



PRESS RELEASE

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THODOS DANCE CHICAGO'S FINAL *NEW DANCES*, JULY 15–16 AT THE ATHENAEUM, MARKS 17 YEARS OF CULTIVATING NEW CHOREOGRAPHY, POST-PERFORMANCE CAREERS



(top, from left) Thodos Dance Ensemble members John Cartwright, Abby Ellison, Alex Gordon, Hattie Haggard, Thomas Jacobson, Jessica Miller Tomlinson, Brennen Renteria and Luis Vazquez and Founder/Artistic Director Melissa Thodos are creating world premiere works for Thodos Dance Chicago's *New Dances* 2017, July 15 and 16 at the Athenaeum Theatre.

(Bottom, from left) Photos of new works from *New Dances* 2016 (credit: Ben Licera.) Click [here](#) to download images.

CHICAGO, April 21, 2017 – For 17 years, Thodos Dance Chicago has fostered new dance creation by producing *New Dances*, one of this city's first and, still today, most extensive in-house choreography incubation programs.

Now, in the series' final year under Thodos Dance Chicago's auspices, *New Dances* 2017 will give eight members of the company's ensemble one last chance to kick off their dance shoes and show off their skills as creators and directors of their own, self-conceived new works.

With so much creative freedom, *New Dances* is always the must-see of Chicago's summer dance season, never failing to serve up a diverse line-up of fresh, homegrown, fully produced new works. *New Dances* 2017 is Saturday, July 15 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, July 16 at 3 p.m. at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport Ave., Chicago. Tickets are \$14–\$40. For tickets and information, visit athenaeumtheatre.org or call (773) 935-6875.

John Cartwright, Abby Ellison, Alex Gordon, Hattie Haggard, Thomas Jacobson, Jessica Miller Tomlinson, Brennen Renteria and Luis Vazquez are the eight Thodos members premiering new works at *New Dances* 2017. Their mentors during the three-month new work incubation period are Chicago dance community leaders Margi Cole, Kristina Isabelle, Billy Siegenfeld and Zachary Whittenburg. *New Dances* traditionally invites a guest choreographer to contribute an additional new work. This year, in celebration of the final year of the project, company founder and artistic director Melissa Thodos will return to her passion for new work and set a world premiere.

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New Dances – Always the must-see of Chicago’s annual summer dance season

“Members of Thodos Dance Chicago are far more than performers – they have always been creative artists selected to join the company based on their passion and talent for choreography as well,” explains Thodos. “One of our hallmarks is our strong commitment to support dance creation. No other dance organization has offered as comprehensive of an in-house choreography initiative as ours. We’ve done this in large part to help assure that when our ensemble members conclude their performance career, they are fully equipped to pursue a post-performance career in dance.”

To prepare for *New Dances 2017*, each dancer/choreographer is given a three-month development period with more than 30 hours of studio time – unprecedented in the field – to bring their choreographic vision to full life. They’ve already submitted creative proposals, developed budgets and handpicked their cast of dancers from within and outside the company. Now they are scheduling and overseeing rehearsals, meeting with costume and lighting designers and contributing to marketing plans.

Additionally, twice during the process, a *New Dances* panel of Chicago dance professionals convenes for a day-long showing of each work-in-progress to provide feedback, clarity, ideas and encouragement.

2017 panelist Kristina Isabelle is artistic director of Kristina Isabelle Dance Company and director of HighJinks Productions. Margi Cole, founder of The Dance COLEctive, is on the faculty of Columbia College Chicago and serves as the Series Program Manager for the Dance Center’s performance series. Billy Siegenfeld is the founder, artistic director, choreographer, book-writer, vocal arranger and performing member of Jump Rhythm Jazz Project. Zachary Whittenburg spent 10 years as a professional dancer with companies including Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and is now Communication and Engagement Director at Arts Alliance Illinois.

In sum, over the past 17 years *New Dances* has collectively launched the choreographic careers of nearly 80 Chicago-based dance artists, spawned more than 150 world premieres and created a platform for hundreds of dancers, both from within and outside the company, to showcase their skills and build their reputations. Many *New Dances* works have gone on to become part of the Thodos Dance repertory, been showcased at festivals including *Jacob’s Pillow* and *Dance Chicago*, and been remounted by Joffrey Ballet and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. Thanks to their *New Dances* experience, TDC ensemble members also have gone on to choreograph locally and nationally for River North Dance Company, Goodman Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Dutch National Ballet Project, Dance Kaleidoscope, Atlanta Ballet, Dance Works Chicago, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Idaho Dance Theatre, Grand Rapids Ballet, Giordano Dance Chicago, Eisenhower Dance Ensemble and the second companies of Alvin Ailey and American Ballet Theater.

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About Thodos Dance Chicago

In 1992, Thodos Dance Chicago Founder and Artistic Director Melissa Thodos formed a company that offered dancers a place to perform, a place to create new work and a place to educate a next generation of dancers.

Fast forward 25 years, and her company Thodos Dance Chicago has successfully performed for over one million dance fans, created and taught dance in Chicago, across the country in 27 states, and around the world on five continents.

In February, Thodos announced her company would continue its evolution as an integral part of Chicago's dance community, but with a new structure in 2017 and beyond. "Our 'ride to 25' has been incredibly fulfilling, personally and professionally, and I feel such a deep sense of accomplishment as we culminate our Silver anniversary season," said Thodos. "Likewise, I feel that now, while we are on a true high note and financially secure, is the right time for a change. Having fulfilled the goals and vision on which Thodos Dance Chicago was founded, I look forward to the start of a new chapter that allows for more personal creative freedom."

Moving forward, the company will no longer maintain its own ensemble of dancers, allowing Thodos more bandwidth to pursue project-based work including residencies, independent teaching opportunities with emerging artists, and set new works and signature dances from the TDC repertoire on other companies and festivals locally and nationally. The company is also seeking a successor to take on *New Dances* and continue offering Chicago dance professionals the opportunity to conceive, produce and present new work.

Thodos Dance Chicago is supported by The Sono and Victor Elmaleh Foundation, The Garden of the Phoenix Foundation, 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, Service Club of Chicago, Project 120, the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events and many individual and corporate sponsors.

For more information, visit thodosdancechicago.org.

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