

MEDIA RELEASE



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BALLET AUSTIN WELCOMES WORLD PREMIERE OF STEPHEN MILLS' *POE / A TALE OF MADNESS* MARCH 22-24

BUTLER NEW CHOREOGRAPHY ENDOWMENT COMMISSIONS SECOND
OFFERING

AUSTIN, Texas (March 13, 2024) – Experience the intrigue, mystery, and horror of Edgar Allan Poe's life and his most enduring works in the **World Premiere** of **Stephen Mills' *POE / A Tale of Madness (POE)***. Commissioned through the generosity of the Butler New Choreography Endowment, this hauntingly beautiful ballet explores the tragic life and macabre works of American writer and poet **Edgar Allan Poe**. Featuring a newly commissioned symphonic score by **Graham Reynolds**, performed live by the **Austin Symphony Orchestra**, join Ballet Austin **March 22-24** for three performances of this gripping new ballet at the Long Center for the Performing Arts.

A THRILLING WORLD PREMIERE

Stephen Mills, Ballet Austin's Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund Artistic Director, brings Poe's masterpieces to life in a mesmerizing fusion of literature and dance.

Mills' team of artistic collaborators for this new work includes award-winning composer **Graham Reynolds**, creating his first symphonic ballet score, and Austin-based artist **Shawn Sides**, founder and co-artistic director of the Rude Mechanicals Theatre Collective, writing her first ballet libretto. The newly commissioned music will be performed live by the **Austin Symphony Orchestra**.

Celebrated costume designer **Margaret Mitchell** creates extravagant period-appropriate costumes, incorporating rich fabrics into full skirts and long capes to illustrate the embellished fashions of 19th century America. Mitchell has designed costumes and scenery professionally for over 30 years, with work featured in the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space, the McNay Art Museum, and El Centro Nacional a Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

Mills works again with nationally acclaimed scenic designer **Michael B. Raiford**, following the surreal beauty of ***Belle REDUX / A Tale of Beauty & the Beast***. Raiford has also designed elements of ***Exit Wounds***, ***The Mozart Project***, and Mills' balletic version of ***The Magic Flute***.

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Raiford's recent credits include work with companies around the world, including *Les Misérables* for Lyric Theatre of Oklahoma, *Carmen* for Central City Opera, and *Ragtime* for ZACH Theatre.

This spellbinding new work is sure to keep you on the edge of your seat!

A NIGHT WORTH CELEBRATING

Elevate your theater experience by attending *POE / A Tale of Madness* on **Friday, March 22** for *Opening Night at Ballet Austin*. Featuring special offerings and experiences to celebrate the first performance of each production, attendees can upgrade their evening to include delicious light bites and beverages, pre-show activations, and exclusive access to Gallery 701 and the Skyline View Lounge.

Offered for purchase at this production, indulge in hand-crafted **pre-show charcuterie bites with a special pre-show AND intermission beverage of your choice**. Skip the crowded bar lines with a private full-service cash bar in **Gallery 701**, serving unique beverage creations inspired by the performance. Step out onto the **Skyline View Lounge** to enjoy your evening al fresco, with beautiful views of the downtown skyline and refreshing spring air.

Opening Night invites audiences to enjoy the perfect night out!

SECOND WORK OF THE BUTLER NEW CHOREOGRAPHY ENDOWMENT

POE follows the unprecedented success of Stephen Mills' *Grimm Tales* in 2019, the first ballet commissioned by the Butler New Choreography Endowment in collaboration with nationally acclaimed visual artist Natalie Frank. This transformational \$3 million gift from Sarah and Dr. Ernest Butler, established in 2016, supports in perpetuity the creation of major dance works by Stephen Mills and his successors.

TICKETS ON SALE

Dates: Friday, March 22 at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, March 23 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, March 24 at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets are **on sale now** and range from **\$15-\$99**. Visit balletaustin.org to reserve seats online, or contact Ballet Austin's Ticketing Services Team by calling **512.476.2163**, weekdays from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT for personalized assistance.

ABOUT STEPHEN MILLS

Sarah & Ernest Butler Family Fund Artistic Director

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Known for his innovative and collaborative choreographic projects, Stephen Mills has created over 60 premieres for Ballet Austin and has works in the repertoires of companies across the United States and around the world. His inaugural season as artistic director in 2000 attracted national attention 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 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's first Kennedy Center invitation in January of 2002 was to perform Mills' *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ballet Austin presented a variety of Mills' works at The Joyce Theater (NYC) in 2005 and returned to the Kennedy Center in collaboration with The Suzanne Farrell Ballet in 2008 and for the Ballet Across America Festival in 2013. In 2005 after two years of extensive research, Mills led a communitywide human rights collaboration that culminated in the world premiere work *Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project (Light)*. In 2006 *Light* was awarded the Audrey & Raymond Maislin Humanitarian Award by the Anti-Defamation League. The work made its international debut in September 2013, with performances in three cities across Israel and is the subject of the award-winning documentary film, *FINDING LIGHT*. In October 2016, Mills led the company through a 16-city tour of the People's Republic of China, concluding in China's largest city, Shanghai.

In 1998, Mills won the choreographic honor of representing the United States with his work, *Ashes*, at the Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine Saint-Denis in Paris. In 2004, his work *One/the body's grace* won the Steinberg Award, the top honor at le Festival des Arts de Saint-Sauveur International Choreographic Competition in Montreal. Mills' ballets are in the repertoires of Hong Kong Ballet, Ballet Augsburg, American Ballet Theatre Studio Company, Atlanta Ballet, Milwaukee Ballet, The 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, Eugene Ballet, Oklahoma City Ballet, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre 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, visual artists Natalie Frank and Trenton Doyle Hancock, internationally renowned flamenco artist José Greco II, and composer Graham Reynolds. In 2020, Mills collaborated with filmmaker, producer, and former company artist Paul Michael Bloodgood to create the dance film *Preludes/Beginnings* for which he received a 2021 Lone Star EMMY® Award.

As a dancer, Mills performed with the world-renowned Harkness Ballet, The American Dance Machine under the direction of Lee Theodore, Cincinnati Ballet, and Indianapolis Ballet Theatre before becoming a part of Ballet Austin. Mills danced principal roles in the Balanchine repertoire, as well as works by ChooSan 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. His invitations to teach include Jacob's Pillow, Goucher

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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, Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Boca Ballet Theater, School of American Ballet, The Suzanne Farrell Ballet, Butler Ballet, Lyon Opera Ballet, and NW Professional Dance Project.

Mills is a member of the national dance service organization Dance/USA and served both in leadership roles and on the national Board of Trustees for the organization. In 2013, he became a Fellow of the Chief Executive Program of National Arts Strategies.

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

Stephen Mills’ *POE / A Tale of Madness* Production Sponsors

Commissioned by the Butler New Choreography Endowment through the generosity of Sarah and Ernest Butler, Virtigo Pictures, The Bancroft Initiative, Texas Commission on the Arts, ECPR Texas, Austin Marriott Downtown

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Arrange interviews, access high-resolution images and videos, by contacting **Sarah Pace** at **512.476.9151 ex. 118**, 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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