

# SMUIN

CONTEMPORARY BALLET

CELIA FUSHILLE / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## SMUIN'S ANNUAL GALA RAISES RECORD-BREAKING \$690,000 FOR 30TH SEASON ANNIVERSARY, HONORS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR CELIA FUSHILLE

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (8 March 2023) — Arts, community, and civic leaders came together to celebrate **Smuin Contemporary Ballet** at its **Annual Gala**, hosted by co-chairs **John Konstin** and **Lee D. Baxter** along with Smuin's Board of Trustees and Friends of Smuin committee. Held Sunday, March 3 at The St. Regis in San Francisco, the evening dazzled partygoers with a cocktail reception, gourmet dinner, rollicking live auction featuring one-of-kind experiences, and more. This year's gala honored Smuin Artistic Director **Celia Fushille** and her achievements over her 30-year tenure with the company. Smuin's Annual Gala raised a record-setting amount of \$690,000, funds that will enable the innovative company to continue presenting the best of classical ballet and contemporary work as it celebrates three decades of success.

Guests began arriving at the St. Regis following the final performance of "Celebrating Michael Smuin," a program featuring the dynamic late founder's works, *Zorro!* and *Fly Me to the Moon*. The evening began with a cocktail hour reception, where champagne and passed hors d'oeuvres were served as Smuin Artistic Director **Celia Fushille** and company artists mingled with esteemed guests such as San Francisco Mayor **London Breed**, former San Francisco Mayor **Willie Brown**, Assistant US Attorney (and former SF Supervisor) **Annemarie Conroy**, District Attorney **Brooke Jenkins**, and San Francisco Police Commissioner **Debra Walker**. Attendees were then seated at beautifully decorated tables in the gallery ballroom before Mayor Breed welcomed the crowd. "The arts are magical. They spark emotion, they spark excitement, and they make us feel something that truly represents joy," said Breed. "Tonight, we are here to celebrate 30 years of Smuin and all the work that they have done to bring that joy, that excitement, and happiness to us. We also recognize and celebrate all that Celia Fushille has done as one of the founding members of Smuin to deliver the most excellent performances, not just

here in San Francisco and in the Bay Area, but also across the country.” Fushille then took the stage to introduce the company’s current roster of sixteen artists, after which she expressed her gratitude to partygoers for their support. “Thank you all so much for being here as we celebrate Michael Smuin and his beautiful company. We have tried to respect his legacy and expand upon it these years that I’ve been fortunate enough to lead this company. Without you, we could not do what we’ve done!”

This year’s gala honored Fushille for her incredible milestone of 30 years with the company. 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. After completing three decades with Smuin, Fushille will step away as Artistic Director at the conclusion of this season. Smuin Board Member **Robert Challey** stepped forward to share highlights of her career, from originating iconic roles such as Frankie in *Frankie and Johnny*, Lola-Lola in *The Blue Angel*, and Santa Baby from the company’s beloved *The Christmas Ballet*, to her leadership of the company following Michael’s unexpected passing. “She accomplished so much for the ballet,” said Challey. “She commissioned the works of more than 20 choreographers, and she expanded the repertory of the company by presenting more than 18 world premieres.” He shared several more accomplishments including Fushille’s naming of Associate Artistic Director **Amy Seiwert** as Smuin’s first Choreographer-in-Residence, and encouraging the creation of works by company artists with the establishment of the Choreography Showcase. He praised Fushille for realizing a 10-year goal with Smuin’s move into its first permanent home in 2019, noting her tireless efforts to raise funds to purchase and renovate the Smuin Center for Dance in San Francisco.

Following his speech, Challey presented Fushille with a bouquet and gift from the Smuin Board. “It’s been an incredible 30 years,” she said, while promising that she will continue to be involved with the company as a trustee of the Smuin Board. “Michael would be so floored to see all of you here tonight, knowing that there’s finally a building in the city with his name on it. All he gave to the city, to the art form, to the beauty of dance, we continue to celebrate that. The future looks so bright.”

The evening continued with a spectacular dinner catered by St. Regis and complemented by

wines generously donated by Napa Valley's Grgich Hills Estate, provided by Stephan Strebl in honor of his late mother, Mary Lee Strebl. A thrilling live auction hosted by guest auctioneer **Liam Mayclem** followed—first up was a trio of delectable treats baked by Smuin artists **João Sampaio, Brennan Wall, and Jace Pauly**. Among the mouth-watering homemade confections were Sampaio's passion fruit cake, Wall's tiramisu, and Pauly's cinnamon buns, auctioned off to three tables of delighted guests to raise a total of \$9,900 for the company. Other one-of-a-kind gifts and experiences included an exclusive opportunity to join Smuin in New York during the company's upcoming appearance at The Joyce Theater, which sold for a stunning \$11,000. Finally, a special walk-on appearance in Smuin's annual *The Christmas Ballet* spectacular sold multiple times for \$5,000 each, giving the winning bidders a private studio rehearsal and a cameo appearance on stage with the Smuin dancers. The company also raised an incredible \$267,000 in its "Fund a Need" campaign, with proceeds supporting everything from costume creation to securing music rights, and dancer physical therapy to commissioning world-class choreographers.

Guests were then invited to the upstairs terrace to enjoy dessert and dancing with Smuin's incredible artists. Among those dancing the night away: San Francisco Supervisor **Rafael Mandelman**, Assistant SFPD Chief **David Lazar**, and Smuin Board of Trustees members **Trisha Mount** (Vice President), **Karen Kadushin** (Secretary), **Patti Hume** (Board of Trustees Emeriti, Founding President), **Linda Membreño**, **John Schlag**, and **Susie Stitt**, among many other enthusiastic Smuin fans.

Funds raised at **Smuin's Annual Gala** will support the Company in staging its innovative productions around the Bay Area, ensuring the company's productions maintain the signature Smuin sparkle audiences know and love as the company continues to excel in combining classical ballet artistry with the athleticism of contemporary dance. Sponsors of Smuin's Annual Gala included Grgich Hills Estate and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

## **ABOUT SMUIN**

For 30 years Smuin has pushed the boundaries of contemporary ballet, incorporating diverse dance styles and musical genres. Smuin creates art that is original and evocative, engaging and

delighting audiences with works of 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 Associate Artistic Director Amy Seiwert will continue to lead Smuin in bold and creative ways for the next decade and beyond. For more information, visit [smuinballet.org](http://smuinballet.org).

-30-

**PRESS:** Contact Steph Keay, Carla Befera & Co.  
(650) 687-7830 | [steph@cb-pr.com](mailto:steph@cb-pr.com)

**PHOTOS:** Media may download high-res photos at:  
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/smuingala2024/>