

AMERICAN MIDWEST *Ballet*

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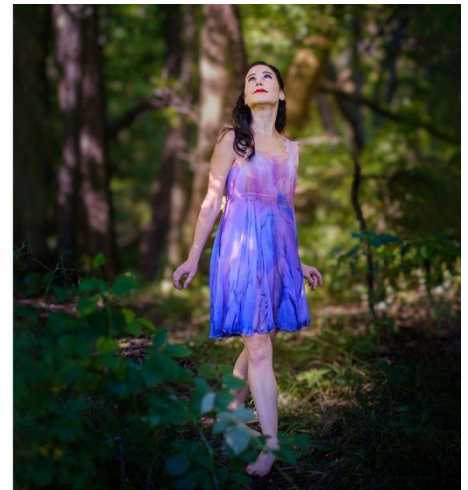
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[Please call or email for rehearsal access, artist interviews, or reviewer comps.]

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From left: *The Diner*; grand pas de deux from *Don Quixote*; *The Sun Rises Inside*

MOMENTUM FEATURES WORLD PREMIERE AND CLASSICS

A high-velocity world premiere, a contemporary dance “instant classic,” and a showpiece of 19th-century ballet are among the works that will be on view when American Midwest Ballet [AMB] presents *Momentum* October 15 and 16 at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center in Council Bluffs.

“*Momentum* is a mixed-repertory program,” AMB artistic director Erika Overturff said. “It’s a collection of individual ballets, instead of a single story like our other Season 13 productions, *The Nutcracker* and *The Wizard of Oz*.”

“The mixed-repertory format lets *Momentum* showcase the wide range of dance as an exciting and expressive art form.”

The five pieces on the program are:

- The world premiere of *Speed Date*, a work created for AMB by guest choreographer Ray Mercer
 - Frank Chaves' *Eva*, a tribute to the songs of vocalist Eva Cassidy
 - The return of audience favorite *The Diner*, by Erika Overturff
 - The famous *pas de deux* (dance for a couple) from the 1871 classical ballet *Don Quixote*
 - AMB company artist Kelanie Murphy's *The Sun Rises Inside*, created in 2020 for the company's *Going Solo* series of dance films, and now making its live-stage premiere
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More about *Speed Date*

"My aesthetic is physical," guest choreographer **Ray Mercer** says, "and it's quick. I like things to move fast."

Mercer – an Omaha native, a member of the Broadway cast of *The Lion King*, and a resident choreographer of the Alvin Ailey company's Ailey/Fordham BFA program in New York City – draws on that aesthetic for *Speed Date*, his new work making its world premiere on the *Momentum* program.

Mercer said he got the idea for a work about speed dating (an organized activity in which participants have short conversations with a succession of potential partners) from a friend who had tried it. "It fit the aesthetic of my choreography: the fact that it moved so fast, was physical, that they had to think quickly on their feet," he said. "And then I thought: How do I continue to tell the story?" The result, he said, was a three-section work that moves from the initial high-speed encounters to how relationships might develop.

Erika's take: "Ray has such a fantastic energy and we are really excited to have his work in our repertory. *Speed Date* is incredibly athletic, fast-moving, and precise, and at the same time there's emotional depth in how the relationships evolve."

More about *Eva*

When **Frank Chaves** created *Eva* for Chicago's River North dance company, the Chicago Sun-Times said it "has all the marks of an instant classic." It began, he said, because of the voice of a woman he had never met.

His Philadelphia presenter had invited him to dinner and began playing records by Eva Cassidy, a singer who had died tragically of cancer in 1996 at the age of 33. A small but passionate band of fans had kept her works alive, and eventually her posthumous albums achieved worldwide popularity.

“He was playing her for me on purpose,” Chaves said. “He had always dreamed of commissioning a piece to her music. And that was my introduction to Eva.

“I immediately fell in love with her voice – this gorgeous, crystal clear, pitch perfect, beautiful voice that just cut through.”

Chaves began by going through Cassidy’s diverse catalog, which ranged from pop tunes to gospel. “I had to go through her library and pick the songs that really stuck out to me, or that I really had a kind of connection with, and those that evoked emotions within me,” he said. Eventually he also met Cassidy’s parents, saw some of the visual art works she had created, and met people who had heard her perform. The creative process, he said, gave him a feeling of deep connection with the singer he had never met.

“I think that for me, so to speak – and it’s interesting to use this phrase – it was a match made in heaven,” he said. “I just feel like my choreography with her music was meant to happen. So thank you, Eva. It really worked out beautifully.”

Erika’s take: “Frank is brilliant at creating work that isn’t just beautiful, it really moves you. I’ve wanted to add *Eva* to the AMB repertory ever since I first saw it, and I’m thrilled that we’re going to be able to share it with our audience for Season 13.”

More about *The Diner*

Erika Overturff’s *The Diner* holds a special place in AMB history. Performed on tour at the Dance Chicago festival in 2009, it was the first work the company ever presented – even before its official Omaha debut. Set to songs linked by the theme of food, it plays out as a series of vignettes about workers and customers whose paths cross in a classic roadside diner.

Erika’s take: “It’s time to have some fun, and *The Diner* is just fun all around! I originally created this ballet after I heard a song about coffee. I instantly pictured a solo for a bluesy waitress. I was hooked, but needed more – and began listening to all the songs about food I could find. Pretty soon I cooked up a sweet little piece set in a roadside diner.

“This ballet is all about personality, and I realized we had the right cast of characters this season to really bring this piece to life! From a short-order cook, to lively patrons, to a trio of waitresses, *The Diner* brings together two wonderful things – dance and food. What’s not to love!”

More about the *grand pas de deux* from *Don Quixote*

Known almost universally among dancers as simply “**Don Q**”, the *grand pas de deux* from *Don Quixote* originated as part of an 1871 production that Marius Petipa created for the Imperial Ballet of St. Petersburg, Russia. The *pas de deux* became famous in its own right through worldwide touring performances by the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

Erika’s take: “The story line is simple – a young couple celebrating their wedding – but the thrilling dancing makes the Don Q *pas de deux* a spectacular achievement of 19th-century classical ballet. It gives the dancers a chance to blend charming acting with brilliant technical feats.”

More about *The Sun Rises Inside*

Dancer and choreographer **Kelanie Murphy** found inspiration for her ballet during walks in the woods. When Erika Overturff invited her to create a work for AMB’s *Going Solo* series of short dance films, she chose an outdoor setting and created a work for four dancers, developing the concept in collaboration with filmmaker Lance Glenn. Their film, *The Sun Rises Inside*, premiered in November 2020. For *Momentum*, Murphy has translated her concept for live performance onstage.

Erika’s take: “Kelanie’s ballet evokes the warmth of the sun, dappled light through the trees, and the magic of nature. It has a beautiful flow.”

Performances of *Momentum* will be at 7:30 pm on Saturday, October 15, and 2 pm Sunday, October 16, at the Hoff Family Arts & Culture Center, 1001 South 6th Street in Council Bluffs. Ticket information is available at amballet.org/tickets.

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ABOUT AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

American Midwest Ballet [AMB] brings the beauty, athleticism, and energy of professional ballet to audiences in the Midwest and beyond. Performing at home and on tour, our mission is to inspire people through dance programs of the highest quality: breathtaking performances, exciting education, and uplifting community engagement.

AMB's Season 13 is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Fred and Eve Simon Charitable Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, and Douglas County; season sponsors Omaha Steaks and Cindy & Scott Heider; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Sherwood Foundation.

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