

# Ballet

N E B R A S K A

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 8, 2010

Contact: Erika Overturff, (402) 541-6946

### **BALLET IS BACK: CURTAIN RISES OCTOBER 2 ON THE NEW BALLET NEBRASKA**

OMAHA -- When the Orpheum Theater curtain rises October 2 on Ballet Nebraska's debut production, professional dance in Nebraska will mark an amazing turnaround, the new company's artistic director said.

"Less than a year ago, I was a dancer in Omaha Theater Ballet, and we'd just been called into a studio and told that our jobs would be gone when the season was over," Erika Overturff recalled. "It seemed as if it could be the end -- not just of our careers, but of the whole history of professional dance in Nebraska.

"And yet now, here we are: ready to go onstage in the state's most prestigious theater, with live music, and joined by an international roster of great new dancers.

"It's a tribute to Omaha and the surrounding region that so many people stepped up and simply wouldn't let this art form die. Thanks to them, we've gone from zero to a new, independent ballet company with a real future."

It's especially appropriate, Overturff said, for that future to begin with *Swing, Swing, Swing!*, the ballet that the company will perform for its October 2 debut. Created by Chicago-based choreographer Harrison McEldowney for Omaha Theater Ballet, it had been one of OTB's most popular and successful works.

"Harrison is an unbelievably sought-after choreographer in every field of dance," Overturff said. "He can afford to be very selective. But when he heard that OTB had folded and that some of its dancers were starting a new company, he immediately said, 'If you want to do *Swing*, you've got it.' Knowing we had *his* confidence was a huge boost to *our* confidence."

*Swing, Swing, Swing!* pays homage to a generation of brave Americans. With its optimistic 1940s storyline, inventive mix of dance styles, and wide-ranging audience appeal, *Swing, Swing, Swing!* also summarizes the artistic goals of the new company, Overturff said.

"It shows how ballet can be not only beautiful dancing, but also great theater and great entertainment," she said. "That's what Ballet Nebraska is going to be all about."

*Swing, Swing, Swing!* is presented with the support of the Iowa West Foundation, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. Tickets are available at the Ticket Omaha box office at 13th and Douglas streets, by calling 402-345-0606, or online from **[ticketomaha.com](http://ticketomaha.com)**.

More information about Ballet Nebraska is available from the company's website at **[balletnebraska.org](http://balletnebraska.org)**.

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**FYI for Editors: Interview/photo/video availabilities for *Swing, Swing, Swing!***

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Contact: Erika Overturff, (402) 541-6946 or email [media@balletnebraska.org](mailto:media@balletnebraska.org)

**To schedule interviews:** Ballet Nebraska is happy to arrange interviews with artistic director Erika Overturff and company dancers. Interview opportunities with choreographer Harrison McElDowney also may be possible subject to his availability. To schedule interviews, please call Erika Overturff at (402) 541-6946, or email [media@balletnebraska.org](mailto:media@balletnebraska.org)

**To attend a rehearsal:** Ballet Nebraska's dancers are rehearsing now for the October 2 production of *Swing, Swing, Swing!* These rehearsals provide a great visual-media opportunity to give your readers/viewers an unusual behind-the-scenes look at the dancers at work. The current rehearsal schedule is **Tuesday through Friday, 11:30 am to 3:45 pm**, and **Saturday, 1 to 4 pm**. We also are planning to rehearse **Sunday, September 12**, with choreographer Harrison McElDowney in attendance, but the exact schedule is still subject to change. If you would like to attend any rehearsals, please contact Erika Overturff (402 541-6946) or email [media@balletnebraska.org](mailto:media@balletnebraska.org) so we can make sure to accommodate your needs.



**To download full-resolution photos:** Visit Ballet Nebraska's *Media Info* page at [http://www.balletnebraska.org/media\\_info/](http://www.balletnebraska.org/media_info/) for a link to download photos.

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## **SYNOPSIS: SWING, SWING, SWING!**

*Choreography .....Harrison McEldowney*  
*Original Premiere .....Omaha Theater Ballet, February 12, 2009*  
*Ballet Nebraska Premiere .....Orpheum Theater, October 2, 2010*

It's World War II, and a patriotic fervor unites the nation as Americans support both each other and their collective cause. Our scene is set with soldiers embarking on their daily routine – energized by spirit and determination.

