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BALLET AUSTIN RECEIVES \$10,000 GRANT FROM NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS *GRANT SUPPORTS UPCOMING LIGHT / THE HOLOCAUST & HUMANITY PROJECT*

AUSTIN, Texas (February 27, 2023) – Ballet Austin announces the award of a \$10,000 Grant for Arts Projects from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). This grant supports Ballet Austin’s upcoming production of Stephen Mills’ [*Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project*](#), featuring both a full-length contemporary dance work preceded by a two-month long community-wide discussion on the protection of human rights against bigotry and hate. This grant is one of 1,251 Grants for Arts Projects awards totaling nearly \$28.8 million announced by the NEA as part of its first round of fiscal year 2023 grants.

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

Stephen Mills’ *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project* (*LIGHT*) seeks at its core to use dance as a convener of conversation around issues related to the protection of human rights. Illuminated through the story of Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren, *LIGHT* takes the audience on a journey that is simultaneously situated in the past while making relevant connections to the present, told through the lens of dance.

Mills, Ballet Austin’s Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund Artistic Director, developed and choreographed *LIGHT* in 2005; it has been an ongoing project of his for the past 18 years. The project began as Mills felt inspired by the events of 9/11 to seek deeper meaning in his work. To research the significant topic behind the dance work, Mills toured eight death and work camps in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic, followed by trips to Israel. He also spoke extensively with Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren, whose story served as the inspiration for *LIGHT*.

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 lectures, a production by Ballet Austin, screenings of the documentary *FINDING LIGHT*, as well as other public

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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.”

Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project will be performed by Ballet Austin March 31-April 2 at the Long Center for the Performing Arts. The performances serve as the culmination to a two-month long community project beginning in February. The community project and audience engagement activities surrounding the performances continue the work begun with previous iterations of *LIGHT* and engage partner organizations and individuals to come together as a community to explore answers to questions focused on the prevention of bigotry and hate.

WHAT THIS GRANT PROVIDES TO THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY

The funding received from the NEA supports the staging and performance of ***Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project*** and its related community projects. *LIGHT* includes a community project that promotes the protection of human rights against bigotry and hate by engaging the community at-large through arts, education, and public dialogue. It is anticipated that these events will engage approximately 5,000 individuals.

“The financial support provided through this grant immensely aids in our efforts to bring *LIGHT* to as many members of the Austin community as possible,” Cookie Ruiz, Ballet Austin’s Executive Director, explains. “This project is so important in our world right now, and the support provided by the National Endowment for the Arts ensures that this project is presented in the most appropriate and impactful way.”

LIGHT Community Project Events, Underwritten by the Fifth Age of Man Foundation, 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 Updegrove, 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.

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- 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 for *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project* are on sale now and range from \$15-\$99. Visit balletaustin.org to reserve seats online, 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.

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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.

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

The Fifth Age of Man Foundation, Drs. Joann Hunter Johnson & Kenneth Johnson, Dr. Beverly Dale, and EY

Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project Community Project Underwriter

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The Shubert Foundation, Heritage Title, Baylor, Scott & White, and ECPR

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ATTENTION MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES

Arrange interviews, access high-resolution images and videos, by contacting **Sarah Pace** at **512.476.9151 ex. 137**, or via e-mail at sarah.pace@balletaustin.org. Did you know Ballet Austin is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization? [Learn more.](#)

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