

AMERICAN  
MIDWEST  
**Ballet**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**September 21, 2018**

Contact: Shanna Zordell (Executive Assistant), 563-663-2120 - [shanna@amballet.org](mailto:shanna@amballet.org)  
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Among this year's Momentum works: Matthew Lovegood's *French Songs* (left); Erika Overturff's *Connemara*; and Overturff's *Rhapsody in Blue*. [More full-resolution photos...](#)

**NEW BRAND, NEW DANCERS, NEW WORKS IN AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET'S *MOMENTUM***

OMAHA — The freshly rebranded American Midwest Ballet — formerly known as Ballet Nebraska — will open its ninth season in October with a fresh crop of works, artistic director Erika Overturff said.

"Our mixed repertory program, *Momentum*, has been a must-see since our earliest seasons, because it showcases the exciting range of dance as an expressive art," Overturff said. "For its first American Midwest Ballet edition, we're mixing some past favorites with works that will be new experiences for our audiences."

Headlining the selection is Overturff's *Rhapsody in Blue*, to the iconic music of George Gershwin.

"When I choreographed it, I listened to the music many times until I knew all of the rhythms and notes by heart," Overturff said. "The music is so expressive; within one piece it conveys so many different moods. It is flirty, jazzy, big and bold, whiny and sad, sweeping and romantic, daring and quick – lots of personality!"

"I see the dancers as a personification of the musical notes themselves, as if they floated out of the instruments and onto the stage for us to see."

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Among the program's other highlights are three guest works:

Frank Chaves' sultry, flirtatious *At Last*, is a duet set to lyrics sung by the incomparable Etta James. Chaves, based in Chicago, was the artistic director of its famed contemporary dance company River North Dance Chicago for 23 years until his retirement in 2015. Restricted to a wheelchair by the spinal disease syringomyelia, he continues to be active as an independent choreographer.

Mariana Oliveira's powerful *Death and the Maiden* was a winner of the Joffrey Ballet's 2016 "Winning Works" choreography competition. Originally from Brazil, Oliveira has created works for companies including Richmond Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, and New York City Ballet Choreographic Institute.

*Group Therapy*, a witty ensemble character study by master showman Harrison McEldowney, was originally created for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. The piece takes a humorous and touching look into the lives of four couples working on their relationships.

Rounding out the production are returns by two audience favorites: Overturff's *Connemara*, created in 2011 as part of a collaboration with Joslyn Art Museum; and American Midwest Ballet ballet master Matthew Lovegood's *French Songs*, set to selections from composer and musicologist Joseph Cantaloube's "Chants d'Auvergne."

Overturff's inspiration was a painting selected by a vote of Joslyn visitors from the museum's permanent collection: *Connemara (Rock Pool)*, by contemporary American artist May Stevens. For *French Songs*, Lovegood responded to the varied moods of Cantaloube's composition, based on Cantaloube's orchestrations of peasant songs from his home region of France, which he had collected over a period of more than 30 years.

American Midwest Ballet, formerly Ballet Nebraska, brings the beauty, athleticism, and energy of professional ballet to audiences in the Midwest and beyond. Performing at home and on tour, its mission is to provide enrichment through programs of the highest quality: professional dance performances, educational programs, and community outreach.

American Midwest Ballet's talented professional dancers hail from around the nation and abroad. The company inspires people through its expressive performing artists, acclaimed choreographers, skilled teachers, and stunning productions.

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**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

Contact: Shanna Zordell (Executive Assistant), 563-663-2120 - shanna@amballet.org