At the same time, a bevy of hostesses prepares for the task ahead of them: providing entertainment to the servicemen on leave at New York's Stage Door Canteen. The soldiers seek a happy refuge from the rigors of war at this famous establishment. Big Band music, swing dancing and a host of performers offer much-needed recreation to these American heroes. One lucky man even finds love at the canteen and a girl to call his own.

The soldiers are shipped off to defend the nation. With the men away at war, the women assume the duties left behind – joining the workforce and coining the phrase "Rosie the Riveter." Overseas, the soldiers reflect on the nature of GI life and dream of Vargas calendar girls. Back in New York, a hostess from the Stage Door Canteen longs for the return of her new love, while he simply dreams of home.

A nation rejoices as the war ends and the soldiers return home. The young lovers reunite and dream of being a "Me & Mrs. You." In celebration, the Stage Door Canteen once again comes alive to the sounds of *Swing, Swing, Swing!*

## **ONSTAGE MUSICIANS FOR SWING, SWING, SWING!: THE DOYLEMUSIC COMBO**

Performing onstage with the dancers in *Swing, Swing, Swing!*, the DoyleMusic Combo is a collection of some of the finest jazz musicians in the Omaha area. Its members have played with local groups including Luigi Inc., The Confidentials, Rave On, the Omaha Big Band, the Steve Raybine Band, and many more, as well as in the original Omaha Theater Ballet production of *Swing, Swing, Swing!*

Band members for Ballet Nebraska's production are:

*Doyle Tipler .....leader, trumpet*  
*Ken Janak .....saxophone, clarinet*  
*Suzie Mertz .....vocals*  
*Jeff Scheffler .....guitar*  
*Mark Haar .....bass*  
*Carlos Figueroa .....drums*

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[**Note to editors:** a bio sheet for the dancers accompanies this release.]

### BALLET NEBRASKA INTRODUCES DANCERS FOR 2010-11 PREMIERE SEASON

OMAHA, Neb. -- Dance fans will see a mix of new and familiar faces when the curtain rises on Ballet Nebraska's debut performance October 2 at Omaha's Orpheum Theater.

The 12-member professional dance troupe includes past members of Ballet Nebraska's predecessor company, the Omaha Theater Ballet, as well as new recruits originating from as far away as Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet School, artistic director Erika Overturff said.

"They've come by many routes to be here, but we're thrilled they're here," she said. "As an artistic director and choreographer, the thing that excites me the most is the chance to work with a wide range of talents. Each one brings something special to the company."

The dancers are: Matthew Carter, Claire Goodwillie, Natasha Grimm, Alberto Liberatoscioli, Risa Mochizuki, Erika Overturff, Mikhail Ronnikov, Bret Samson, Jennifer Weber, Sasha York, and Angela Zolczynski, company dancers; Wade Schaaf, guest artist; and Erin Alarcón and Kelsey Schwenker, apprentices.

The dancers are enthusiastic about Ballet Nebraska's premiere production, Harrison McEldowney's *Swing, Swing, Swing!*, Overturff said.

"Dancers love variety," she said, "and many of them have never done anything quite like this before. When most of your background is in the traditional ballet classics, it's huge fun to find out your next role involves putting on a sailor's uniform and getting into a fistfight!

"And dancing with the DoyleMusic Combo right on stage with you is amazing. The musicians and dancers pick up on each other's energy, and that spills out into the audience, and soon the whole place is jumping. You really feel what made the Swing Era exciting."

Tickets for the October 2 production of *Swing, Swing, Swing!* are available from Ticket Omaha at **ticketomaha.com**. More information about Ballet Nebraska is available at **balletnebraska.org**.

*Swing, Swing, Swing!* is presented with the support of the Iowa West Foundation, the Nebraska Arts Council, and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

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## Erika Overturff, Artistic Director



Erika earned her BFA in ballet performance and teaching from the University of Utah, which she attended on a full scholarship. She graduated cum laude in just three years and was chosen outstanding senior by the ballet department faculty.

