

# OREGON **BALLET** THEATRE

## PRESS CONTACT:

Natasha Kautsky

Director of Marketing & Communications

PHONE: 503.227.0977

EMAIL: [natasha.kautsky@obt.org](mailto:natasha.kautsky@obt.org)

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Oregon Ballet Theatre Presents the Return of Nicolo Fonte's *Beautiful Decay*, Featuring Portland Dance Icons Gregg Bielemeier and Kasandra Gruener

*"Beautiful Decay is not only an evening of explosive, athletic dance that leaves the audience speechless after just the first act, but also a witty and sophisticated meditation on the passing of time."*

— *Dance Journal*

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration continues with the exciting return of OBT Resident Choreographer Nicolo Fonte's ground breaking, *Beautiful Decay* – a riveting full length ballet exploring the passage of time and its impact on individual identity. Since OBT performed the work in 2016, *Beautiful Decay* has been staged by dance companies across the country to critical and popular acclaim. With Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* as a backdrop, set design by Tony Award winner Mimi Lien, and a multi-generational cast featuring Portland dance icons Kasandra Gruener and Gregg Bielemeier, *Beautiful Decay* is a creative thunderbolt.

Inspiration for *Beautiful Decay* came to Fonte from a series of 3-D photographs by artist Mark Golebiowski featuring wilted, yet very vibrant exotic flowers. The 3-D technology offered a deeper look into their very essence – their flower-ness. "These flowers were so full of movement," Fonte observes, "and retained such a potent identity and sense of 'self,' that the beauty evident in the decay was to me both noble and touching. There was still this sense of identity which remained: 'I am still present!' And I thought, 'What a perfect metaphor for a performer.'"

To bring this idea to the stage, Fonte uses a multi-generational cast. The older dancers are fully integrated with OBT company members contrasting the power of youthful athleticism with that of mature grace. While there is an obvious difference, there is also a connection between the two. With time comes a deeper beauty. "One gesture with 45 years' experience can break your heart and steal the show,"

says Fonte. Fortunately he has two incredible guest artists – Portland dancers Gregg Bielemeier and Kasandra Gruener – to make the case.

Gruener danced with San Francisco based Margaret Jenkins Dance Co before founding her own company. She is also OBT's renowned Director of Education Outreach. This performance marks a crossroads for Gruener who after 35 years will retire from her position with OBT and looks forward to finding herself as a dancer again. "I am excited to dance as my own age," she says. "My own physicality retains my past. It will look and feel different, but it's the same experience."

Gregg Bielemeier, now celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> season as a dancer, performed in Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2016 production. He recently reprised the role with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet and has become something of a *Beautiful Decay* expert. "Gregg is so committed to the process and the expression of his role. He doesn't overdo. He's at once fragile and strong." says Fonte.

Beyond its underlying meaning, *Beautiful Decay* is simply a thrillingly and entertaining evening of dance. "This is not a dutiful examination of a theme with social relevance," says OBT Artistic Director Kevin Irving, "so much as a socially relevant work that is dynamically entertaining!"

*Beautiful Decay* runs April 9-12, 2020 at Portland's Newmark Theatre

Tickets start at \$29/ Groups of 10 or more start at \$22

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## **ABOUT NICOLO FONTE**

Choreographer Nicolo Fonte is known for his daring and original approach to dance. His work has been noted by critics for a unique movement language as well as a highly developed fusion of ideas, dance and design. Born in Brooklyn New York, Fonte started dancing at the age of 14. He studied at the Joffrey Ballet School in New York as well as at the San Francisco Ballet and New York City Ballet Schools while completing a Bachelor Degree of Fine Arts at SUNY Purchase.

Upon graduation, he danced with Peridance in NYC and later joined Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in Montréal, dancing in the works of Balanchine, Tudor, Kudelka and Spaniard Nacho Duato. Fonte subsequently joined Duato's Compañia Nacional de Danza in Madrid and forged a strong identity in the Spanish company for seven years – for both his dancing and his choreography. *En los Segundos Ocultos (In Hidden Seconds)*, one of three ballets Fonte made for the Spanish company, was hailed as a breakthrough work of great impact with the poetic vision of a mature artist and indeed this ballet established his presence on the European dance scene.

In 2000, Fonte retired from performing to devote himself full-time to his choreographic career. Since that time he has created or staged his ballets for The Dutch National Ballet, Houston Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Ballet West, Royal Ballet of Flanders, Stuttgart Ballet, The Australian Ballet, The Göteborg Ballet, The Finnish National Ballet, Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theatre, The Perm Tchaikovsky Ballet, The Washington Ballet, Ballett Mainz, Ballett Nürnberg, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, Complexions Contemporary Ballet, TANZ Ensemble Cathy Sharp, North Carolina Dance Theatre, Tulsa Ballet, Ballet British Columbia, Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal and Queensland Ballet.

Fonte received a Choo San Goh award for his 2002 collaboration with Pacific Northwest Ballet, *Almost Tango*, of which R.M. Campbell of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer wrote, "Fonte is a thinker, an architect who creates the new rather than reinvent the old. He is a master of manipulating space and creating relationships". *Almost Tango* was also voted as one of Dance Europe's "Best Premiere's when it was re-staged for The Australian Ballet in 2004.

From 2002 to 2006, Nicolo enjoyed an ongoing creative partnership with The Göteborg Ballet in Sweden, creating and staging numerous works that helped establish the company's distinct profile. While in Göteborg, he created his first full-length ballet, based on the life of Tchaikovsky. Widely acclaimed in the international press for Fonte's marriage of narrative skill and a contemporary choreographic language, *Re: Tchaikovsky* appeared on the "Best of 2005" lists of both Ballett-Tanz and Dance Europe. Fonte has also played an important role in the ongoing development of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet as one of that company's most popular guest choreographers. To date, he has created eight highly successful works for ASFB that have toured throughout the U.S. and overseas.

