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**THODOS DANCE CHICAGO TO DEBUT NEW DANCE STORY ABOUT
JAPANESE-AMERICAN DANCE LEGEND SONO OSATO, *SONO'S JOURNEY*
TO PREMIERE JANUARY 9, 2016 AT THE AUDITORIUM THEATRE**



From left, two archival photos of Japanese-American dance artist Sono Osato, Sono Osato today, and Thodos Dance Chicago Artistic Director Melissa Thodos with Sono Osato making plans for the world premiere of *Sono's Journey*.
Click [here](#) to download these images.

CHICAGO, August 19, 2015 – **Thodos Dance Chicago** announced today the company will celebrate the life of the legendary Japanese-American dance artist, **Sono Osato**, with a world premiere dance story titled *Sono's Journey*, debuting in January 2016 at Chicago's Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University.

Choreographed by Thodos Dance Chicago founder and artistic director **Melissa Thodos**, *Sono's Journey* will be a full company, contemporary dance story that artistically reflects the tale of acclaimed dancer Sono Osato's incredible life journey, from her roots as a young girl in Chicago's Jackson Park, to her audition on the Auditorium Theatre stage that launched her dance career at age 14, to her position today, at the age of 96, as one of the most inspirational, barrier-breaking artists ever in American dance.

Sono's Journey will be the centerpiece of a rich and varied dance program at Thodos Dance Chicago's return engagement as part of the Auditorium Theatre's "Made in Chicago" series, Saturday, January 9 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$28-\$68 and are on sale now. To purchase tickets, visit AuditoriumTheatre.org, call **(312) 341-2300** or purchase in-person at Auditorium Theatre's Box Office, 50 E Congress Pkwy.

Discounted tickets for groups of 10 or more are available at **(312) 341-2300** or sales@auditoriumtheatre.org.

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About *Sono's Journey*

According to Melissa Thodos, "*Sono's Journey* is an extraordinary and enduring story encompassing Sono Osato's life experience as a Japanese-American performer in a rapidly changing world."

Sono Osato, born August 29, 1919 in Omaha, Nebraska, moved to Chicago as a young girl with her Japanese father, Shoji Osato, and Irish-French Canadian mother, Francis Fitzpatrick. Her parents recognized and cultivated her talent as a dancer, and prepared themselves and their daughter the international spotlight. In 1934, Sono's life dream career came true on the stage of Chicago's Auditorium Theatre with her life-changing audition for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo at the tender age of 14.

After her parents entrusted Sono to the world of professional dance, they became the caretakers of Jackson Park's Japanese Tea Garden and Phoenix Pavilion, a gift to the city of Chicago from Japan following the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Shoji and Francis cared for the gardens during the years leading up to World War II, from 1935 to 1941. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, however, Shoji was taken and held in an internment camp on Chicago's south side, just as Sono had begun her starring roles on Broadway. Sono continued to grow and thrive as a dancer, while overcoming prejudice and professional limitations throughout her career because of her Japanese heritage.

Today, Sono and her family are working with Thodos Dance Chicago on the development of *Sono's Journey*, a remembrance and metamorphosis of an era of dance in America, reflecting her experience as a Japanese-American performer at a time of war and prejudice. Additionally, a film documentary is tracking the making of *Sono's Journey*, including interviews with Sono and the artists involved with the work, background stories, the creative process undertaken to bring the piece to the stage, Sono's connections to Chicago, and her life story coming full circle on the stage of the Auditorium Theatre.

Meanwhile, Chicago's historic Japanese Garden is entering a new era of rebirth of its own due to the efforts of **Project 120 Chicago**, a civic public-private partnership with the Chicago Park District that is fostering an historic Japanese cultural exchange in Jackson Park, symbolized by recreating a new Phoenix Pavilion near the original site.

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“Project 120 Chicago strongly believes in the power of the arts to tell human stories, and we are absolutely thrilled to collaborate with Thodos Dance Chicago to bring Sono Osato’s story back to where it all began,” said **Robert Karr, Jr.**, President, Project 120 Chicago. “Sono Osato’s story is our story, a universal tale about overcoming the adversity we encounter in our lives. If you are going to share such an incredibly vital, moving story through dance, you want a visionary artist like Melissa Thodos to tell it.”

In addition to linking with Thodos Dance Chicago on the creation of *Sono's Journey*, Project 120 Chicago has already attracted significant international attention to the revitalization of Jackson Park by commissioning visual artist **Yoko Ono** to create **SKY LANDING**, her first permanent public art work in the Americas, set to open to the public in June 2016 in the park’s Garden of the Phoenix.

Preserving American dance: Thodos Dance Chicago’s American Dance Legacy Project

Sono's Journey is the third new work to emerge from Thodos Dance Chicago’s **American Dance Legacy Project**, which is dedicated to keeping the creative voice on stage of renowned American dance artists no long visible to the public. The Project’s first work was *Fosse Trilogy*, a trio of rarely performed works by Bob Fosse, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. The second is a suite of choreography created by iconic Chicago modern dance legend Sybil Shearer, funded in part by the Morrison-Shearer Foundation. *Sono's Journey* will only add to the company’s highly successful track record focusing on the American voice in dance.

