old knight's palm but hesitates, unwilling to tell him what she sees. A storm breaks, the windmill's sails begin to turn, and Don Quixote sees giants. He draws his sword and attacks. A sail catches him and hurls him to the ground.

Scene Three · Don Quixote's Dream

Exhausted, Don Quixote falls asleep and finds himself in the realm of the Dryads. Their Queen and Cupid bring him Kitri, transformed into his ideal, the beautiful Dulcinea. At dawn he wakes with Sancho keeping watch, and the companions set off toward the town.

ACT TWO

Scene One · Lorenzo's Tavern

The following evening, townsfolk and toreros gather at Lorenzo's tavern, and the toreador Espada arrives with Mercedes and the fiery Carmencita. Kitri and Basilio appear. Basilio has earned a little money, enough for a moment's rest at the tavern, but not enough for Lorenzo, who throws him out once again.

Basilio devises a trick. He draws a dagger and, with a great show of despair, plunges it into his chest and collapses while Kitri mourns over her "dying" lover. Touched by their love, Don Quixote levels his lance at the innkeeper until Lorenzo blesses the marriage. The moment the blessing is given, Basilio springs back to life. Since a blessing cannot be undone, Lorenzo throws up his hands, forgives them both, and joins the dance with his wife, Teresa.

Scene Two · The Wedding

The wedding of Kitri and Basilio fills the town square. A fiery Fandango opens the celebration, and at its height Kitri, Basilio, and the lead soloists perform the famous Grand Pas. Don Quixote blesses the newlyweds, and then he and Sancho Panza bid farewell and set off once more in search of new chivalric adventures.

Artistic Director



JOSEPH PHILLIPS

Columbia, South Carolina

Joseph Phillips grew up in Columbia. His first role was Nicholas in Carolina Ballet's *Nutcracker* at Township Auditorium. He trained with Stanislav Issaev at the University of South Carolina, and when Issaev became dean of dance at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Joseph followed him there. He went on to the North Carolina School of the Arts, and Issaev remained his principal teacher and coach.

He won gold medals at the USA International Ballet Competition, the first Prague International Ballet Competition, and the Youth America Grand Prix Finals, all in 2002, and in Seoul in 2008, more than any other American male dancer.

He danced with San Francisco Ballet, Miami City Ballet, and American Ballet Theatre. In 2013 he became a principal dancer with the Mariinsky Theatre in Russia, on its Primorsky Stage, dancing in Vladivostok and St. Petersburg. He is one of a handful of Americans ever to hold that rank. In the Philippines he became the only foreign artist to dance with all three national companies, and at Ballet Philippines he served as Resident Choreographer and Interim Artistic Director.

In 2020 he and Misty Copeland created *Swans for Relief*, which linked 32 dancers in 14 countries through *The Dying Swan*. It passed five million views, and CNN International named it one of the top ten performances of the pandemic.

As Artistic Director of Columbia Classical Ballet, he brought the company and its school together under one nonprofit and one board for the first time in Columbia's history.

Columbia gave him the Key to the City and named July 17 Joseph Phillips Day. In June 2027 the USA International Ballet Competition brings him back to Jackson to honor its gold medalists at its 50th anniversary. His first book, *The Line*, shaped like a full-length ballet, comes out next year.

Artistic Staff

Ballet Master and Rehearsal Director



Kharkiv,
Ukraine

SERGEI ZOLOTAREV

Sergei Zolotarev was born in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and began ballet at five. He graduated from the Kharkov School of Ballet and the Kiev State Ballet School, two of Ukraine's leading academies, trained in the Vaganova method, and refined his artistry under masters in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As a Principal Dancer with the Moscow City Ballet he danced leading roles across the classical repertoire, and he also performed with the Natalya Sats Musical Theatre and the Russian National Ballet Theatre. He

has toured Europe and the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, North Korea, and the United States. He then joined the Primorsky Stage of the Mariinsky Theatre, where he served six years as Rehearsal Director, staging productions that remain in its repertoire. He is guest faculty for the University of South Carolina Summer Dance Conservatory. At Columbia Classical Ballet he teaches company class, rehearses the company, and teaches in the School. He staged this *Don Quixote*.

