

OREGON **BALLET** THEATRE

KEVIN IRVING / ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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*Oregon Ballet Theatre Launches **(R)Evolve**: Frank Discussions About Ballet in Our Time*

Panelists include: Choreographer **Gioconda Barbuto**, Dance Writer **Phil Chan**, Former NYCB Soloist and mental health advocate **Kathryn Morgan**, and *Memoirs of Blacks in Ballet* Founder **Theresa Ruth Howard**. More to be announced!

Oregon Ballet Theatre's 2020/21 season OBT MOVES continues this March with the launch of **(R)Evolve**, a series of live talks exploring a range of issues impacting ballet in our time. The one hour discussions will both challenge and inspire with a mix of commentary by distinguished panelists from the field and live performance by OBT dancers to highlight their points. The first two talks - **"The Alchemy of Audience" on March 16** and **"Can Ballet Survive Its Traditions?" on March 30** - will be moderated by OBT Artistic Director Kevin Irving and by former OBT Community Engagement Director Kasandra Gruener. Audiences will be able to participate by submitting questions both in advance and during the event which will be live streamed on OBTV. Each episode will also be available on demand following the broadcast.

It's been nearly a year since the pandemic shuttered Portland's stages and since people have been able to share in the unique and thrilling experience of live performance. Ballet companies around the world have pivoted to digital presentations to keep the art form alive. The physical separation from audience has been painful and brought to the forefront the role of audience in the performing arts. The first **(R)Evolve** event, "The Alchemy of Audience" explores this historic moment and the impact on dancers who have not only been restricted in their ability to perform, but to even train and rehearse at a level required to maintain their artistry. OBT dancers Coco Alvarez-Mena, Eva Burton, Mathilde Lambert, and Bailey Shaw are joined by former company member Emily Parker and **acclaimed choreographer [Gioconda Barbuto](#)** for this revealing discussion about the existence of art in isolation.

While the pandemic has placed severe limitations on the ability of ballet companies to perform, this extended pause has also propelled a much needed examination of ballet's established traditions and the potential and power of ballet to open minds, stimulate new perspectives and thinking. Many of these

issues were already top of mind at OBT which over the years has produced such programs as *Impact*, *Terra*, *Man/Woman*, and *Choreography XX*. In a 2017 Oregon Arts Watch interview with Jamuna Chiarini, Irving noted that while he sees exquisite beauty in classical ballets, he is also troubled when he notices “rows and rows of women who have no individuality, no purpose other than to be background to more important people. And that reflects the society that supported the creation of this art form, and was unquestioned for over 100 years.” While tradition makes ballet unique, it is time to take stock of what aspects of this tradition need fine tuning or even a thorough overhaul.

In the second *(R)Evolve* segment “Can Ballet Survive Its Traditions?” Irving and Gruener explore the physical and racial stereotypes found in traditional full length ballets. They are joined by: OBT Rehearsal Director Lisa Kipp; dance writer Phil Chan who cofounded [Final Bow for Yellow Face](#) a movement committed to eliminating outdated and offensive stereotypes of Asians; and by former New York City Ballet soloist [Kathryn Morgan](#) who channeled her personal career challenges into becoming a leading advocate for positive body image and mental health for aspiring ballerinas.

(R)Evolve will continue in June with two more segments addressing ballet tradition, “Ballet Is Woman? According to who?” exploring hierarchy and gender norms in ballet and finally, “The Question of WHITE in Ballet” for which OBT is joined by former Black ballerina and founder of [Memoirs of Blacks in Ballet](#) (MoBBallet), Teresa Ruth Howard. OBT is also grateful to be supported by Howard’s organization with its ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

Pending the easing of restrictions on in-person activities OBT hopes to host the June *(R)Evolve* discussions both in-person and through OBTv. The company will provide updates to <https://www.obt.org/revolve/> regarding in-person programming as well as additional guests, dates, and times for the June segments.

(R)Evolve

March 16 and 30, 2020

6-7 pm

\$12 per episode or as part of \$100 digital season subscription
exclusively on OBTv

For more details about *(R)Evolve* and to purchase tickets visit: www.obt.org/revolve/

ABOUT THE PANELISTS

Gioconda Barbuto

The choreographer and creator of OBT’s *BringingOutsideIn*, Gioconda Barbuto is an internationally esteemed Canadian dancer and choreographer. As a long-time member of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens and Nederlands Dans Theater III, Barbuto was quickly recognized as a versatile and

magnetic artist, gracing the works of many leading choreographers. Her synergy in studio with Jiří Kylián, in particular, led to two celebrated dance films, *Birth Day* and *Car Men*. In 1996, she was nominated for The Kennedy Center Fellowship and received The Banff Centre's Clifford E. Lee Choreography Award. She has unflaggingly pursued her choreographic calling, creating detailed, dynamic friezes of full-bodied gesture, marked by her innate musicality. Choreographing for many acclaimed dance companies, her oeuvre now counts over 50 works. In 2015, Barbuto was selected as the McKnight International Choreographer in Minnesota. She also recently obtained one of the choreographic positions for Oregon Ballet Theatre's Choreography XX competition, creating *BringingOutsideIn* — named "best in premiere" in *Dance Europe* magazine. Barbuto also extends her methods for molding space and energy through her Movement Workshops and is invited to teach at academies worldwide.