Similarly, Melissa Thodos’s recent full-length dance stories *The White City: Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893* (“Best dance of 2011” – *Chicago Sun-Times*), co-choreographed by frequent TDC collaborator **Ann Reinking**, and their equally acclaimed *A Light in the Dark: The Story of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan* in 2013 have met with ecstatic audience and critical acclaim, and significantly elevated the company’s profile both in Chicago and nationally.

More about Sono Osato

In 1934, at age 14, Chicago’s Auditorium Theatre played a significant role as the site of Sono’s extraordinary audition for Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, which led to her permanent departure from her family. She later went on to dance with American Ballet Theatre (then Ballet Theatre). While at ABT, she danced roles in such ballets as Kenneth MacMillan’s *Sleeping Beauty*, Antony Tudor’s *Pillar of Fire*, and Bronislava Nijinska’s *The Beloved*.

As a musical theater performer, her Broadway credits included principal dancer in *One Touch of Venus* (Donaldson Award) and Ivy Smith in the original *On the Town*. In fact, *On the Town* has a long history of progressive, diverse casting, which began with the creative team's then-controversial casting of Osato as Ivy Smith in the original 1944 production, in the midst of World War II. In many ways, Osato's story reflects that of Misty Copeland's, who just this year was named American Ballet Theatre's first African American principal dancer in 75 years, and who, like Osato, is breaking down barriers in the dance world by performing the role of Ivy Smith in a new Broadway production of *On the Town*.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, Sono briefly pursued a career as an actress, appearing on Broadway in *Peer Gynt*, in the film *The Kissing Bandit*, and in occasional guest appearances on TV series like *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* (1950). She later founded the Sono Osato Scholarship Program in Graduate Studies at Career Transition For Dancers to help former dancers finance graduate work in both the professions and the liberal arts. Today, Osato is 95 years old, resides in New York, and was married for over sixty years to real estate developer Victor Elmaleh until his recent death in late 2014.

About Thodos Dance Chicago

In 1992, Melissa Thodos, a young Evanston-born, Chicago-based dancer and choreographer, was frustrated with the lack of opportunities for dancers to work in what in her mind was the obvious environment for a well-rounded dance professional: A place to perform. A place to create. And a place to educate. Fast-forward 23 years, and Thodos is the only female choreographer and director to have helmed her own mid-sized, contemporary dance company in Chicago for more than two decades with this unique mission.

Today, Thodos Dance Chicago (TDC) is an ensemble of twelve versatile dance artists with a captivating style that uses a variety of dance forms. The company's unique mission of inspiring expression through dance education, dance creation and dance performance has established TDC as an innovative presence in American contemporary dance. In addition to performing works by **Melissa Thodos** and resident artists, TDC performs works created by other renowned choreographers: **Bob Fosse, Ann Reinking, Lar Lubovitch, Shapiro & Smith, Jon Lehrer, Michael Anderson, Zachary Whittenburg, Lucas Crandall, Brian Enos, Amy Ernst, Ron De Jesús, Gustavo Ramírez Sansano, Ahmad Simmons** and **KT Nelson**.

Thodos Dance Chicago continues to expand its artistic and institutional boundaries under the guidance of Founder and Artistic Director **Melissa Thodos**, Executive Director **Gail Ford**, Booking Director **Rick Johnston**, Artistic Associate **Laura Gates**, Resident Lighting Designer **Nathan Tomlinson**, Education and

Outreach Associate **Kate Weatherly**, Board President **Sharon Lear**, a dedicated board of directors and the support of thousands of contemporary dance enthusiasts both in Chicago and nationwide.

The company is supported by the **Illinois Arts Council—a state agency, Target, The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the MacArthur Fund for Arts & Culture at the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, The Arts Work Fund, The Morrison-Shearer Foundation, The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation, The Service Club of Chicago, The Garden of Phoenix Foundation, the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events** and many individual and corporate sponsors. For more information, visit thodosdancechicago.org.

About Project 120 Chicago

Project 120 Chicago is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 partnering with the Chicago Park District on planning and projects for Jackson and Washington Parks to revitalize these nationally significant, complex historic urban parks.

The Project 120 Chicago and Chicago Park District collaboration includes developing, organizing and deploying resources, including financial capital and expertise, to design, construct, and develop the parks in accordance with a holistic framework plan and projects.

This collaboration began in 2012 with the development and implementation of plans to revitalize the Garden of the Phoenix on the Wooded Island in Jackson Park for the 120th Anniversary of the dedication of the Phoenix Pavilion. Their work quickly expanded to include plans for Jackson Park, then Washington Park.

Since 2012, an inter-disciplinary national team of experts, landscape architects, artists, architects, ecologists, policy makers, historians and engineers, have each contributed to the development and implementation of holistic framework plans to revitalize these historic parks for the 21st century.

Project 120 Chicago's design and program leadership includes **Robert Karr, Jr.**, President, Project 120 Chicago; **Susan Kopp Moskow**, Executive Vice President, Project 120; **Leif Selkregg**, Project 120 Chicago Board Member; **Robert Rejman**, Director at Chicago Park District; **Patricia O'Donnell**, Landscape Architect and Principal at Heritage Landscapes and Frederik Law Olmsted expert; **Sonia Cooke**, President of The Garden of the Phoenix Foundation; **Nora Halpern**, Principal at NRH Arts; **Kulapat Yantrasast**, architect and creative director at WHY; and **Larry Booth**, Architect and Principal of Booth Hansen.

Visit project120chicago.org for more information.