Erika danced at Montgomery Ballet, Alabama Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. She has performed soloist and principal roles in classical and contemporary repertoire, including originating the lead role in Harrison McEldowney's production of *Swing, Swing, Swing!* As a choreographer, Erika has received critical praise for her work. Her original work *The Diner* was selected for performance at the prestigious Dance Chicago 15th Anniversary Spectacular.

Erika's choreography includes *Ella*, *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Prison Blues*, *Feeling Good*, *Pizzicato Pas de Deux*, *Love Me or Leave Me* and *Tropico*. Erika served as repetitrice for Montgomery Ballet and resident choreographer for Omaha Theater Ballet. She has been a faculty member, choreographer, and guest teacher for schools throughout the United States. Erika is the founder of Ballet Nebraska.

## Sarah Maloney, Company Advisor

Originally from Omaha, Sarah Maloney received her ballet training from Ballet Omaha and Omaha Theater Ballet School of Dance. She joined Omaha Theater Ballet in 2001 and has performed a variety of roles including the lead in *French Songs*, and Betty Boop in *The Orpheum Nutcracker*.

In 2008, Sarah graduated summa cum laude from Bellevue University with a BS in Healthcare Management. Since 2003 she has also worked in a clinical hospital laboratory where she has developed her managerial and organizational skills.



Sarah served as Director of the Omaha Theater Ballet Student Ensemble, where she was responsible for coordinating performance and outreach programs for after-school groups, assisted living facilities, and other community organizations. She currently works with Ballet Nebraska in an advisory capacity and also assists with rehearsals. Sarah was instrumental in founding Ballet Nebraska.

## Harrison McEldowney, Guest Choreographer



Harrison returns to Omaha by popular demand. His production of *Swing, Swing, Swing!* for the Omaha Theater Ballet premiered to rave reviews, and he later returned to stage his entertaining duet *Let's Call It Off*. Harrison has choreographed for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Hubbard Street 2, River North Dance Company, the Civic Ballet of Chicago, the Cerqua/Rivera Art Experience, Ballet Met, American Repertory Ballet, Louisville Ballet, Chicago Shakespeare Repertory, and he was resident choreographer for Configurations Dance Company.

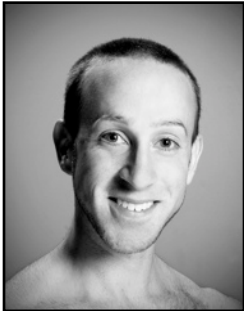
Harrison is the inaugural recipient of the Prince Prize and has received the Ruth Page, After Dark, and Choo-San Goh Awards for choreography. Other choreographic achievements include the opening work of the 10th Anniversary of Dance for Life, the finale of Dance Chicago's 10th Anniversary, the 35th Anniversary Tour of *American Bandstand*, directing the Australian Tour of *More Dirty Dancing*, the '92 Barcelona Olympics' Closing Ceremonies, and Carnegie Hall's *Celebration of 125 Years of Musical Theater*. He has choreographed for film and television and recently earned an Emmy nomination for his starring role in *Billy Sunday*. Harrison also directs shows for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines including *Freedom of the Seas*, the world's largest cruise ship.

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## Company Dancers

### Matthew Carter



Matthew Carter began his training with Sharon Filone at the Lake Erie Ballet School and Sandra Barnett at Little's Dance Studio. He went on to study on scholarship at North Carolina School of the Arts, Miami City Ballet School, and the Chautauqua Festival Dancers. Matthew has danced professionally with Ohio Ballet, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, Lake Erie Ballet, and Omaha Theater Ballet. He has also performed as a Guest Artist with Hawaii Ballet Theatre, Neglia Ballet Artists, and Ballet Tucson. Matthew has been choreographing since the age of 16 and has premiered works with numerous schools, professional companies, and theaters. He is the co-director of Motion41 Dance in Omaha and continues to serve as a guest teacher for schools throughout the country. Matthew

returns to his professional dance roots this season as a dancer and ballet master for Ballet Nebraska.