Resident Choreographer



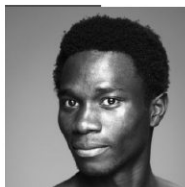
Antioch,
California

IRENE LIU

A William J. Gillespie scholar, Irene Liu holds a BFA in Dance Performance from UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts. In 2020 she founded Ballet Infinity in San Mateo, California, and in 2023 brought Joseph Phillips onto its faculty. In 2024 the two opened and co-directed El Camino Ballet. She has choreographed for the USA International Ballet Competition and has created and coached many competition pieces, most often for Youth America Grand Prix. Her students have won

top prizes at YAGP, the American Dance Competition, and the World Ballet Competition, and her graduates have gone on to the Boston Ballet pre-professional program, The Washington Ballet, and Complexions. She has assisted Yuri Possokhov of San Francisco Ballet and has also staged works for Sacramento Ballet. Since becoming Resident Choreographer in 2025, she has created works for the LifeChance Gala, including *L'Amour Chalamet*, and for Project 27, where she returns with new work this season.

The Dancers



Nairobi, Kenya

LAWRENCE OGINA *Principal Artist*

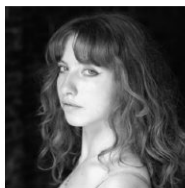
Lawrence Ogina is from Kenya and is in his fourth season with Columbia Classical Ballet. His roles with the company include Jafar in *Aladdin*; Duke Tremaine in *Cinderella*; the Arabian, Sugar Plum Cavalier, and Snow Cavalier in *The Nutcracker*; the Neapolitan in *Swan Lake*; Peter in *Peter and the Wolf*; Prince Désiré in *Once Upon an Evening*; and Pierre in *La Esmeralda*. His repertoire also includes *Spartacus*, *Summertime*, *Libertango*, and *Spring Waters*, and original works have been created for him, including *Cassiopéia* and *In the Garden*. He has appeared as a guest artist with the Charleston Ballet in Charleston, West Virginia, in *Peter and the Wolf*, *Cinderella*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Dracula*.



Teresina,
Brazil

YULEANNE SANTOS *Principal Artist*

Yuleanne Santos is from Teresina, Brazil, where she began ballet at six at Teatro do Boi and continued at Balé Jovem do Piauí. On a full scholarship she moved to Italy to train at Balletto di Roma, working with Cornell Callender, Ana Maria Garagozzo, Alexandre Stepkine, and Jose Perez. She was a gold and silver medalist at the Prêmio Internacional de Dança de São Paulo. In 2018 she joined Astana Ballet in Kazakhstan as a soloist. Her soloist and principal roles include Kitri in *Don Quixote*, the Prelude in *Chopiniana*, Sugar Plum and the Arabian lead in *The Nutcracker*, the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*, *La Sylphide*, *Spring Waters*, and Phrygia in *Spartacus*. She has been a guest artist with the Charleston Ballet in West Virginia.



Olympia,
Washington

JOLIE ALONSO *Company Artist*

Jolie Alonso is from Olympia, Washington, where she trained in many styles before falling in love with ballet. In 2023 she joined the Joffrey Ballet School in New York as a Trainee under Era Jouravlev, training in the Vaganova technique and premiering in *The Grand Pas de Fleurs* from *La Esmeralda*. She then danced two seasons with New Ballet San Jose under Dalia Rawson, first as a Studio Company Apprentice and then as a Studio Company dancer, performing Clara and the California Poppy in *The San Jose Nutcracker*, the Russian Princess in *Swan Lake*, and Zulma in *Giselle*. She has danced featured roles in contemporary works by Natasha Adorlee and James Kopecky and was recognized for her pas de deux work at ADC IBC and YAGP in 2025.



Richmond,
Virginia

AMY BROOKS *Company Artist*

Sponsored by Susan Anderson

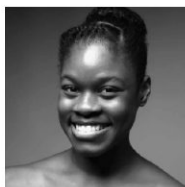
Amy Brooks grew up outside Richmond, Virginia, training in classical ballet and modern dance at Aim Dance Academy and Central Virginia Dance Academy. She continued at summer intensives with Richmond Ballet, the Joffrey Ballet in New York, and BalletX, and was a Dance Fellow at the Carmel Dance Festival alongside Leandro Damasco Jr. She holds a degree in Dance Performance and Choreography from the University of South Carolina, where she worked with Complexions Contemporary Ballet, Joffrey Ballet Chicago, the Limón Dance Company, Kathryn Morgan, and Valentina Kozlova. Before joining Columbia Classical Ballet, she danced with Columbia Repertory Dance Company.