**QUICK GUIDE TO AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET'S *MOMENTUM***

- What:** As American Midwest Ballet's annual mixed-repertory program, *Momentum* brings audiences a sparkling collection of short ballets in a variety of styles.
- When:** Friday, October 19, 7:30 pm - Joslyn Art Museum  
Sunday, October 21, 2:00 pm - Iowa Western Arts Center
- Tickets:** Joslyn performance: Ticket Omaha: [www.ticketomaha.com](http://www.ticketomaha.com); 402-345-0606; box office, 13th & Douglas.  
Iowa Western Arts Center performance: Arts Center box office, [artscenter.iwcc.edu](http://artscenter.iwcc.edu) or 712-388-7140.
- Sponsors:** Premier Benefactors - Iowa West Foundation, Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, Richard Brooke Foundation, Holland Foundation, Douglas County  
Season Sponsors - Anonymous, Omaha Steaks, Peter Kiewit Foundation  
Production Sponsor - Cindy and Scott Heider  
Major Support - Nebraska Arts Council and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment; Sherwood Foundation
- Highlight:** *Rhapsody in Blue*, choreographed by Erika Overturff to the iconic music of George Gershwin. Elegant yet playful in style, the ballet blends neoclassical technique with elements of jazz, just as Gershwin did in composing the score.
- Erika's take:** "I love the variety of dance that we are able to share through *Momentum*. The whole program is a brilliant showcase for our dancers' versatility and the expressive range of dance."

# AMERICAN MIDWEST *Ballet*

## ARTIST BIOS

Contact: Shanna Zordell (Executive Assistant), 563-663-2120 - shanna@amballet.org

### **Erika Overturff**

*Artistic Director & CEO, American Midwest Ballet*



Erika Overturff is the founder of American Midwest Ballet, the region's professional ballet company. Under her leadership as artistic director and CEO, American Midwest Ballet enriches the area through an exciting array of professional dance performances and a strong commitment to cultural education and community outreach programming. Erika began her training in Iowa at the Academy of Ballet, studying at summer programs including North Carolina School of the Arts, American Ballet Theatre, Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, and the

Kirov Academy. Following early high school graduation as valedictorian, Erika earned her B.F.A. in ballet performance and teaching from the University of Utah, which she attended on a full scholarship. She graduated *cum laude* in just three years and was chosen outstanding senior by the ballet department faculty.

Erika went on to dance with Montgomery Ballet, Alabama Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. She has performed principal and soloist roles in a wide range of classical and contemporary repertoire. Audiences have enjoyed Erika's performances in roles such as Eileen in *Swing, Swing, Swing!*, Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lucy in *Dracula*, Snow Queen and Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*, and Myrtha in *Giselle*. Erika has also been a faculty member and guest teacher for schools around the United States.

As a choreographer, Erika has received critical praise for her work. She served as répétitrice for Montgomery Ballet and resident choreographer for Omaha Theater Ballet. She has worked on several collaborations with Opera Omaha, created an all-new production of *Peter and the Wolf* with the Omaha Symphony, and regularly creates new works for American Midwest Ballet. As part of the company's ongoing collaboration with Joslyn Art Museum for *Momentum*, Erika has choreographed original ballets inspired by museum artwork or exhibitions, including *Connemara*, *Cleopatra*, *Go West!*, and *Appalachian Song*. Other featured works include *Tropico*, *Party Animals*, *The Diner*, and *Ella*. Erika also created American Midwest Ballet's lively and entertaining version of the holiday favorite *The Nutcracker*, which has premiered to enthusiastic audiences both at home and on tour. For her vision and achievements, Erika was named a recipient of Midlands Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Awards, honoring area entrepreneurs, executives, and professionals.

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**Matthew Lovegood**

*Ballet Master*



Matthew Lovegood began his training in Pennsylvania with Sharon Filone at the Lake Erie Ballet School and Sandra Barnett at Little's Dance Studio. He went on to study on full scholarship at North Carolina School of the Arts, Miami City Ballet School, and the Chautauqua Festival Dancers. Matthew has danced professionally with Ohio Ballet, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, Lake Erie Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. He has performed numerous leading roles within the classical repertoire, including Prince Desire in *The Sleeping Beauty*,

Franz in *Coppélia*, and Mercutio in *Romeo & Juliet*, as well as in works by George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, Donald Byrd, Heinz Poll, Laura Dean, Luis Montero, and many others. He has also performed as a guest artist with Hawaii Ballet Theatre, Neglia Ballet Artists, and Ballet Tucson.

Area audiences have enjoyed Matthew in roles such as Prince Siegfried in *Swan Lake*, Albrecht in *Giselle*, Cavalier in *The Nutcracker*, White Rabbit in Kennet Oberly's *Alice In Wonderland*, the Asp in Erika Overturff's *Cleopatra*, Puck in Oscar Antunez's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the leading role in Ann Reinking's staging of *In the Style of Bob Fosse*. Also a choreographer, he has premiered original works with numerous schools and professional companies, including *Bacchanale Variations*, *Signs of Life*, *Sadako*, *Poseidon*, *Transcription*, *Caprice*, and *Swan Lake* for American Midwest Ballet. Matthew is the co-director of Motion41 Dance in Omaha and continues to serve as a guest teacher for schools throughout the country. Matthew is a founding member of American Midwest Ballet and returns for his ninth season as ballet master.