### Claire Goodwillie

Claire Goodwillie began her ballet training at Omaha Theater Ballet School of Dance with Robin Welch. She spent summers training with the renowned Pacific Northwest Ballet and Ballet Austin. She has also trained in Banff, Canada. Claire appeared in numerous Omaha Theater Ballet productions including *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Firebird* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Notable roles include Clara, a Snowflake, and a Flower in *The Nutcracker*, as well as a Mazurka Girl in *Coppélia*. She performed the role of Sugar Plum Fairy in a Christmas production at Omaha Theater Company. Claire joins Ballet Nebraska after spending one year as an apprentice with Omaha Theater Ballet.



### Natasha Grimm



Natasha Grimm trained with Robin Welch at the Omaha Theater Ballet School of Dance. She has also trained on scholarship with Kansas City Ballet, toured with Manhattan Dance, and performed with the Omaha Symphony and Opera Omaha. Natasha began her professional career with Omaha Theater Ballet, where she danced for three seasons. She has worked with many notable choreographers including Bill Hoteling, Kristin Sudeikis, Sean Curran, Paula Weber, Harrison McEldowney, Rochelle Zide and Kennet Oberly. Her favorite roles include Princess Vasilisa in *The Firebird*, Spanish and Arabian in *The Nutcracker*, The Gossip in *La Fille Mal Gardée*, and the dancing Amneris in *Aida*. Natasha joins Ballet Nebraska this season as a founding member.

### Alberto Liberatoscioli

Originally from Italy, Alberto received his training in Balanchine and Vaganova technique in Milan under Iride Sauri. He was a member of Slovak National Ballet where he performed in such classics as *Le Corsaire*, *La Bayadere*, and *Swan Lake*. Later, Alberto became a soloist at Columbia Classical Ballet in South Carolina, where he danced in productions such as *Tryptich*, *Rite of Spring*, and George Balanchine's *Scotch Symphony*. He also danced at Omaha Theater Ballet for one season. Alberto is a founding member of Ballet Nebraska.



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## Risa Mochizuki



Risa Mochizuki hails from Tokyo, Japan, where she trained under master teacher Mitsuyo Kishibe. Risa went on to study with Maria Mechkarova at the Royal Ballet School of Flanders, later performing with the company. She has performed a variety of roles from the classical repertoire, including *Don Quixote*, *Paquita*, *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Le Corsaire*, *Diana and Acteon*, and *La Bayadere*, as well as contemporary works by Goyo Montero and Jiri Kylian. Risa has also been awarded medals at prestigious international ballet competitions including the Prix de Lausanne International Ballet Competition in Switzerland, Silver Medal at the Youth America Grand Prix in New York, and Silver Medal at the Sibiu International Ballet Competition in Romania.

## Mikhail Ronnikov

Mikhail Ronnikov received his dance training at the famed Bolshoi Ballet and the Moscow Choreographic Academy. Mikhail danced as principal dancer with Moscow Classical Ballet, Moscow City Ballet and the Russian Imperial Ballet. He also competed internationally, receiving a bronze medal at the prestigious Moscow International Ballet Competition. After moving to the United States, Mikhail danced with Colorado Ballet as a principal dancer. He has performed contemporary works of Douge Verone, Rick McCullough, Michael Pink, Twyla Tharp, Septime Webre and Christopher Wheeldon. Mikhail most recently danced with Russian National Ballet before joining Ballet Nebraska for the company's inaugural season.



## Bret Samson



Bret Samson began her dance studies at Lake Shore Dance in Wisconsin. She received her formal ballet training from Melissa Anderson and Rafael Delgado, and became a founding member of their performance group in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bret has performed in classical and neoclassical ballets, including works by Delgado and Anderson, and Master Jean-Paul Commélin. She danced with Madison Ballet for one season, where she performed her favorite role, a mermaid in W. Earle Smith's world premiere of *Peter Pan*. Bret danced with Milwaukee Ballet II and as an apprentice with Omaha Theater Ballet, before joining Ballet Nebraska as a founding member.

## Jennifer Weber

Jennifer began her dance training at Ballet Omaha under the direction of Robin Welch. She danced at Omaha Theater Ballet for three seasons, performing in Balanchine's *Valse Fantasie*, Norman Walker's *Prayer and Fantasy*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Coppélia*. She also performed with Opera Omaha, the Omaha Symphony, and the Shizuoka Ballet Festival in Japan. Jennifer danced as a member of Ballet Quad Cities for six seasons, performing in several of Johanne Jakhelln's works including *Lyric for Strings*, Edith in *From the Pages of a Young Girl's Life*, the Violet Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty*; Matthew Keefe's *The Nutcracker*; and the Pas de Trois from *Danses Concertantes*. Jennifer has taught dance throughout the Midwest. She currently still teaches in the Iowa City area and has recently received her yoga certification. Jennifer holds both a BA degree in mathematics from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where she graduated summa cum laude, and an MFA in dance from the University of Iowa.