In addition to Oregon Ballet Theatre, Nicolo Fonte is currently the Resident Choreographer for Ballet West, in Salt Lake City, which began with the 2012-2013 season.

## **ABOUT GREGG BEILEMEIER**

Gregg Bielemeier is an Oregon born dance artist who started his career with the Portland Dance Theater in 1970. As a freelance artist he has worked on the West Coast and Europe as a featured choreographer, performer and teacher for over 43 years. He is a frequent improviser/collaborator with musicians, actors and visual artists, creating suave, witty dance works that have been described as "wonderfully inventive," by the *Los Angeles Times*, and as "marvelously goofy," by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

A sought-after educator, Bielemeier has been a guest artist in technique, performance and repertory at institutions such as the University of Nevada/Las Vegas, Portland State University, Reed College, Center for Movement Arts, da Vinci Arts Middle School, Lewis & Clark College, the Vancouver School of Arts and Academics and the School of Oregon Ballet Theatre. He is a founding core artist of Conduit Dance in Portland, Oregon, where he continues to teach all levels of contemporary movement and dance improvisation.

Bielemeier has been awarded grants from the Metropolitan Arts Commission, the Regional Arts and Culture Council, and on two occasions received Individual Artist Fellowships from the City of Pasadena, CA. He has provided movement direction for performances by master drummer Obo Addy, Cygnet Theater, Rumpus Room Dance, and performance artist Susan Banyas. His choreographic work has been commissioned by the Northwest Professional Dance Project, D-9 Dance Collective, School for New Dance (Amsterdam), Tere Mathern Dance, Reed College, Polaris Dance Theater, Skinner | Kirk Dance Ensemble, Modern Dance Lab, aero/betty aerial dance theatre, Imago Theatre, Pauvre | Dance, BodyVox and White Bird, among others. Bielemeier's choreography has been presented in Los Angeles by Dance Kaleidoscope, in Seattle at On the Boards Northwest New Works Festival, at Holland's International Dance Festival, and in Portland by PSU's Contemporary Dance Season, Portland Art Museum, and for White Bird's inaugural and 11th contemporary dance performance series.

### **ABOUT KASANDRA GRUENER**

Oregon native Kasandra Gruener has a BA in Dance from Mills College and an MA in Contemplative Education from Naropa University. She was a member of San Francisco based Margaret Jenkins Dance Co., and founded her own company, Henry Harris Green. In her 35+ years as a teaching artist, she has conducted master classes, workshops, and daily technique classes in dance studios, NEA-funded Artist-in-Schools programs in the Midwest, private and public K-12 schools, colleges, community centers, hospitals, group homes, and child care centers. A specialist in teaching at-risk youth, Kasandra earned the 2007 and 2009 Young Audiences' Sunburst Award for commitment to arts education. In 2009, Kasandra was a guest professor at Portland State University in the theatre department's dance minor program. She presently serves on the Community Arts Team, a committee of arts and education leaders working to assist Portland's Regional Arts and Culture Council (a 2010 Kennedy Center Partner in Education) in its efforts to expand arts education and professional development in our schools.

### **ABOUT OREGON BALLET THEATRE**

OBT is the largest professional ballet company in Oregon, employing nearly 200 people and attracting artists from around the globe with our reputation for excellence. The company is rooted in the traditions

of classical ballet, with a repertoire that ranges from the great classics to premieres from some of the most exciting choreographic voices in the field today. Our mission is dedicated to the vitality of, and access to, world-class ballet performance and training in our region.

Oregon Ballet Theatre was founded in 1989 through the consolidation of Pacific Ballet Theatre and Ballet Oregon; James Canfield, a former principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet, was the company's first artistic director. Under his leadership, OBT quickly developed a distinctive style and unique repertoire that grew to comprise over 80 ballets. From 2003-2012, under the direction of Christopher Stowell, OBT presented nearly 350 performances and added 51 ballets, including 20 world premieres, to its diverse body of work. In June 2013, Kevin Irving became the company's third Artistic Director.

Irving brings over 25 years of experience performing with and managing world-renowned cultural organizations and dance companies, including The Gothenburg Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, and Compañia Nacional de Danza (Spain). His tenure has been marked by a commitment to collaborative partnerships with other Portland artists and organizations, including the Portland Art Museum, Multnomah County Library, Kenji Bunch, and Pink Martini. He has expanded the company's classical repertoire – with the premieres of Ben Stevenson's *Cinderella*, August Bournonville's *Napoli*, and his own *Swan Lake* – while preserving OBT's legacy and restoring major works such as James Canfield's *Romeo & Juliet* and Christopher Stowell's *The Sleeping Beauty*. At the same time, he continues to build a diverse body of work with premieres from internationally acclaimed contemporary choreographers such as Nacho Duato, Jiří Kylián, and James Kudelka, while investing in American choreographers such as Alvin Ailey, Twyla Tharp, and Agnes de Mille as well as new dance makers Helen Pickett, Darrell Grand Moultrie and OBT's Resident Choreographer, Nicolo Fonte.

OBT's investment in the community extends far beyond our stages and studios, as we seek to enrich the community and invest in our art form. We provide ballet training to over 800 students through the OBT School, which attracts dancers from as far away as Spain and Japan, and through OBT2, our junior company, which brings professional level performance to underserved audiences throughout Portland.

Our robust Education Outreach programming impacts nearly 40,000 people annually, including thousands of K-12 youth across 21 school districts. Ongoing efforts to ensure equitable access include: scholarships to OBT School, field trip transportation for low income and Title 1 schools, and our Share the Wonder campaign, which provides thousands of tickets to our mainstage performances for families in need.