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**Erin Alarcón**



*Hometown:* Hackettstown, New Jersey

*Training & Experience:* B.A. in dance from Mercyhurst University, magna cum laude; New Jersey School of Dance Arts; summer programs at Eglevsky Ballet and Joffrey Ballet; professional performances with SoMar Dance Works and Ballet Concert; guest artist with Iowa Dance Theater

*Featured Repertory:* Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*; Odette in *Swan Lake*; title roles in *Giselle* and *Alice in Wonderland*; featured roles in *Tropico*, *Party Animals*, *The Diner*, *DanceSport*, and *Ella*.

*Additional Highlights:* choreographed *One in Three*, featured in *Momentum* to rave reviews; ninth season with American Midwest Ballet; founding company member

**Rebecca Brenner**



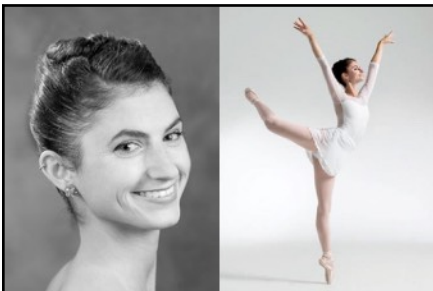
*Hometown:* Columbus, Ohio

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in dance from University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music; Columbus City Ballet School, merit scholarship at Orlando Ballet School; summer program at American Ballet Theater; member of Rochester City Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Little Swan and Neapolitan variation in *Swan Lake*; roles in *Giselle*, *The Nutcracker*, *Paquita*, *Cleopatra*, and *Go West!*

*Additional Highlights:* participated in Youth American Grand Prix New York City finals; fifth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Nora Carr**



*Hometown:* Burnt Hills, New York

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in dance from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music; Akjun Ballet Theatre; Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet; Northeast Ballet Artist; summer programs at American Ballet Theater, Miami City Ballet, Saratoga Summer Dance Intensive, CPYB; scholarship recipient at New York Summer School of the Arts

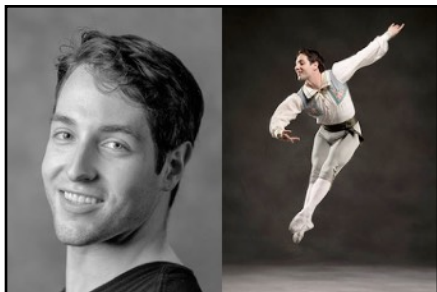
*Featured Repertory:* Roles in *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *Appalachian Song*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*Additional Highlight:* third season with American Midwest Ballet



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**Ryan Christopher**



*Hometown:* Golden, Colorado

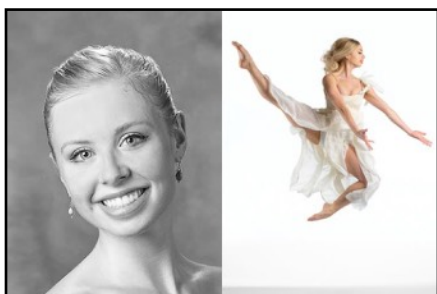
*Training & Experience:* International Youth Ballet School and Performing Arts Conservatory of Texas; professional dancer with Ballet Ariel and Boulder Ballet; guest artist throughout Colorado and around the United States

*Featured Repertory:* soloist in *Paquita*; pas de trois in *Swan Lake*; pas de six in *Giselle*; Snow King and Cavalier in *The Nutcracker*;

featured roles in *On My Mother's Side* and *Go West!*

*Additional Highlights:* former baseball and football athlete; professional costume and prop designer; sixth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Katherine Eppink**