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## Sasha York



Originally from Chelyabinsk, Russia, Sasha started his ballet training at Paavola School of Dance in Flint, Michigan. He later returned to Russia, where he trained with Urey Urivich. Sasha was accepted into the pre-professional program at Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, where he performed in company productions of *Don Quixote*, *The Nutcracker*, *Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. He has worked with many well-known choreographers such as Harrison McEldowney, Viktor Plotnikov and Septime Webre. Prior to joining Ballet Nebraska, Sasha danced as a company member for two seasons at Omaha Theater Ballet, performing roles such as Snow King in *The Nutcracker* and the lead in McEldowney's *Swing, Swing, Swing!*

## Angela Zolczynski

Originally from Rapid City, South Dakota, Angela is a graduate of the prestigious Walnut Hill School for the Arts in Natick, Massachusetts. She received her ballet training from Michael Owen of American Ballet Theater. Angela performed with Omaha Theater Ballet for six seasons, dancing in numerous works including *The Firebird*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Angela performed many soloist roles including Chinese in *The Imperial Nutcracker*, and Lead Mazurka in *Coppélia*. A dedicated instructor, Angela has taught ballet, jazz, and tap in Omaha for six years. She also served as assistant director of Omaha Theater Ballet's Student Ensemble for three years. Angela is a founding member of Ballet Nebraska.





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## **Guest Artist**

### **Wade Schaaf**



Guest artist and a current Chicago resident, Wade graduated cum laude from Northern Illinois University with a BFA in theater arts with an emphasis in dance performance. He has danced with Ohio Ballet, State Street Ballet-Santa Barbara, Omaha Theater Ballet, and River North Chicago Dance Company. Wade has worked with such well-known choreographers as Septime Weber, Stephen Mills, Kennet Oberly, Bill Soleau, Frank Chavez, and Laurie Stallings. He danced the roles of Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* and Jonathan in Oberly's *Dracula*. Wade also performed the snow pas de deux in *The Nutcracker*. A gifted choreographer, he has staged his own work at Omaha Theater Ballet and Groundwork Company. Wade currently dances at Thodos Dance Chicago, where he recently premiered his original work *Awakenings*.

## **Apprentices**

### **Erin Alarcón**

A native of New Jersey, Erin Alarcón received her dance training under Christine Taylor and Luba Gulyaeva of New Jersey Civic Youth Ballet, where she performed a number of classic roles and contemporary works. During the summers, she studied with Eglevsky Ballet and The Joffrey Ballet. Erin earned her Bachelor of Arts in dance performance at Mercyhurst College under the direction of Tauna Hunter. Erin performed leading roles in both *Giselle* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. She has worked with a number of guest artists including Laura Alonso, Bruce Marks, Vivi Flindt, and Bill Evans. Erin has danced professionally with SoMar Dance Works and Ballet Concerto. She has also studied abroad with Valerie Valentine of the Dutch National Ballet. Erin joins Ballet Nebraska as an apprentice this season.



### **Kelsey Schwenker**



Kelsey Schwenker – a Boulder, Colorado, native – trained with Ballet Nouveau Colorado, where she was a five-year member of its student company, directed by Julia Wilkinson Manley. She has attended summer intensives with Kansas City Ballet, Burklyn Ballet Theatre, Boulder Jazz Dance Workshop and Paul Taylor Dance Company. Kelsey received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in ballet performance, graduating summa cum laude from the University of Oklahoma, where she trained with Mary Margaret Holt, Donn Edwards, Steve Brule and Jeremy Lindberg. While there, she performed in notable works including *Rodeo*, *Divertimento No. 5*, *The Firebird*, *Afternoon of a Faun* and *Les Biches*. Kelsey joins Ballet Nebraska as an apprentice this season.