Elgin,
South Carolina

LINDAN SHIVAR *Company Artist*

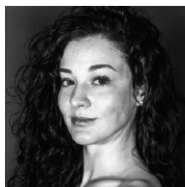
Lindan Shivar is from Elgin, South Carolina, and began training in the Cecchetti method as a child. She holds a BFA in Dance with honors from Belhaven University, where she studied under Ravenna Tucker-Wagnon of The Royal Ballet and Birmingham Royal Ballet and Laura Morton of Milwaukee Ballet, and performed *Frescoes* from *The Little Humpbacked Horse*, staged by Sir Henry Danton. She continued at Southeastern Ballet School under Hillary Krieger-Toth and Gabor Toth. She joined Columbia Classical Ballet as an apprentice in 2022 and became a Company Artist in 2024. Her repertoire includes the Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty*, the Snow Queen in *The Nutcracker*, and roles in *Swan Lake* and works by Terrance Henderson and Irene Liu. This is her fifth season.



Chicago,
Illinois

CATHERINE SISTRUNK *Company Artist*

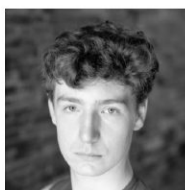
Catherine Sistrunk is from Chicago and came to ballet at sixteen after thirteen years as a gymnast. She trained on scholarship in the trainee programs of Ballet West in Salt Lake City and Ballet de Barcelona in Spain, and in 2024 at the English National Ballet Trainee Programme in London, working with James Pett and Travis Clausen-Knight of Company Wayne McGregor, Arthur Pita, and Anne-Laure Arnoux of the Paris Opera Ballet. She has attended summer intensives with American Ballet Theatre and refined her technique with Hillary Krieger-Toth at Southeastern Ballet School. Her roles include leads in *The Nutcracker*, *Cinderella*, *Don Quixote*, and *Coppélia*. This is her first season with Columbia Classical Ballet.



Aiken,
South Carolina

BONNIE SPAFFORD *Company Artist*

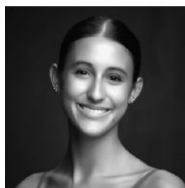
Bonnie Spafford is from Aiken, South Carolina, and began ballet at twelve under Terry Ellen Shields at the Classical Ballet Centre in Summerville. She trained at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, first under Stanislav Issaev and then in the residential program under Josee Garant, and attended the University of South Carolina's Summer Dance Program. At seventeen she enlisted in the United States Air Force, was nominated to the Air Force Academy, and performed with the Division I Air Force Dance Team. She joined Columbia Classical Ballet as a trainee in 2025. She is completing a degree in Finance and Accounting, plans to pursue a Juris Doctor, and teaches ballet across South Carolina.



Milpitas,
California

DYLAN TOBIAS *Company Artist*

Dylan Tobias is from Milpitas, California, the child of two former dancers, and began dancing at three at the studio where his parents trained. In 2019 he continued at New Ballet San Jose under Dalia Rawson and Linh Le, performing soloist and principal roles including Siegfried in *Swan Lake*, the Nutcracker Prince in *The San Jose Nutcracker*, and the Peasant Pas soloist in *Giselle*. As a recurring guest artist with Ballet Academy of Silicon Valley, he has danced Basilio in *Don Quixote*, Prince Désiré in *The Sleeping Beauty*, and Prince Charming in *Cinderella*. He competed at YAGP and ADC IBC, placing in the Top 10 at both the regional and national levels and receiving multiple scholarship offers.



Columbia,
South Carolina

ZOLA WEINBERG *Company Artist*

Zola Weinberg is from Columbia and began ballet at two at the Columbia Conservatory of Dance. At five she turned to gymnastics, competing with Lake Murray Gymnastics until fourteen, then returned to ballet under Anita Ashley at Columbia Ballet School, where she also trained in contemporary dance and musical theater. In her senior year at Dreher High School she was a teaching assistant for Kathleen Lee's Dance I class while training with Columbia Classical Ballet. She has attended summer intensives at Columbia Ballet School, Charlotte Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Colorado Ballet, and Philadelphia Ballet. Her credits include the Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty* and the Snow Queen in *The Nutcracker*.



