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BALLET AUSTIN PRESENTS STEPHEN MILLS' *LIGHT / THE HOLOCAUST & HUMANITY PROJECT* MAR 31 - APR 2

AUSTIN, Texas (February 21, 2023) – Ballet Austin brings Stephen Mills' award-winning [*Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project*](#) back to Austin this spring, preceded by a series of community dialogues focused on the protection of human rights against bigotry and hate. The contemporary dance work will be performed at The Long Center for the Performing Arts on March 31 & April 1-2.

With 2021 being “the highest year on record for documented reports of harassment, vandalism and violence directed against Jews” (ADL statistic), and with anti-Semitism on an unprecedented rise in Austin, Stephen Mills selected this dance work as part of Ballet Austin's season. In 2019 alone, the FBI reported that [63% of all hate crime cases in the United States were anti-Jewish related.](#)

WHAT IS *LIGHT / THE HOLOCAUST & HUMANITY PROJECT*?

Stephen Mills' *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project* (*LIGHT*) shares the life story of Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren, taking the audience on a journey that seeks to have the audience consider the unlearned lessons from the Holocaust and their relevance to present-day issues challenging human and civil rights.

Created and choreographed by Stephen Mills, Ballet Austin's Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund Artistic Director, *LIGHT* has been licensed to other companies and has toured both nationally and internationally throughout the past 17 years. Following the events of 9/11/2001, Mills felt compelled to seek deeper meaning in his work and his discussions with audiences. Once he determined the focus of the new work, Mills spent more than a year studying the history of the Holocaust, including traveling to eight death camps in Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, and Israel.

Stephen Mills said of the piece: “*LIGHT* challenges communities to work collaboratively to consider the ‘difficult knowledge’ presented by the Holocaust. Citizens are asked to hold themselves and each other accountable for any act of disregard for human rights and to learn by studying the ethical, historical and representation issues of the Holocaust through public

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lectures, a production by Ballet Austin, screenings of the documentary *FINDING LIGHT*, as well as other public conversations. In closing, citizens are encouraged to consider how the study of the Holocaust might foster dialogue regarding contemporary issues of genocide, bigotry, and hate.”

NAOMI WARREN

As the inspiration behind *LIGHT*, [Naomi Warren](#) (1920-2016) was paramount to the creation of the work. In addition to sharing her story with Mills, Warren played an active role in the education process for the artists in the work. She spoke on many occasions with company dancers and helped to educate those involved with the project. Joined by Mills, Naomi Warren spoke to the United Nations at their invitation in 2014.

Naomi Warren grew up in Wolkowysk, a small city in Eastern Poland. The war broke out in 1939 and, by the summer of 1941, the Nazi army invaded Poland. In January of 1942, as the Nazis began to systematically isolate, intern, and murder the Jewish population, Naomi and many family members were taken by cattle car to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Arriving at the camp, Naomi was separated from her mother, who was immediately taken to the gas chambers for extermination. Naomi survived three years at Auschwitz-Birkenau, was transferred to Ravensbruck, and was eventually liberated from Bergen-Belsen. Of the family members held in concentration camps, Naomi was the only surviving member, having lost her mother, husband, and other family members.

At the end of the war, Naomi settled in Houston, Texas, where she remarried and built a successful import business and wonderful family. She served on the boards of Holocaust Museum Houston, the Jewish Federation, and the Southwest Region of the Anti-Defamation League. Among her many honors are awards from the Jewish-American Committee, Holocaust Museum Houston, and the Government of Denmark. In honor of Naomi’s 80th birthday, her family established the Warren Fellowship for Future Teachers at Holocaust Museum Houston.

Naomi Warren’s story is one of great hardships and perseverance. Naomi died on October 2, 2016 at 96 years old; Stephen Mills’ *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project* continues to share her story and message of hope.

A LASTING IMPACT

LIGHT made its world premiere in Austin on April 1, 2005 at Bass Concert Hall. In 2005, it received the Anti-Defamation League’s Audrey & Raymond Maislin Humanitarian Award. Since its premiere in 2005, *LIGHT* has traveled across the US and around the world. Each time *LIGHT* visits a city, the host organization is asked to create an extended, collaborative, city-wide dialogue focused on their challenges related to human and civil rights. Each city’s project culminates in the 85-minute dance work. Cities such as Pittsburg, Denver, Miami, Nashville,

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Akko, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem have presented the work and these powerful community discussions. In the fall of 2013, *LIGHT* made its international debut during a three-city tour across Israel. In 2014, Stephen Mills and Naomi Warren were invited to speak about *LIGHT* to the United Nations in New York City.

In 2013, filmmaker Karen Bernstein (niece of Leonard Bernstein) created an hour-long Emmy® Award-winning documentary about the project entitled *Producing Light* that aired on PBS stations nationally. The contemporary dance work is also the subject of a new award-winning documentary, titled *FINDING LIGHT*. Executive produced by Stephen Mills and directed by Lone Star Emmy® Award-winning filmmaker and former Ballet Austin company dancer, Paul Michael Bloodgood, the film shares the creative process behind *LIGHT*, the friendship between Mills and Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren, and the impact the project had on those involved. As a recent recipient of the “Best Documentary” award from the 2022 Berlin Indie Film Festival and the 2022 Rome International Movie Awards, *FINDING LIGHT* will be seen at a number of notable film festivals during this year.