*Hometown:* Des Moines, Iowa

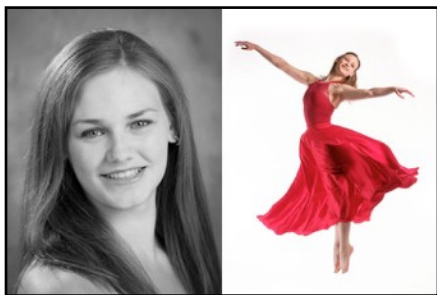
*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in ballet from the University of Utah and scholarship member of Utah Ballet; Iowa Ballet Academy; guest artist at Iowa Dance Theatre; summer programs at Pacific Northwest Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet on full scholarship, Ballet West, Nashville Ballet, and Ballet Met

*Featured Repertory:* Spanish and Ballerina Doll in *The Nutcracker*; soloist in *Bournonville Divertissements*; featured roles in *Go West!*,

*Ella*, and *Appalachian Song*

*Additional Highlights:* performed two world premieres in Seoul, South Korea; fifth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Claire Goodwillie**



*Hometown:* Omaha, Nebraska

*Training & Experience:* Omaha Theater Ballet School; summer programs at Pacific Northwest Ballet and Ballet Austin; apprentice with Omaha Theater Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* title role in *Cleopatra*; Rat Queen in *The Nutcracker*; Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; featured roles in *Sadako*, *Party Animals*, *Giselle*, *The Diner*, and *Go West!*

*Additional Highlights:* ninth season with American Midwest Ballet; founding company member

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**Alyssa Grimsley**

*Hometown:* Fort Smith, Arkansas

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in ballet performance from the University of Oklahoma, summa cum laude; Western Arkansas Ballet; summer programs at Joffrey Midwest, Ballet Austin, Tulsa Ballet, and Cincinnati Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Big Swan in *Swan Lake*, Spanish in *The Nutcracker*; roles in *Giselle*,

*Paquita*, *Go West!*, and *Ella*

*Additional Highlights:* toured with Oklahoma Festival Ballet to Eisenstadt, Austria and with Burklyn Ballet Theatre to Edinburgh, Scotland; fifth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Alexandra Hoffmann**



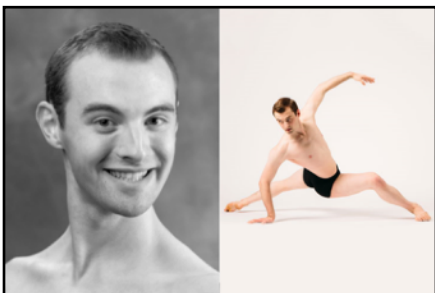
*Hometown:* Cleveland, Ohio

*Training & Experience:* Ana Lobe of Cleveland San Jose Ballet; summer programs at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, Nashville Ballet, and Louisville Ballet; trainee with Louisville Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Dew Drop Fairy and Ballerina Doll in *The Nutcracker*, Fee in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Little Swan in *Swan Lake*; roles in *Cleopatra*, *Go West!*, *Bournonville Divertissements*, and *Transcription*

*Additional Highlight:* fourth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Cameron Miller**



*Hometown:* Kansas City, Missouri

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in dance performance and choreography with emphasis in ballet and modern from the University of Missouri-Kansas City; Kansas City Ballet School and Summer Intensive

*Featured Repertory:* Balanchine's *Concerto Barocco*, White Swan pas de deux, Cavalier and Snow King in *The Nutcracker*

*Additional Highlights:* selected to perform a pas de deux in the 73rd Annual International Choreographers Showcase in Guatemala, as well as at ArtsKC and the Kauffman Center for Performing Arts; first season with American Midwest Ballet



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**Kogan Murphy**



*Hometown:* Chicago, Illinois

*Training & Experience:* Joffrey Ballet trainee; Ballet Theatre of Indiana, Judith Svalander School of Ballet; Joffrey Ballet summer program

*Featured Repertory:* Spanish in *The Nutcracker*; Little Swan in *Swan Lake*; roles in *Giselle*, *Appalachian Song*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*Additional Highlights:* Miss Illinois talent scholarship and Miss Douglas County; fourth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Wyatt Payne**



*Hometown:* Wichita, Kansas

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A in ballet performance from Friends University; Rogers Ballet; summer programs at Next Generation Ballet and Oklahoma City Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Nutcracker and Arabian in *The Nutcracker*; roles in *Appalachian Song* and *Bricolage*