Manila,
Philippines

JOHANNA YATCO *Company Artist*

Johanna Yatco is from Manila, Philippines, and began formal ballet training at fifteen with House of Dance, Goh Ballet in Vancouver, Philippine Ballet Theatre, and Ballet Manila. She earned top-three placements at international competitions in Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada, and Italy, and performed roles from *Don Quixote*, the pas de trois from *Paquita*, and Medora in *Le Corsaire*. As a guest artist she was invited to St. Petersburg for Innopraktika's Russian Seasons and to Ballet Manila's *Giselle*. She joined American Repertory Ballet as a trainee in 2022, dancing the Snow Queen pas de deux, Snowflakes, Flowers, Marzipan, and Coffee in *The Nutcracker*, and the Evil Queen in *Snow White*, and has danced in Ethan Stiefel's *Giselle*, *Paquita*, and *Cinderella*.



Voronezh,
Russia

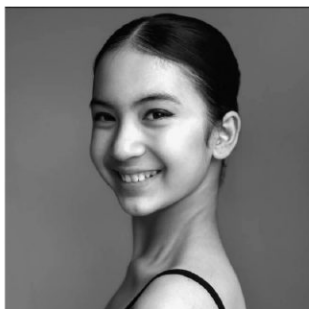
KARINA ZOLOTAREVA *Company Artist*

Karina Zolotareva began ballet at seven and graduated from the Voronezh State Choreographic School in Russia, where she trained in the rigorous Vaganova system. As a dancer with the Moscow City Ballet and the Primorsky Stage of the Mariinsky Theatre, she performed the full classical repertoire of both companies while touring worldwide. Her years in the corps de ballet of leading academic theatres gave her a command of the spatial architecture of classical ballet and a deep understanding of a choreographer's vision, the foundation of her teaching. She is guest faculty for the University of South Carolina Summer Dance Conservatory.

WHO'S WHO

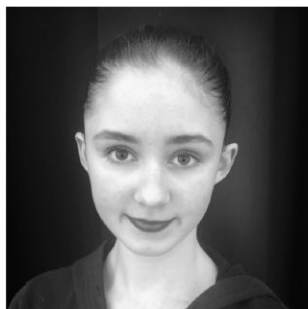
Trainees

Training with the company, in affiliation with the School of Columbia Classical Ballet



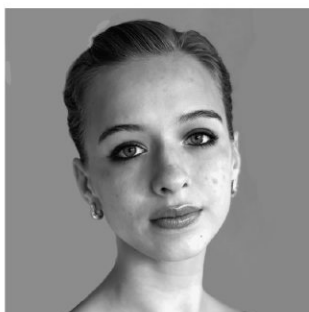
SIENA APPELBOUM

San Carlos, California



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Guest Artists



St. Petersburg,
Russia

VALERI SALNIKOV

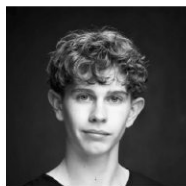
Valeri Salnikov danced with the Kirov Ballet, now the Mariinsky, and the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg before coming to the United States, where he danced with the Augusta Ballet and worked with Edward Villella. His repertoire includes works by Petipa, Balanchine, Béjart, and Eifman. For many years he ran a ballet studio on Harden Street in Five Points, a few doors from where Columbia Classical Ballet trains today. Joseph Phillips took class there as a boy and danced Basilio in Val's first production of *Don Quixote*. Over the last twenty years, Val has staged his own productions of *The Nutcracker*, *Carmen*, and *Don Quixote*, painting the backdrops himself. The scenery on stage tonight is from that first *Don Quixote*.



New York,
New York

LISA KAMIYA *Ellison Ballet*

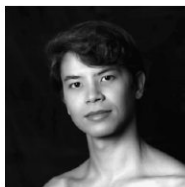
Lisa Kamiya began dancing at the age of three. Throughout her training she has received first-place awards from the National Ballet Competition, the Connecticut Classic, and the Japan International Ballet Festival, and was honored with the Youth Grand Prix Award at the YAGP New York regional. She performed a variation from *Giselle* on the Lincoln Center stage during the YAGP Final Round and has been awarded scholarships to Bolshoi Ballet, the European School of Ballet, and San Francisco Ballet. In winter 2025 she performed as a guest artist with Delaware Ballet as the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*. She is in her fourth year of full-time training at Ellison Ballet in New York under Artistic Director Edward Ellison and its faculty.