BEYOND THE STAGE

The 2023 *LIGHT* Community Dialogue invites Austin to participate in a series of free events that include:

- A screening of *FINDING LIGHT*, a new documentary showing the creation process behind *LIGHT*, on Thursday, February 23 at The Paramount Theatre.
- An iACT (Interfaith Action of Central Texas) Red Bench Conversation on *LIGHT* at Agudas Achim/Shalom Austin on February 28.
- An evening with Dr. Rebecca Rossen and Stephen Mills, titled *Moving Memories: Representing the Holocaust and Survivor Stories Through Dance*, presented on March 7 at 7:15PM at Achim/Shalom Austin.
- A panel discussion facilitated by Mark Updegrave, President/CEO of LBJ Foundation. Panelists include Stephen Mills; Oren Segal, VP of the Center on Extremism/ADL, NYC; and Oni Blair, Executive Director of the ACLU Texas. Opening comments presented by Mayor Kirk Watson. The event will be live-streamed by Austin PBS from the LBJ Presidential Library on March 8 at 2PM.
- An AISD Fireside Chat with Anti-Defamation League, hosted by Morgan Moon from the Center on Extremism, at Ballet Austin’s AustinVentures StudioTheater on March 23.

TICKETS ON SALE

Tickets are on sale now and range from \$15-\$99. Visit balletaustin.org to reserve seats online,

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or contact Ballet Austin's Box Office Team at **512.476.2163**, weekdays from noon to 6 p.m. CT for personalized assistance.

ABOUT STEPHEN MILLS

Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund Artistic Director

Known for his innovative and collaborative choreographic projects, Stephen Mills has dance works in the repertoires of companies across the United States and around the world. From his inaugural season as Artistic Director in 2000, Mills attracted attention from around the United States with his world-premiere production of *Hamlet*, hailed by Dance Magazine as "...sleek and sophisticated." The Washington Post recognized Ballet Austin as "one of the nation's best-kept ballet secrets" in 2004 after Ballet Austin performed Mills' world premiere of *The Taming of the Shrew*, commissioned by and performed at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The Company was first invited to perform at the Kennedy Center in January of 2002 with the Mills production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and at The Joyce Theater in New York City in 2004. In 2005 after two years of extensive research, Mills led a community-wide human rights collaboration that culminated in the world premiere work *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project*. In 2006, *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project* was awarded the Audrey & Raymond Maislin Humanitarian Award by the Anti-Defamation League. In September of 2013, the work made its international debut with a tour in three cities across Israel.

In 1998, Mills was the choreographer chosen to represent the United States through his work, *Ashes*, at Les Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis in Paris. Most recently, Mills was awarded the Steinberg Award, the top honor at Le Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur International Choreographic Competition for *One / the body's grace*. Mills has created more than 40 works for companies in the United States and abroad. His ballets are in the repertoires of such companies as Hong Kong Ballet, Ballet Augsburg, American Ballet Theatre Studio Company, Atlanta Ballet, Milwaukee Ballet, Washington Ballet, Cuballet in Havana, Cuba, BalletMet Columbus, Dayton Ballet, Sarasota Ballet, Ballet Pacifica, Dallas Black Dance Theater, Louisville Ballet, Nashville Ballet, Colorado Ballet, Texas Ballet Theater, The Sacramento Ballet, and Dance Kaleidoscope. He has worked in collaboration with such luminaries as the eight-time Grammy Award-winning band, Asleep at the Wheel, Shawn Colvin, and internationally renowned flamenco artist José Greco II.

As a dancer Mills performed with a wide variety of companies such as the world-renowned Harkness Ballet and The American Dance Machine under the direction of Lee Theodore. He also performed with the Cincinnati Ballet and The Indianapolis Ballet Theatre before becoming a part of Ballet Austin. Mills has danced principal roles in the Balanchine repertoire, as well as works by Choo-San Goh, John Butler, Ohad Naharin, Vicente Nebrada, Domy Reiter-Soffer, and Mark Dendy.

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In addition to his work as a choreographer, Mills is a master teacher committed to developing dancers. He has been invited as guest faculty at many pre-professional academies including Jacob's Pillow, Goucher College, Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing Arts in Dallas, The Virginia School of the Arts, The New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, Stephens College and Point Park University in Pittsburgh. Mills is a member of the national dance service organization Dance / USA and has served both in leadership roles and on the Board of Trustees for the organization.

ABOUT BALLET AUSTIN

As distinctive and dynamic as the city it calls home, Ballet Austin welcomes audiences near and far to participate in its “classically innovative” vision for the creation of original artworks, classical ballet instruction, and life-long health and wellness through dance and fitness. With a rich history spanning six decades, acclaimed productions, a commitment to creating access to programs, and a large, classical ballet academy, the organization is poised for an even greater future. From their home at the Butler Dance Education Center in downtown Austin, Ballet Austin and Stephen Mills, Ballet Austin's Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund artistic director, actively engage the community, dancers, and audiences alike. The New York *Times* proclaims Ballet Austin “a company with big ambitions” originating work that is “absorbing.” For additional information on Ballet Austin and to purchase tickets and classes, visit balletaustin.org.

ABOUT OUR SPONSORS

Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project Production Sponsors

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