

LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS PRESENTS DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

Lesher Center for the Arts, Walnut Creek
7:30pm, Thursday, March 16 and 7:30pm, Friday, March 17

WALNUT CREEK, CA (13 February 2023) — **Lesher Center for the Arts** proudly hosts the return of **Dance Theatre of Harlem** to the West Coast, presenting the globally acclaimed company for two nights only. Following its sold-out performances last season, the company returns to the premier East Bay arts venue with a program of vibrant works by established choreographers including Stanton Welch's classical *Orange*, the romantic pas de deux *When Love* by Helen Pickett, *Blake Works IV (The Barre Project)* by William Forsythe, and Nacho Duato's dynamic *Coming Together*. **Dance Theatre of Harlem** is known for its empowering performances of classical and contemporary works in demonstration of its premise that ballet belongs to everyone. As part of its residency at the Lesher Center, the company will also provide an Arts Access performance for local Title 1 schools. The Lesher Center will also host a conversation about social equity issues with Artistic Director Virginia Johnson and local nonprofit leaders. **Dance Theatre of Harlem** will perform **7:30pm, Thursday, March 16** and **7:30pm, Friday, March 17** at the Lesher Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek. For tickets (\$68-\$114) and more information, the public may visit lesherartscenter.org or call the box office at **(925) 943-7469** (*open Wed-Sun, 12-6pm*).

Dance Theatre of Harlem's performances at the Lesher Center will be part of the company's final season led by Artistic Director Virginia Johnson, a founding member of the company who was appointed by co-founder Arthur Mitchell. Choreographer Robert Garland will succeed Johnson following her retirement in June, concluding a career with the company that has spanned four decades.

Orange is a classical style ballet by acclaimed Australian choreographer **Stanton Welch**. Part of a series that explores the seven colors of a person's chakra, the ballet is set to music by Antonio Vivaldi. Welch was born in Melbourne to Marilyn Jones, O.B.E., and Garth Welch, A.M., two of Australia's most gifted dancers of the 1960s and 1970s. He began his training at the age of seventeen, winning a scholarship to

San Francisco Ballet School, before dancing with The Australian Ballet. Welch's choreographic career developed during his time with the company, receiving his first choreographic commission in 1990. This marked the beginning of a series of commissioned works over the next fourteen years and in 1995, Welch was named resident choreographer of The Australian Ballet. He has received numerous commissions from the world's leading companies, creating works for prestigious companies such as Houston Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, The Australian Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet, and Royal Danish Ballet, among others. He assumed the role of Artistic Director at Houston Ballet, America's fifth largest ballet company, in July 2003. For his contributions to the world of dance, Welch was awarded the Order of Australia in June 2015, receiving recognition for his service to the performing arts as a dancer, mentor, choreographer, and artistic director.

When Love offers a charming duet by **Helen Pickett** that reflects the wonder of timeless love and mutual attraction, set to Philip Glass' "Knee 5" from the finale of *Einstein on the Beach*. "Insistent time maps our days. But, when we are in love we surrender to unbridled time," says Pickett. "In these brief, wondrous periods we experience timeless love, and we dance our being." Pickett is a San Diego, California native who has set more than 40 ballets on companies across the U.S. and Europe over the past 14 years. She performed with William Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt for more than a decade and worked with the avant-garde Wooster Group theater company for five non-consecutive years. In 2007 *Dance* magazine named Pickett one of "25 To Watch," applauding the use of improvisation her in choreography and recognizing her work in pushing the boundaries of human movement. She also received a Choreographic Residency from Jacob's Pillow in 2008 and was one of the first choreographers to receive the Jerome Robbins Foundation's New Essential Works Grant. Pickett has choreographed works for Boston Ballet, Royal Ballet of Flanders, Ballet West, Vienna State Opera, Pennsylvania Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Alberta Ballet, Tulsa Ballet, Charlotte Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, and Washington Ballet, among others. She has presented longer form work at the Scottish Ballet and Atlanta Ballet, where she served as Resident Choreographer.

Set to music by James Blake, world-renowned choreographer **William Forsythe's** *Blake Works IV (The Barre Project)* is the newest installment in a series *Fjord Review* called "A love letter to dancers, to technique, to the possibilities of the ballet barre." Raised in New York and initially trained in Florida, Forsythe danced with the Joffrey Ballet and later the Stuttgart Ballet, where he was appointed Resident Choreographer in 1976. Over the next seven years, he created new works for the Stuttgart ensemble and

ballet companies in Munich, The Hague, London, Basel, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, Paris, New York, and San Francisco. In 1984, he began a 20-year tenure as director of the Ballet Frankfurt. In 2004, Forsythe established a new ensemble, The Forsythe Company, which he directed from 2005 to 2015. Forsythe's works are prominently featured in the repertoire of virtually every major ballet company in the world including the Mariinsky Ballet, New York City Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, England's Royal Ballet, and the Paris Opera Ballet. He has been conveyed the title of Commandeur des Arts et Lettres (1999) by the government of France and has received the Hessischer Kulturpreis/Hessian Culture Award (1995), the German Distinguished Service Cross (1997), the Wexner Prize (2002), the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale (2010), the Samuel H Scripps/American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement (2012), and the German Theater Award FAUST for Lifetime Achievement (2020). Forsythe is an Honorary Fellow at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance in London and holds an Honorary Doctorate from The Juilliard School in New York.

