2023 Spotlight Preliminary Ballet Panels

Jukka Aromaa is a former principal dancer with New York City Ballet, Finnish National Ballet and Deutsche Oper am Rhein Dusseldorf. He was a guest principal dancer with Deutsche Oper Berlin and English National Ballet. In 1980 he won First Prize at the Prix de Lausanne Competition and 1984 in Helsinki International Ballet Competition. Honors during Mr. Aromaa's long 25-year dancing career include the Benoit de la Dance award received in Bolshoi Theatre 1995. He served as Artistic Director of Finnish National Ballet School from 2003 to 2006. Currently, Aromaa teaches internationally and serves as a judge, lecturer and répétiteur for both the classical and Balanchine repertory.

Molly Bogunovic is a former ballerina with Pennsylvania Ballet and Los Angeles Ballet. Her repertoire includes soloist roles in *The Four Temperaments* (Balanchine), *The Nutcracker*, Ben Stevenson's *Cinderella, Five Tangos*, Peter Martin's *Fearful Symmetries, Giselle, Raymonda Variations, Serenade*, and others. While with Pennsylvania Ballet, she had the honor of going on tour to the Kennedy Center and the New York City Center. Additionally, she had principal roles created for her by Christopher Stowell and Stacey Tookey (from "So You Think You Can Dance"). Currently, she is on faculty at USC Glorya Kaufman School of Dance, Guest Lecturer at UC Santa Barbara, and teaches internationally.

Melissa Bowman* is the Academy Director of the Montana Ballet Company. Invited by Mikhail Baryshnikov, Ms. Bowman joined the Corps de Ballet of American Ballet Theatre where she danced for several years. She then founded her own ballet company, the Emerson Dance Theatre, and later joined the Bern Ballet in Switzerland and the Zurich Ballet with Uwe Scholz. Following Scholz to Leipzig, Germany, Bowman danced soloist and principal roles and became his associate director. She was an advisor for ABT's National Training Curriculum committee, the Assistant Principal of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School at ABT, and Artistic Director of the ABT Summer Intensives.

Leslie Carothers-Aromaa is a former principal dancer with the Joffrey Ballet and Pennsylvania Ballet. She was featured on television in Dance in America's A Night at The Joffrey, televised on PBS. She has danced principal roles in works by George Balanchine, Sir Frederick Ashton, Jiri Kylian, Twyla Tharp, Anthony Tudor, John Cranko, and Mark Morris, amongst many others, and danced the leads in many of the full-length classical ballets, including *Swan Lake, Giselle, Coppelia, Romeo and Juliet, and Sleeping Beauty*. During her career, leading roles were created for her by Robert Joffrey, William Forsythe, Gerald Arpino, Dwight Rhoden, and others. Carothers-Aromaa has served as Dance Institute Director, Artistic Director, Ballet Chair, and dance faculty at The Colburn School of Performing Arts. Currently, she teaches both ballet and Zena Rommett Floor-Barre® nationally and internationally and serves as a Mentor and Managing Board Member of the Zena Rommett Floor-Barre Foundation.

Andrea Lassakova is a former first soloist of the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. She trained at the Eva Jacz Conservatory, the official school of the Slovak National Ballet, under the tutelage of Klara Skodova. Upon graduation, she joined the Slovak National Ballet as a Demi-Soloist. She later joined the Finnish National Ballet where she danced leading roles, before joining the Mikhailovsky. At the Mikhailovsky she danced principal roles including Odette/Odile, Medora, Gamzatti, and many more. She has performed works by Christopher Wheeldon, Nacho Duato, and Lar Lubovitch and performed in some of the world's most prestigious theaters, including the Mariinsky in St. Petersburg and Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo.

Francine Kessler Lavac* is a former Soloist with Ballet West and Harkness Ballet Company where she performed both classical and contemporary repertoire. Ms. Kessler Lavac's principal roles have included Swanhilda in *Coppelia*, Dew Drop and Sugar Plum in *Nutcracker*, leads in Balanchine's *Pas de Dix, Irish Fantasy, Serenade, Four Temperaments*, John Butler's *Carmina Burana*, and *Cinderella*. Ms. Kessler can be seen as the partner of Mikhail Baryshnikov on the Baryshnikov Television Special for CBS with choreography by Michael Kidd. Ms. Lavac regularly teaches master classes and private instruction, plus group classes. She was recently invited, as one of ten teachers nationally selected, to attend a teacher workshop at School of American Ballet.

Marie-France Levesque* is a former ballerina with American Ballet Theatre. She previously danced with the Les Grands Ballets Canadiens where she performed several principal roles in *Concerto Barocco*, *Jewels* (Balanchine), *The Nutcracker*, and *Carmina Burana*, among others. Ms. Levesque was recruited by Mikhail Baryshnikov to join ABT, where she danced for eleven years, performed several soloists and principal roles, and received an Artist of Exceptional Achievement status. Ms. Levesque has been choreographing and teaching at universities and dance studios in the greater Los Angeles and Orange Counties area since 1996. She also established The Los Angeles Dance Company (www.TheLADC.com), of which she is the Founder and Artistic & Executive Director.

Antonio Lopez is a former Principal Dancer with the San Francisco Ballet. He has had roles created for him by choreographers such as Michael Smuin, William Christensen, and Jiri Kylian. Mr. Lopez received an Emmy for his work in Michael Smuin's Emmy Award-winning *A Song For Dead Warriors*. His repertoire includes leads in *Nutcracker, Cinderella, In the Night, Forgotten Land, Bolero, Spartacus, Don Juan* and *Beauty and the Beast*. He created a new ballet

for National Ballet de Mexico and choreographed four short pieces for the National Geographic television series "Party Like...". He teaches master classes nationally and maintains an on-going teaching relationship for Smuin Ballet in San Francisco and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.

Adrian Blake Mitchell is a former soloist of the Mikhailovsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. He trained at the Ellison Ballet Professional Training Program and graduated from the Vaganova Academy. His repertoire includes leading roles in a rich variety of both classical and contemporary repertoire. He has partnered star ballerinas including Polina Semionova and danced repertoire from world-leading choreographers. He acts frequently as an Artistic Ambassador for the ABT JKO School. He also serves as Artistic Director of Dance in Color, a nonprofit organization that he co-founded which provides scholarships to children from diverse and underserved communities to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the professional dance industry.

*Preliminary 1 only