Phil Chan

Phil Chan is a co-founder of *Final Bow for Yellowface*, and most recently served as the Director of Programming for IVY, connecting young professionals with leading American museums and performing arts institutions. He is a graduate of Carleton College and an alumnus of the Ailey School. As a writer, he served as the Executive Editor for *FLATT Magazine* and contributed to *Dance Europe Magazine*, *Dance Magazine*, *Dance Business Weekly*, and the *Huffington Post*. He was the founding General Manager of the Buck Hill Skytop Music Festival, and was the General Manager for *Armitage Gone! Dance and Youth America Grand Prix*. He served multiple years on the National Endowment for the Arts dance panel and the Jadin Wong Award panel presented by the Asian American Arts Alliance. He serves on the Leaders of Color steering committee at Americans for the Arts, the International Council for the Parsons Dance Company, and the Advisory Board of *Dance Magazine*. He is the author of *Final Bow for Yellowface: Dancing between Intention and Impact*, and a 2020 New York Public Library Dance Research Fellow.

Kathryn Morgan

Kathryn Morgan is a soloist with Miami City Ballet. She began studying ballet at age three at Mobile Ballet in Mobile, Alabama. Kathryn attended the summer program at the School of American Ballet in 2004 and enrolled as a full time student that fall. She joined New York City Ballet as an apprentice in June of 2006 and became a member of the corps de ballet of the Company in February of 2007. In October 2009, Kathryn was promoted to soloist. She left the company due to an autoimmune illness in 2012. She has since regained her health and currently performs, teaches, and speaks around the country, runs a highly successful YouTube channel, her podcast "The Kathryn Morgan Show", writes a column for "Dance Spirit Magazine", is the creator of the the "Kathryn Morgan Scholarship", "Kathryn Morgan Collection" and "Kathryn Morgan Haul", and is a judge and master teacher for the Youth America Grand Prix Ballet Competition. She joined Miami City Ballet in May 2019.

Theresa Ruth Howard

Theresa Ruth Howard began her professional dance career with the Philadelphia Civic Ballet Company at the age of 12. She later joined the Dance Theatre of Harlem where she had the opportunity to travel extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and Africa. She has worked with choreographer Donald Byrd as a soloist in his staging of New York City Opera's *Carmina Burana*, in his critically acclaimed *Harlem Nutcracker*, as well as the controversial domestic violence work *The Beast*. In 2004, she became a founding member of *Armitage Gone! Dance* and was invited to be a guest artist with *Complexions Contemporary Ballet's* 10th anniversary season.

Ms. Howard has been a member of the ballet faculty at the Ailey School for over 18 years. She has been an artist in residence at Hollins University and New Haven University, in addition to teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, Marymount, Shenandoah University, University of the Arts, and the historical American Dance Festival. Ms. Howard has adjudicated arts competitions and taught in Russia, Italy, Canada, and Bulgaria. She has taught at the Joffrey Ballet School (NY) as well as co-facilitating a Body Awareness workshop and the Jazz Contemporary division of the program.

As a writer, Ms. Howard has contributed to *The Source*, *Pointe Magazine*, *Dance Magazine*, Germany's *Tanz*, and Italy's *Expressions*. She is a contributing writer for *Dance Magazine* online. Her articles about body image prompted her to create mybodymyimage.com, which endeavors to help others build a positive body image through respect, acceptance, and appreciation. Her article *The Misty-rious Case of the Vanishing Ballerinas of Color: Where have all the Others Gone?* was the subject of *Race and Dance Townhall: REAL TALK* at the *Dance/USA* conference in June 2015. Ms. Howard launched MoBBallet.org, digitally archiving the *Memoirs of Blacks in Ballet*. One of MoBB's first projects was to help organize and facilitate the first ever audition for Black female ballet dancers for major ballet organizations at the 2015 International Association of Blacks in Dance conference. MoBBallet is a 2016 Knight Foundation grantee for the documentation of Philadelphia's Black ballet history.

~We are only as strong as our stories~

ABOUT OBT

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 and Community Engagement 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.