

SMUIN

CONTEMPORARY BALLET

AMY SEIWERT / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

SMUIN'S ANNUAL GALA CELEBRATES 31ST SEASON EVENT RAISES \$450,000 TO SUPPORT COMPANY

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (1 April 2025) — **Smuin Contemporary Ballet's** Annual Gala celebrated its 31st season, its first under Artistic Director Amy Seiwert, on Saturday, March 22, 2025. Hosted by co-chairs **Lee D. Baxter** and **John & Athena Konstin**, along with Smuin's Board of Trustees and Friends of Smuin, the elegant fête at The Galleria at San Francisco Design Center dazzled partygoers with a cocktail reception and spectacular performances highlighting Smuin's past, present, and future. The gala raised \$450,000, funds that will empower the company to continue pushing the boundaries of contemporary ballet in bold, innovative, and astounding ways.

The evening commenced with a cocktail reception and steady trickle of lavishly dressed Smuin supporters. Guests were welcomed with a sumptuous spread of dim sum served in steaming baskets while Artistic Director **Amy Seiwert**, Artistic Director Emerita **Celia Fushille**, and the company's fabulous artists mingled with the crowd. Attendees were then seated at beautifully decorated tables to enjoy dinner from McCalls Catering and programming from the Smuin artists.

Seiwert welcomed guests warmly with a speech on her first season as Artistic Director, and why Smuin is San Francisco's premier contemporary ballet company. "Our creative space is truly a sanctuary. It makes for an incredibly fertile ground to create work from, and to innovate from—and in doing so that means we get to move the language of ballet forward," said Seiwert. "I believe strongly in the power of the performing arts to hold up a mirror to humanity to show what unites us. We dive deep into our imagination to give you an experience that we hope will make you feel more deeply than words can express."

This was followed by a program of beautiful dances including *Fascinating Rhythm* from Michael Smuin's *Dancin' with Gershwin*, an old-school-cool tap piece that showcased the company's versatility and renowned talent for "putting on the ritz." Audiences also enjoyed *Uno Jionto Postouro* from Michael Smuin's *Chants d'Auvergne*, Amy Seiwert's gripping *It's Not A Cry*, Tessa Barbour's *Here's To You, Harvey* from Smuin's 2025 Choreography Showcase, and Brennan Wall's *Recto Verso*, a celebratory work also developed in this year's Showcase. The performances were received with roaring applause—among those applauding were former San Francisco mayor **Willie Brown**, State Senator **Scott Wiener**, San Francisco Supervisor **Rafael Mandelman**, Assistant SFPD Chief **David Lazar**, and Smuin Board of Trustees members **Trisha Mount** (Vice President), **Karen Kadushin** (Secretary), **Linda Membreño**, **Randy Soso**, **Hal and Carol Louchheim**, and **John Schlag**.

The evening transformed into a vibrant live auction hosted by **Stefanie Resnick** and commenced with the annual trio of delicious cakes baked by Smuin artists. Participating this year were dancers **Tessa Barbour**, **João Sampaio**, and **Brennan Wall**, who brought yet another enticing spread of desserts to the table, including Barbour's Espresso Cheesecake, Wall's "Red-ish" Velvet Cake, and, in a shocking twist: Sampaio's Strawberry Rhubarb Pie, which he divulged that he did not make himself—yet sold for the highest price of the bunch at \$3,500. The auction continued with a trove of other tempting items, including tickets to an exclusive celebration in wine country, an insider evening and dinner with Seiwert and choreographer Trey McIntyre, two private cruises on the Bay, an NYC Broadway experience, and the ever-popular walk-on roles in Smuin's annual *The Christmas Ballet*. The auction concluded with a call to public donations for Smuin's Raise the Barre initiative, which was met with generous donations from the crowd.

Funds raised for Smuin Contemporary Ballet 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 Contemporary Ballet include San Francisco Chronicle, Tri-Counties Bank, Grgich Hills Estate & Stephan Strebl, McCalls Catering & Events, and Lily Spruce Events.

ABOUT SMUIN

For more than 30 years, Smuin has pushed the boundaries of contemporary ballet, combining classical ballet training, technique, and artistry 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. From 2007-2024, Artistic Director Emerita Celia Fushille celebrated Michael Smuin's legacy while enriching the company's repertoire by collaborating with choreographers from around the world, commissioning world premieres, and bringing new choreographic voices to the Smuin stage. Now at the helm, Artistic Director Amy Seiwert continues to lead Smuin in bold and creative ways. Smuin's vision is to uplift the human spirit and shatter preconceptions of ballet through innovative artistry and exceptional quality. At the heart of the company is their mission statement, which declares, "Smuin Contemporary Ballet thrives on diverse views and dance styles to create art that is original, evocative, and entertaining. By creating a platform for artists to flourish, we foster innovation. By embracing bold ideals and ideas, we unleash the limitless power of dance. We are committed to sharing our passion for dance through performances, classes, and community engagement."

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