*Additional Highlight:* second season with American Midwest Ballet

**Bret Samson**



*Hometown:* Saukville, Wisconsin

*Training & Experience:* Lake Shore Dance; Steps on Broadway; performed with Milwaukee Ballet II, Madison Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Arabian Princess and Chinese soloist in *The Nutcracker*; soloist in Mikhail Fokine's *The Dying Swan*; featured roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Sadako*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Giselle*, and *Ella*

*Additional Highlights:* ninth season with American Midwest Ballet;

founding company member

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**Katerina Schweitzer**



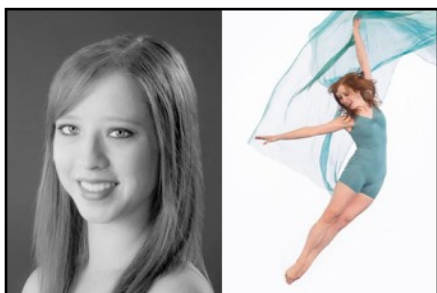
*Hometown:* Vero Beach, Florida

*Training & Experience:* apprentice with Gelsey Kirkland Ballet; Space Coast Ballet Academy; Kirova Ballet Academy of Miami; private training by Heidi Khursandi; Gelsey Kirkland Ballet Academy graduate; summer programs at American Ballet Theatre, Joffrey Ballet, Ballet Vero Beach, Kirova Ballet Academy of Miami, and Gelsey Kirkland Academy

*Featured Repertory:* roles in *The Nutcracker*, *Appalachian Song*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*Additional Highlight:* second season with American Midwest Ballet

**Kelsey Schwenker**



*Hometown:* Boulder, Colorado

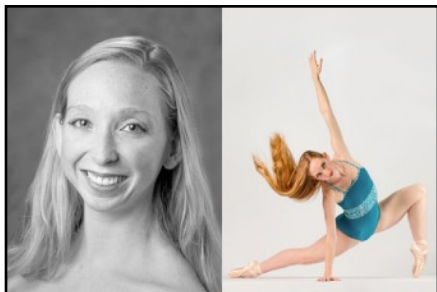
*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in ballet from the University of Oklahoma, summa cum laude; Ballet Nouveau Colorado; summer programs at Kansas City Ballet, Burklyn Ballet Theatre, Boulder Jazz Dance Workshop, and Paul Taylor Dance Company

*Featured Repertory:* lead roles in *Alice in Wonderland*, *Poseidon*, and *Flower Festival Pas de Deux*; Dew Drop Fairy and Snow Queen in *The Nutcracker*; featured roles in *Giselle*, *The Diner*, *Go West!*, *Swan*

*Lake*, *DanceSport*, and *In the Style of Bob Fosse*

*Additional Highlights:* rehearsal director for Repertory Ensemble, the company's youth performance group; ninth season with American Midwest Ballet; founding company member

**Amaris Sharratt**



*Hometown:* Tucson, Arizona

*Training & Experience:* Ballet Arts; summer programs at Pacific Northwest Ballet, Houston Ballet, and Ballet Tucson on full scholarship; performed with Milwaukee Ballet II, Houston Ballet, Nevada Ballet Theater, Ballet Tucson, Earthen Vessels, and Hopestone Dance Company

*Featured Repertory:* Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Chinese soloist in *The Nutcracker*; roles in *Giselle*, *Paquita*, *Cleopatra*, *Go West!*, *Swan Lake*, and *Ella*

*Additional Highlights:* performed in Edinburgh, Scotland as a scholarship recipient at Burklyn Ballet Theater; fifth season with American Midwest Ballet

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**Rachel Smith**



*Hometown:* Plymouth, Massachusetts

*Training & Experience:* Nashville Ballet trainee; Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre graduate program; Boston Ballet School, South Shore Ballet Theatre, The Brookline Ballet School; summer programs at Walnut Hill School of the Arts, Boston Ballet, Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, Miami City Ballet, Houston Ballet, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and Nashville Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* roles in *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, *In the Style of Bob Fosse*, and *Appalachian Song*

*Additional Highlights:* placed in top 12 at Youth American Grand Prix in 2011 and 2012; third season with American Midwest Ballet

**Anders Southerland**



*Hometown:* Seattle, Washington

*Training & Experience:* trained under teachers Peter Boal, Bruce Wells, and Le Yin of Pacific Northwest Ballet; member of Houston Ballet II and Milwaukee Ballet II