Finally, *Coming Together* by **Nacho Duato** closes this stellar bill at the Leshar Center. This abstract work sees the dancers run, leap, dive, and spin to an obsessive, driving score by Frederic Rzewski that combines music with recited phrases from a letter by Sam Melville, a political prisoner killed in the 1971 Attica prison riots. Born Juan Ignacio Duato Barcia, Duato is a Spanish modern ballet dancer and choreographer from Valencia. He trained at the Rambert School in London and continued his studies at Maurice Béjart's Mudra School in Brussels, as well as Alvin Ailey's American Dance Centre in New York. Duato first came into prominence at the Nederlands Dans Theater, directed by Jiri Kylián. From 1990 to 2011, Duato was the artistic director at Compania Nacional de Danza. From 2011 to 2014, he led the ballet company of the Mikhailovsky Theatre in Russia. In 2014, Duato became general and artistic director at the Berlin State Ballet, before returning to his previous post in Saint Petersburg as artistic director of Mikhailovsky Ballet in 2016. Today, his ballets are in the repertoires of many prestigious international companies.

As part of its residency at the Leshar Center, the company will also provide education and outreach opportunities, including an **Arts Access** performance for local Title 1 schools. This program will include an hour-long presentation for grades 3-5 with 30 minutes of introduction to ballet featuring the dancers at the barre and how they train—culminating in a demonstration of different moves, turns, lifts, jumps, and more. The second half of the program will feature two excerpts from the Dance Theatre of Harlem repertory and a Q & A, followed by a finale of “Mother Popcorn” set to the song of the same name by

James Brown, from Robert Garland's ballet *Return*. In addition, the Leshar Center for the Arts will host a conversation with Virginia Johnson on March 15. Johnson will discuss social equity issues with nonprofit leaders during this event, for which Leshar plans to partner with community leaders, particularly those who are female-identifying and/or of nonprofit organizations. For more information, the public may visit lesherartscenter.org/events.

All programming is subject to change.

About Dance Theatre of Harlem

Dance Theatre of Harlem is a leading dance institution of unparalleled global acclaim, encompassing a professional touring company, a leading studio school, and a national and international education and community outreach program. The 18-member company offers a powerful vision for ballet in the 21st century and performs a forward-thinking repertoire of treasured classics, neoclassical dances, and innovative contemporary works that use the language of ballet to celebrate Black culture. Led by Artistic Director Virginia Johnson, Dance Theatre of Harlem tours nationally and internationally, and is celebrated for presenting a company of African American and other racially diverse artists who perform the most demanding repertory at the highest level of quality. Dance Theatre of Harlem also provides a world-class school that trains young people in classical ballet and the allied arts.

Founded in 1969 by Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook, Dance Theatre of Harlem has been called “one of ballet’s most exciting undertakings” by *The New York Times*. Shortly after the assassination of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mitchell was inspired to start a school that would offer children—especially those in Harlem, the community in which he was born—the opportunity to learn about dance and the allied arts. Now in its sixth decade, Dance Theatre of Harlem has grown into a multi-cultural dance institution with an extraordinary legacy of providing opportunities for creative expression and artistic excellence that continues to set standards in the performing arts. Dance Theatre of Harlem has achieved unprecedented success, bringing innovative and bold new forms of artistic expression to audiences in New York City, across the country and around the world. Through performances, community engagement, and arts education, the company spreads the message of empowerment through the arts for all.

About the Diablo Regional Arts Association

The **Diablo Regional Arts Association** (DRAA) is the non-profit partner of the Leshner Center for the Arts, and acts as the designated curator for its programming and audience outreach. The organization aims to achieve artistic excellence by providing exceptional arts programming through quality live theatre, visual arts, and youth education at the Leshner Center for the Arts, while providing avenues of accessibility for everyone to enjoy the arts.

For Calendar Editors

WHAT: **Leshner Center for the Arts** proudly hosts the return of **Dance Theatre of Harlem** to the West Coast, presenting the globally acclaimed company for two nights only. Following its sold-out performances last season, the company returns to the premier East Bay arts venue with a program of vibrant works by established choreographers including Stanton Welch's classical *Orange*, a romantic pas de deux by Helen Pickett in *When Love, Blake Works IV (The Barre Project)* by the acclaimed William Forsythe, and Nacho Duato's dynamic *Coming Together*. **Dance Theatre of Harlem** is known for its empowering performances of classical and contemporary works in the demonstration of co-founder Arthur Mitchell's premise that ballet belongs to everyone.

WHEN: 7:30pm, Thursday, March 16
7:30pm, Friday, March 17

WHERE: Hofmann Theatre, Leshner Center for the Arts (1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek)

TICKETS: For tickets (\$68-\$114) or more information, the public may visit lesherartscenter.org or call the box office at **(925) 943-7469** (*open Wed-Sun, 12-6pm*).

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