

SMUIN

CONTEMPORARY BALLET

CELIA FUSHILLE / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

CELIA FUSHILLE ANNOUNCES FINAL SEASON AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF SMUIN CONTEMPORARY BALLET

LEADERSHIP PASSES TO AMY SEIWERT IN 2024/25 SEASON

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (25 July 2023) — After completing three decades with **Smuin Contemporary Ballet**, Celia Fushille has announced she will step away as Artistic Director at the conclusion of the company's 30th anniversary season in June 2024. Associate Artistic Director Amy Seiwert has been appointed to lead the company following Fushille's departure. A founding member of Smuin and its principal dancer for more than 12 years, Fushille has served as Artistic Director of Smuin Contemporary Ballet since 2007. "I was honored when Michael Smuin approached me in November 1993 as he was forming his own company and asked me to come work with him, as a dancer and later as his Associate Artistic Director," said Fushille. "I had admired Michael since my teenage years, and to be mentored by him was a dream. When Michael passed away in 2007, we were bereft. The Smuin Board of Trustees showed enormous faith in appointing me to continue his legacy, and it has been an unbridled pleasure to steer this company for the past 16 years, as it has grown and continued to thrive."

As the final founding member still working with the company, **Celia Fushille** has seen the company through challenges and incredible growth. During her performing career spanning 25 years, she appeared on stages in the U.S. and Europe, and on television and in film. Fushille originated iconic roles with Smuin including Frankie in *Frankie and Johnny*, Roxanne in *Cyrano*, Lola-Lola in *The Blue Angel*, and Santa Baby from the company's beloved *The Christmas Ballet*. She also performed some of Michael's earlier masterpieces, including *The Eternal Idol* and *Medea*. Following Michael's unexpected passing in 2007, Fushille was named the company's Artistic Director, also serving as Executive Director of the company from 2008-2014. As Artistic Director, Fushille forged her own vision for the company while maintaining Michael Smuin's legacy. During her tenure, she named Seiwert as Smuin's first Choreographer-in-Residence, presented the works of more than 20 choreographers new to the company, and expanded the repertoire of the company by commissioning 18 world premieres. Fushille also encouraged the creation of works by company artists with the establishment of the Choreography Showcase. In 2019, she helped realize a 10-year goal with Smuin's move into its first permanent home, leading efforts to raise the funds to purchase and renovate the Smuin Center for Dance in San Francisco. Fushille will continue to be involved with

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the company as a trustee of the Smuin Board and plans to carry on Michael Smuin's work by staging his ballets on other companies. "I enjoyed so many satisfying moments on the stage during my performing career, but equally thrilling was being in the studio by Michael's side and helping to bring his work to life," said Fushille. "I hope to keep his legacy alive by sharing his works with ballet companies around the globe."

Madeleine Boshart, President of the Smuin Board of Trustees, said: "Smuin owes an unfathomable debt to Celia. It isn't an understatement to say she saved the company after Michael's sudden passing, admirably and capably leading Smuin to its current position of stability. We thought it was imperative that Celia's successor at this time be someone who also knew and worked with Michael, who understands and respects the distinct culture at Smuin and its legacy. We are absolutely thrilled to have someone as qualified, prepared and creative as Amy Seiwert ready to step into this role."

Smuin Associate Artistic Director **Amy Seiwert** will work alongside Fushille until leadership officially changes hands after June 2024. "My successor will take the company forward in exciting ways while celebrating all that we learned from Michael," said Fushille. A Smuin alumna and one of the West Coast's most dynamic dancemakers working today, incoming Artistic Director **Amy Seiwert** enjoyed a 19-year performing career dancing with Smuin, the Los Angeles Chamber Ballet, and Sacramento Ballet. Her first eight years dancing with the company were under the leadership of Michael Smuin, who also encouraged her development as a choreographer. She created her first piece for Smuin, *Short Ride*, during its 10th anniversary season in 2003-2004. She danced one additional year under Artistic Director Celia Fushille, who then appointed Seiwert as Smuin's first Choreographer-in-Residence, a post she held from 2008 to 2018. Among Seiwert's works performed to acclaim by Smuin are *Dear Miss Cline* set to the music of Patsy Cline, *Falling Up*, *Renaissance*, *Been Through Diamonds*, *Broken Open*, *Objects of Curiosity*, *But now I must rest*, *The Melting*, *Revealing the Bridge*, *Soon These Two Worlds*, *Requiem*, and *French Kiss*.

Seiwert's signature choreography has been met with consistent acclaim, described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "keeping founder Michael Smuin's legacy of unabashed showmanship alive." She formed her own company in 2004, incorporated in 2011 as Amy Seiwert's Imagery. In demand across the country, Seiwert was an Artist in Residence at ODC Theater from 2013-15, the first National Artist in Residence with New York's Joyce Theater in 2017, and was in residence at "Office Hours" at The Reach in the Kennedy Center in 2021. Her works have been performed in the repertoires of Smuin, ODC/Dance, AXIS, Ballet Austin, BalletX, BalletMet, Robert Moses' KIN, Washington Ballet, Atlanta Ballet, Oakland Ballet, Sacramento Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Louisville Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Dayton Ballet, and American Repertory Ballet, among others. "Who I am as an artist was honed in the two-plus decades I have spent connected to Smuin. I owe so much to Michael and Celia—their support and belief in me opened doors to creative opportunities around the

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country,” said Seiwert. “Now, it is my opportunity to give back. I am thrilled to be of service to this organization and to continue the legacy of Michael and Celia.”

For 30 years Smuin has pushed the boundaries of contemporary ballet within a distinctly American style, engaging and delighting audiences with uncommon physicality and expression. Founded in San Francisco in 1994 by Tony and Emmy award-winning choreographer Michael Smuin, the company is committed to creating work that merges the diverse vocabularies of classical ballet and contemporary dance. Artistic Director since 2007, Celia Fushille has celebrated Michael Smuin’s legacy while enriching the company’s impressive repertoire by collaborating with inventive choreographers from around the world, commissioning world premieres, and bringing new contemporary choreographic voices to the Smuin stage. At the conclusion of the 2023-2024 season, Fushille will step away from her role as Artistic Director and Seiwert will continue to lead Smuin in bold and creative ways for the next decade and beyond. The company launches its 30th anniversary season in the fall of 2023, with programs touring to San Francisco, Mountain View, Walnut Creek, and Carmel. For more information, visit smuinballet.org.

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