Raleigh,
North Carolina

LUKE SLAVICH *Ellison Ballet*

Luke Slavich trains in the Ellison Ballet Professional Training Program in New York under Jason Ambrose, Edward Ellison, Bo Lee, and Sofia Loffe. His classical training began at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts under Mikhail Tchoupakov, Ilya Kozadayev, and Emily Nicolao, with additional training in contemporary and character dance. He continued at the International Ballet Academy under Nadia Pavlenko and Maxim Ponomarenko, refining his Vaganova-based technique. Known for his strength, musicality, and partnering, he has recently performed Ali in the *Le Corsaire* pas de trois (2026) and the Cavalier variation from *The Nutcracker* (2025) with Ellison Ballet.



Taubaté,
Brazil

LEONARDO VICTORINO

Leonardo Victorino is from Taubaté, Brazil, and trained on full scholarship at the Bolshoi Ballet School. He danced principal roles in *Don Quixote*, *Giselle*, and *The Nutcracker* with companies in Rio de Janeiro and toured the United States with the Moscow Ballet. He went on to The Washington Ballet under Septime Webre and was a principal dancer with American Contemporary Ballet in Los Angeles. In Columbia he has danced with Columbia City Ballet and teaches at Ann Brodie's Carolina Ballet, where he directs the classical character program.



Mililani,
Hawaii

KIYOMI MERCADANTE RAMIREZ

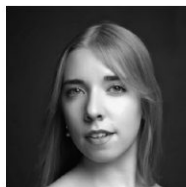
Kiyomi Mercadante Ramirez brings more than three decades of experience as a classical teacher, contemporary choreographer, and professional dancer. She performed with Ballet Dallas, the Richmond Ballet, Ballet Austin, Dallas Black Dance Theater, and Rasa Dance Chicago, and was Artistic Director of Dallas Dance Company. She is a Fellow of the Cecchetti Council of America, its highest teaching distinction, and earned Highly Commended in every professional teacher examination through the Advanced level. She trained with Malcolm Burn, Leslie Peck, Thom Clower, Kaye Weinstein Gary, Van Collins, and Ann Parsley. She has taught at the University of South Carolina, Dallas Black Dance Academy, and the School of the Richmond Ballet, and her students have earned scholarships to The Juilliard School, USC Kaufman, Indiana University, and the Ailey/Fordham program. She teaches at the School of Columbia Classical Ballet.



Hailey,
Idaho

EDUARDO RAMIREZ

Eduardo Ramirez began ballet at eighteen in Sun Valley, Idaho, with Columbia City Ballet alumna Sherry Horton. He moved to Columbia in 2005 and has been a guest artist with civic and professional companies throughout the Southeast. He is a Captain with the Columbia Fire Department and a Chief Warrant Officer Two in the South Carolina Army National Guard. He is married to Kiyomi Mercadante Ramirez, a faculty member of the School of Columbia Classical Ballet. They have four children, and the whole family dances.



Summerville,
South Carolina

CHRISTINA GRACE DUFFY

Christina Grace Duffy is from Summerville, South Carolina, where she began ballet at sixteen. She trained with Cincinnati Ballet, BalletMet, Oklahoma City Ballet, and the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities. She began her professional career at nineteen with Roanoke Ballet Theatre under Rolando Sarabia, dancing principal roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Nutcracker*, and *La Bayadère*, and went on to Arles Youth Ballet Company in France. She was the U.S. representative at the Slavenska Prix in Croatia in 2024.

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EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

DANCeMPower!

Directed by Dr. Anne Richardson

The DancEmPower! Educational Outreach Program, through the generous sponsorships of Palmetto Citizens Federal Credit Union and First Community Bank, provides free tickets to students and teachers in South Carolina schools to attend Columbia Classical Ballet's productions of *Don Quixote* and *The Nutcracker*. Teachers receive lesson plans that prepare their students to attend and that align with the South Carolina College- and Career-Readiness Standards for Visual and Performing Arts Proficiency in Dance.

The companion component is the DancEmPower! in the Schools Program, providing free dance classes taught by Columbia Classical Ballet (CCB) professional dancers working with Richland 2 School Resource Officers (SROs) at elementary schools. Richland 2 SROs explain the dangers of gangs, drugs, and vaping, and the CCB dancers provide a healthy alternative activity through dance. In December, participating students and their teachers attend CCB's *Nutcracker* Ballet at the Koger Center with tickets and transportation provided. This year, Columbia Classical Ballet is partnering with Conder Arts Integrated Magnet School and Round Top Elementary School in Richland School District 2 for our DancEmPower! Program.

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