



For Immediate Release

**BalletX Launches 15th Anniversary Season
With the World Premiere of 4 Virtual Works
on *BalletX Beyond***

Philadelphia, PA, September, 2020 – BalletX kicks off its 15th Anniversary Season with a virtual event on September 23 at 7:00pm, featuring the world premiere of four dance films, available only on the company’s new virtual subscription series platform *BalletX Beyond* at www.BalletX.org/Beyond. Equally exciting for BalletX fans, the company will debut a 25-minute documentary film about the history of the company and the process of building Philadelphia’s Premier Contemporary Ballet.

“BalletX has taken a big leap into a whole new arena producing beautiful dance films for our new virtual platform BalletX Beyond. We dove in and shifted our focus to continue bringing world premiere works to our incredible audience virtually. This is the beginning of a wonderful journey, and we can’t wait to share it with our friends, old and new, around the world,” says Christine Cox, BalletX Artistic and Executive Director.

The four works premiering on September 23, will feature choreographers Rena Butler, Loughlan Prior, Caili Quan, and Penny Saunders with filmmakers Tshay Williams, Daniel Madoff, Elliot deBruyn, and Quinn Wharton, respectively. Composers Darryl J. Hoffman and Michael Wall contribute original soundtracks to two of the films, and the music of civil rights icon Harry Belafonte is featured prominently in another.

Telling a range of stories in various settings, from the Underground Railroad to live-action animation, and island life on Guam to the iconography of cowboys and Revisionist Westerns, the films were shot at a number of sites throughout Greater Philadelphia, including Natural Lands’ Stoneleigh and Idlewild, el Centro de Oro, Sea Isle City, St. Malachi Church, Belmont Stables, The Navy Yard, and more.

BalletX Beyond is available now in two plans at www.BalletX.org/Beyond:

- **Basic** (\$180/year or \$15/month), featuring access to four Virtual World Premiere events, 15 digital features and short dance films, behind-the-scenes documentaries, artist Q&As and interviews, bonus launch videos, and surprise programming and events throughout the season.
- **Plus** (\$360/year or \$30/month), featuring all of the access available in the Basic plan, plus a rotating schedule of over 40 classic ballets from the BalletX archive and ticket discounts to any mainstage performances scheduled in spring or summer 2021.

Subscribers are invited to the live virtual event coinciding with the premiere of the films on September 23, featuring conversations with the choreographers, previews of the short films, and an exclusive performance by BalletX dancers Stanley Glover and Roderick Phifer.

About BalletX

BalletX, Philadelphia's Premier Contemporary Ballet Company, commissions choreographers from around the world to create new ballets that are "fresh, inclusive, and connect to what people want" (*Philadelphia Citizen*). Led by Artistic & Executive Director Christine Cox, BalletX has been recognized by *The New Yorker* as a "place of choreographic innovation" for producing 87 world premiere ballets by over 45 choreographers in its 14-year history. In addition to main-stage performances and international touring, the company offers free community pop ups, dance classes, artist Q&As, open rehearsals, and in-school dance education, designed to bring its home city of Philadelphia and the nation closer to dance. Among its many accolades and honors, BalletX was recently featured on the cover of *Dance Magazine's* October 2019 issue. To learn more about BalletX's programming and dancers, named "among America's best" by *The New York Times*, please visit BalletX.org and follow the company on social media.

About the choreographers:

Rena Butler comes from Chicago, IL, and has danced in companies such as Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, David Dorfman Dance, Manuel Vignouille/M-Motions, and The Kevin Wynn Collection. She has also collaborated with artists including Yara Travieso, Carrie Mae Weems, Nick Cave, and Carrie Schneider. Butler trained at The Chicago Academy for the Arts. She studied overseas at Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan,

and received her BFA from SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Dance. Also a choreographer, Rena has presented her work at Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, The New Orleans Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with Academy Award-winning jazz composer, Terrence Blanchard, CHTV Stories in Switzerland, and more. Butler also served on the consortium for Chicago Dancemakers Forum, and in 2019, was the recipient of the Prince Grace Award for Choreography.

Loughlan Prior is an award-winning choreographer working in New Zealand and internationally. He is the Choreographer in Residence at the Royal New Zealand Ballet and the Artistic Director of Prior Visual, a project-based film collective. He became the first recipient of the Ballet Foundation of New Zealand's Harry Haythorne Choreographic Award in 2015 and was presented with Creative New Zealand's Tup Lang Choreographic Award in 2016. His works have been performed in numerous countries, and he has created numerous live and digital projects for a diverse range of creative partners, including iD Fashion Week, Te Papa National Museum, WGT LUX Light Festival, Tempo Festival, Zambesi, New Zealand String Quartet and TV3's Dancing with the Stars. In 2019 he created *The Appearance of Colour* for Queensland Ballet and the widely acclaimed *Hansel and Gretel*, his first full-length production, for the Royal New Zealand Ballet. His dance films have enjoyed screenings at the Film Society of Lincoln Centre, #60secondsdance Denmark, San Francisco Dance Film Festival and the Short Film Corner of the Cannes Film Festival.

Caili Quan started dancing in her native Guam under the direction of John Grensback and Bettina Sanzotta, and moved to New York City to continue her classical training at Ballet Academy East. She was a trainee with Richmond Ballet and an apprentice with Charlotte Ballet (formerly North Carolina Dance Theatre), before joining First State Ballet Theatre under Pasha Kambalov for three seasons. During her training, she performed works by George Balanchine, Marius Petipa, and Malcolm Burn, among others. Caili has had the pleasure to choreograph for konverjdans, Columbia Ballet Collaborative, DanceWorks Chicago's ChoreoLab, CelloPointe, and St. Paul's School. Her piece *Fancy Me* was performed at the Vail Dance Festival in 2018. Caili was nominated by BalletX to serve as an Artistic Partnership Fellow at The Center for Ballet and the Arts at NYU during Summer 2019. In May 2020, Caili announced her retirement from dancing with BalletX at the conclusion of the 2019-20 Season to pursue her choreographic career. She is currently creating a new work on BalletX.

Penny Saunders, originally from West Palm Beach, Florida, graduated from the Harid Conservatory in 1995, and began her professional career with The American Repertory Ballet under the direction of Septime Webre. She went on to dance with Ballet Arizona, MOMIX Dance Theater, Cedar Lake Ensemble

and in 2004 she joined Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. In 2011, Saunders won the International Commissioning Project which launched her choreographic career, creating pieces for Hubbard Streets' main and second company, Cincinnati Ballet, The Royal New Zealand Ballet, Sacramento Ballet, Whim W'Him, BalletX, Tulsa Ballet 2, Ballet Idaho, SFDanceworks, SALT Contemporary Dance, Neos Dance Theater, Missouri Contemporary Ballet, Owen Cox Dance Group, among others. Saunders is honored to be the Resident Choreographer at The Grand Rapids Ballet where she recently completed her first full length work, *The Happy Prince and Other Wilde Tales*, that focused on the life and fairy tales of Oscar Wilde. Saunders has received support from The New York City Ballet Choreographic Commissions Initiative, participated in The National Choreographers Initiative and was the recipient of the 2016 Princess Grace Choreographic Fellowship. In the 2019-20 season, she is excited to be collaborating with the Tulsa Ballet, Oklahoma City Ballet, The Grand Rapids Ballet, Whim W'Him, BalletX, Dayton Ballet, Diablo Ballet, Ballet Idaho, Indiana University, Seattle Dance Collective, and Point Park University.

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