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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STEPHEN MILLS PRESENTS A TRIO OF EXCEPTIONAL DANCE WORKS HONORING COMMUNITY LEADER SARAH GOODRICH BUTLER, FEBRUARY 10-12 *A COLLECTION OF THREE DANCE WORKS PERFORMED BY BALLET AUSTIN*

AUSTIN, Texas (January 1, 2023) – From the beauty of a neo-classical masterpiece to the energy of contemporary ballet, to the stunning world premiere by international award-winning choreographer, Stephen Mills, Ballet Austin returns February 10-12 to The Long Center for the Performing Arts for a weekend of extraordinary dance. This exciting collection, assembled by Mills, Ballet Austin’s Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund Artistic Director, honors long-time Austin philanthropist Sarah Goodrich Butler for her generous support and leadership over the years, along with her husband, Dr. Ernest Butler.

The program opens with George Balanchine’s breath-taking neo-classical *Serenade*, set to the music of Pyotr Tchaikovsky, and is followed by Jessica Lang’s *Garden Blue*, which features the visual art set pieces by Sarah Crowner and the music of Antonín Dvořák. The program closes with a world premiere by Stephen Mills’ entitled, *I Am The Monument*, set to the music of Philip Glass. With live accompaniment by the Austin Symphony Orchestra, *Sarah’s Songs* is the perfect way to honor such an inspirational couple.

The Sarah behind *Sarah’s Songs*

“*Sarah’s Songs* is a group of dances I have curated to show my appreciation of all that the Butlers have done over the years in furtherance of a robust artistic community in Austin. Each work represents elements of dance I know Sarah enjoys,” Stephen Mills said of the collection.

Over the last 25 years, the Butlers have made more than a dozen significant financial gifts to Ballet Austin totaling nearly \$10 million. Their generous and ground-breaking gifts include:

The Butler Fellowship Program, endowed through the Ballet Austin Foundation, supports post-high school aspiring professional dancers by providing a year-long, tuition-free, full-time training opportunity to develop their talents and prepare these young artists for professional careers in

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dance. This assistance makes the pursuit of a dance career possible for many young artists across the U.S.

The Butler New Choreography Endowment is a \$3 million endowment created by the Butlers in 2016 to fund the world premieres of major dance works created by Artistic Director/Choreographer Stephen Mills and his successors.

The Butler Dance Education Center was made possible through the Butlers' gift of \$3.5 million dollars. This gift was the cornerstone of Ballet Austin's capital campaign to build the Butler Dance Education Center at 501 W. 3rd Street. The 38,000-square foot facility, in the heart of downtown Austin, is home to the ballet company and its artistic, administrative, and production staff, as well as the Ballet Austin Academy and the Butler Center for Dance & Fitness.

Three Extraordinary Dance Works

George Balanchine's *Serenade*

The first ballet in this trio, *Serenade*, is one of George Balanchine's most beloved works; the first created after arriving in the US, making its premiere on March 1, 1935. Featuring a predominantly female cast, this ballet represents the neo-classical side of Sarah Butler. As part of licensing a work from The George Balanchine Trust, dancers receive direction from a répétiteur whose career is to stage Balanchine's works beyond his life. "It's our pleasure to have Leslie Peck as the Répétiteur for *Serenade*. A former dancer with New York City Ballet, Leslie brings with her a wealth of experience with this masterful work, as both a performer and stager. We are honored to have her here, sharing the exquisite legacy of Mr. Balanchine's work with our dancers and the Austin community," Michelle Martin, Ballet Austin's Associate Artistic Director, said of hosting the répétiteur.

Music: Tchaikovsky's *Serenade* for Strings in C major, Op. 48 (1880)

Number of Dancers: 26 (20 women and 6 men)

Run Time: 33 minutes

Jessica Lang's *Garden Blue*

Choreographer Jessica Lang's *Garden Blue* was commissioned by American Ballet Theater (ABT) in 2018. ABT Principals Misty Copeland and Herman Cornejo were two of the seven members of the original cast. "*Garden Blue* is a dance by Jessica Lang, a female choreographer working at a very high national level," Stephen Mills explains. "The music is by Antonín Dvořák with designs by the important visual artist Sarah Crouner. The Butler's appreciation of visual art is well known. The collaboration between these two women, Jessica and Sarah, has created a most beautiful environment." The ballet is vibrant and colorful, contrasting with *Serenade*'s soft blue palette. This work utilizes large moveable art pieces reminiscent of sculptures. With sets and costumes designed by artist Sarah Crouner, *Garden Blue* is full of movement and interaction between the dancers. Similar to Leslie Peck's visit to coach *Serenade*, Jessica Lang will stage the work with the dancers in January.

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Music: Antonín Dvořák's Piano Trio No. 4 in E Minor 'Dumky,' Movements 1, 2 and 3 (1891)

Number of Dancers: 7 (4 women and 3 men)

Run Time: 20 minutes

Stephen Mills' World Premiere *I Am The Monument*

The final work on the program is a world premiere by Stephen Mills. *I Am The Monument* highlights the Butlers' unchanging dedication to new ideas. Featuring Philip Glass' *Symphony No. 3*, a favorite composer of Mills, this work takes the pulsating, dramatic rhythms of the music and transfers them on to the bodies of the dancers. Stephen Mills says of his new work: "The Butler's philanthropy has focused deeply on artistic potential and creation. *I Am The Monument* is my newest work and I am dedicating it to the spirit of investigation that is built into the Butler's giving. The music for the work is by Philip Glass. He is a composer Sarah and I have discussed extensively over the years. The title of the work refers to the idea that our time on earth is measured by the good that we do. And that we, ourselves, our spirits are left behind as the monument to that good."

Music: Philip Glass' *Symphony No. 3*, Movements II, III, IV (1994)

Number of Dancers: 18 (9 women and 9 men)

Run Time: 20 minutes

TICKETS ON SALE

Tickets are on sale now and range from \$15-\$99. Visit balletaustin.org to reserve seats online, or contact Ballet Austin's Box Office 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.

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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.

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.

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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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