*Featured Repertory:* Snow King and Thistle in *The Nutcracker*; Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; featured roles in *Appalachian Song*, *Bricolage*, and *Caprice*

*Additional Highlights:* selected to train with Pacific Northwest Ballet at age eight through a public outreach program; second season with American Midwest Ballet

**Anna Swenson**



*Hometown:* Spokane, Washington

*Training & Experience:* Ballet Arts Academy; trainee program at school of Alberta Ballet; summer programs at Walnut Hill School for the Arts, Joffrey Ballet's Jazz and Contemporary program, and School of Alberta Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Snow Queen and Arabian Princess in *The Nutcracker*; Big Swan in *Swan Lake*; featured roles in *Blackbird*, *Appalachian Song*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*Additional Highlights:* sixth season with American Midwest Ballet

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**Katie van der Mars**



*Hometown:* Corvallis, Oregon

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in ballet performance from the University of Utah and member of Utah Ballet; Corvallis Academy of Ballet; summer programs at Atlanta Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, and Ballet West

*Featured Repertory:* Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; lead in George Balanchine's *Valse Fantaisie*; Sugar Plum Fairy and Snow Queen in *The Nutcracker*; soloist in *Les Odalesque*, *Swan Lake*, *Bournonville*

*Divertissements*, *Party Animals*, and Bluebird and Princess Florine pas de deux from *The Sleeping Beauty*

*Additional Highlight:* seventh season with American Midwest Ballet

**Whitney Walsh**



*Hometown:* Westlake Village, California

*Training & Experience:* Joffrey Ballet trainee; guest artist at Pacific Festival Ballet; California Dance Theatre; summer programs at Joffrey Ballet, American Ballet Theatre New York, Houston Ballet, and Kirov Academy of Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Little Swan in *Swan Lake*, Spanish in *The Nutcracker*; roles in *In the Style of Bob Fosse*, *One in Three*, *Transcription*, *Ella*, *The Diner*, *Go West!*, *Appalachian Song*, and *Giselle*

*Additional Highlights:* performed several world premieres in the Joffrey Ballet's *Winning Works*; fifth season with American Midwest Ballet

**Sasha York**



*Hometown:* Chelyabinsk, Russia

*Training & Experience:* Paavola School of Dance; pre-professional program at Pittsburgh Ballet Theater; member of Omaha Theater Ballet

*Featured Repertory:* Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; title role in *Dracula*; Marc Antony in *Cleopatra*; Snow King and Russian soloist in *The Nutcracker*; Rothbart in *Swan Lake*; lead roles in *Swing Swing Swing!*, *Paquita*, *DanceSport*, *Call it Off*, *On My Mother's Side*, and *Go West!*

*Additional Highlights:* featured guest artist in ballet productions throughout the United States; ninth season with American Midwest Ballet; founding company member

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**Apprentices**

**Elena Carter**



*Hometown:* Seattle, Washington

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A in dance from the University of Arizona;  
Pacific Northwest Ballet School

*Summer Programs:* Pacific Northwest Ballet, Alonzo King LINES Ballet,  
Perry Mansfield, Ballet Austin, Los Angeles Ballet, and Ballet Chicago

**Kelanie Murphy**



*Hometown:* Crystal Lake, Illinois

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in dance performance from the University  
of Missouri-Kansas City; Madison Ballet, Minnesota Ballet, Kansas City  
Ballet, Wylliams/Henry Contemporary Dance Company, Judith  
Svalander School of Ballet

*Summer Programs:* Alonzo King LINES Ballet, Kansas City Ballet

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**Trainees**

**Remmi Hartmann**



*Hometown:* Omaha, Nebraska

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in dance performance and choreography with emphasis in ballet and modern from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance

*Summer Programs:* American Ballet Theatre, Next Generation Ballet on scholarship, Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, and Oklahoma City Ballet on scholarship

**Madeline Koesters**



*Hometown:* Omaha, Nebraska

*Training & Experience:* B.F.A. in dance performance and choreography with emphasis in ballet and modern from the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri – Kansas City; founding member of Ballet Nebraska II; Creighton Dance Company; Omaha Theater Ballet School; performed with Aspen-Santa Fe Ballet and Omaha Symphony; Young Artist Award; choreography featured in Omaha Dance Project

*Summer Programs:* Kansas City Ballet