AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET

Media advisory: Melissa Thodos, co-creator of the inspiring biographical ballet *A Light in the Dark*, is in our studios this week with members of the original cast to teach the ballet to our dancers. Melissa is available for interviews, either in person or by phone. Founder and artistic director Erika Overturff also is available for interviews about the upcoming season and/or the *Momentum* program. **Contact me right away** by email, phone, or text if you'd like to set something up! – jw

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Among the works coming from American Midwest Ballet this season: A Light in the Dark, The Nutcracker, and Cleopatra. Click for more photos.

AMERICAN MIDWEST BALLET'S SEASON 17: INSPIRATION, GLAMOUR, AND SPECTACLE

Single tickets and season subscriptions are on sale now for American Midwest Ballet [AMB] in its seventeenth season of professional dance. Highlights for this season, artistic director Erika Overturff said, include a critically-acclaimed true story, a fresh look for a favorite scene in *The Nutcracker*, and the return of the spectacular historical drama *Cleopatra*.

The season will open October 17 and 18 with ***Momentum***, AMB's annual mixed-repertory program of ballets in a variety of styles, at the Hoff Family Arts and Culture Center in Council Bluffs. Overturff said she is especially excited about *A Light in the Dark*, a 2013 collaborative creation of Broadway legend Ann Reinking and innovative Chicago choreographer Melissa Thodos.

The work, she said, tells the true story of Helen Keller – a rebellious girl, both blind and deaf, whom no one could seem to reach – and Anne Sullivan, the dedicated teacher who refused to give up on her. "**It's an incredible story**," she said. "It's very moving. It's a narrative about real people that highlights the strength of the human spirit, the power of perseverance, and the amazing impact a teacher can have."

Frank Chaves' vibrant *Habaneras, the Music of Cuba* was inspired by his heritage. Chaves' family had left the island when he was only six months old, Overturff said. He later created this work as a tribute to his father, who **kept the island's musical heritage alive** for him through albums of Cuban composers' music. "It's colorful, emotional, and visually stunning," she said.

Overturff's own *Momentum* work is *Danse Macabre*, a premiere that takes the glamour of classical ballet in **an unconventional direction**. "Its premise," she said, "is that once a year, the dead get to reunite and have the night of their lives. The style is skeletal – it has that eerie look – but it's not sinister or morbid. It's about *joie de vivre*, the joy of life, and a reminder that when you get a chance to enjoy life, you should take it."

Next on the season, Overturff said, **the holiday classic *The Nutcracker*** returns with performances November 21 and 22 at the Hoff Center and December 4-6 at Omaha's Orpheum Theater. Continuing what has become an AMB hallmark, the November 22 performance will be a sensory-friendly edition offered in cooperation with Autism Action Partnership.

"There's a reason people return to this ballet every year," she said. "It's a grand production with memorable characters, thrilling dancing, and some of Tchaikovsky's most iconic music. **New this season**, we've added delightful enhancements to costumes and scenery in the realm of the Sugar Plum Fairy that couldn't be sweeter!"

The season will conclude in April 2027 with Overturff's *Cleopatra*, with performances April 10 and 11 at the Hoff Center and April 24 at the Orpheum. "It was fascinating to learn about Cleopatra and ancient Egypt," Overturff said. "She lived surrounded by opulence, which we bring to life through stunning costumes and lavish sets, but also by peril. Her ambition, capability, and remarkable charm left an unforgettable mark in history."

Ticket information for American Midwest Ballet's Season 17 is available at amballet.org.

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American Midwest Ballet's season is presented with the generous support of premiere benefactors the Holland Foundation, the Iowa West Foundation, the Heider Family Foundation, the Julie Morsman Schroeder Foundation, and Douglas County; season sponsor Omaha Steaks; and major supporters the Nebraska Arts Council, the Nebraska Cultural Endowment, and the Sherwood Foundation.