



## COMPANY BIOS

### **ALEXANDRA DAMIANI (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR)**

Appointed Artistic Director of Ballets Jazz Montréal the spring of 2021, Alexandra Damiani has been a major player in the dance community for over two decades. During her 10 years with New York's Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet (2005-2015), first as Ballet Mistress and then as Artistic Director, Damiani had the opportunity to work with and present a wide selection of contemporary dance choreographic languages by such internationally renowned choreographers as Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Crystal Pite and Hofesh Schecter. Damiani also presented the company in major cities and international festivals, including at the Lyon Biennale in France and Sadler's Wells in London.

Originally from France, Damiani is a multidisciplinary artist who has been lending her expertise to the world of film, television, and advertising for many years. Her credits include playing the ballet mistress in Darren Aronofsky's cult film *Black Swan* and working alongside Tanisha Scott on Cardi B's performance for the 2019 BET Awards. Damiani is also passionate about training the young dancers of tomorrow and has excellent connections with highly regarded institutions like Jacob's Pillow and The Juilliard School. Damiani trained in classical dance at the Geneva Dance Center, and later in the French capital with teachers from the Paris Opera Ballet. After winning the Bayonne competition in France, she received a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in the US. She began her career as a dancer-performer in New York where she danced as a soloist with Donald Byrd/The Group and with the company Complexions, directed by Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson. Her career continued in Montréal with the RUBBERBANDance Company and later with the Ballets Jazz Montréal, under the direction of Louis Robitaille (2002-2005).

### **CHING CHING WONG (REHEARSAL DIRECTOR)**

Born in Manila, raised in Los Angeles, and happiest in a studio, this is Ching Ching's second season as Rehearsal Director for Ballet Jazz Montréal. She is the recipient of the Princess Grace Award in Dance, was named *Dance Magazine's* "25 to Watch", and is a répétiteur for Ihsan Rustem staging his work in the US, Europe, and Asia.

As a creator, Ching has made work on Louisville Ballet, Backhaus Dance, SALT 2, and Heidi Duckler Dance. She is also the founder of Project Salamat and The Experience, a global outreach program. After graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance Performance from the University of California Irvine, working closely with the late Donald McKayle, her career began at Northwest Dance Project. There she originated roles in creations by Sarah Slipper, Ihsan Rustem, Felix Landerer, Lucas Crandall, Alejandro Cerrudo, Jiri Pokorny, Wen Wei Wang, Didy Veldman, Danielle Agami, Patrick Delcroix, Alex Soares, Kate Wallich, Pedro Dias, James Gregg, Yin Yue, Loni Landon, Gregory Dolbashian, Rachel Erdos, amongst others. As a freelance artist, she has collaborated with numerous companies and artists

including Roderick George, ZviDance, PARA.MAR Dance Theatre, LED, Brendan Duggan, CARLON, YYDC, and OddKnock Productions.

#### **ANDREW MIKHAIEL (ARTISTIC COORDINATOR)**

Originally from Mississauga, Canada, Andrew Mikhaiel joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2017 as a dancer where he continues to tour nationally and internationally. Prior to joining the company, Andrew earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a concentration in ballet at Marymount Manhattan College, under the direction of Katie Langan. While in NYC, Andrew directed and organized a dance outreach program for NYC public schools, serving 240 3rd-5th graders. While touring with Ballets Jazz Montréal, Andrew has taught master classes across Canada, United States, Finland, France, Germany, Brazil, Spain, Italy, and Israel. He has been a faculty member for BJM\_360, NYCDA's Winter Contemporary Intensive, Candance Competition, Rutherford Movement Exchange, Northern Movement as well as a guest teacher at Steps on Broadway. He is also member of the British Association of Teachers of Dancing (B.A.T.D).

As result of his work ethic, team spirit, and dedication, he became the company's Artistic Coordinator in 2020. In this role, he provides support to the Artistic Director and the entire artistic team while also contributing to the development, planning and organization of the company's various artistic activities such as BJM\_360, the annual auditions, Alors, On Danse, and open classes with the company.

#### **ASZURE BARTON (CHOREOGRAPHER)**

Aszure Barton was born and raised in Alberta, Canada. She received her formal training at the National Ballet School in Toronto, where, as a student, she helped originate the ongoing Stephen Godfrey Choreographic Showcase.

To date, she has collaborated with and created works for Mikhail Baryshnikov, Fang Yi Sheu, Ekaterina Shipulina/Bolshoi Ballet, The National Ballet of Canada, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Bayerisches Staatsballett, Houston Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, The Martha Graham Dance Company, Nederlands Dans Theater, Sydney Dance Company, Ballet British Columbia, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and Ballets Jazz Montréal (Resident Choreographer 2005-08), among many others. Aszure has also led masterclasses, mentored, and created for renowned training institutions including Harvard University, The Juilliard School, New York University, Arts Umbrella, Canada's National Ballet School and The Laban Institute (UK).

Other work includes choreography for the Broadway revival production of The Threepenny Opera directed by Scott Elliott (translation by Wallace Shawn and starring Alan Cumming, Jim Dale, Nellie Mackay, Ana Gasteyer, and Cyndi Lauper), film and installation projects, and international outreach activities such as Kenya's Earth Project: Healing the Rift, at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy. Aszure's choreography has been featured in numerous film and television projects, including the Sundance Channel's Iconoclasts Series with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Alice Waters.

Aszure was the first artist in residence at The Baryshnikov Arts Center in 2005 and has been an artist in residence at The Banff Center since 2009. She was proclaimed an official Ambassador of Contemporary Choreography in Canada and, more recently, received The Koerner Award for Choreography. In 2012 she was honored with Canada's prestigious Arts & Letters Award, joining the ranks of Oscar Peterson, Eugene Levy, Karen Kain and Christopher Plummer.

She is the proud founder and director of Azure Barton & Artists, a collective of visual, sound, and performing artists, and her work continues to tour to Europe, Asia, and Africa as well as Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and the United States.

### **AUSIA JONES (CHOREOGRAPHER)**

Originally from Dallas, Texas, Ausia Jones received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance with a focus on choreography at the USC Glorvia Kaufman School of Dance. During her time at USC Kaufman, Ausia received training at Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Orsolina Forsythe/Pite, and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

As a dancer, she has had the honor of performing works by William Forsythe, Robert Battle, Cayetano Soto, Azure Barton, Jiri Kylian, among others. She has choreographed at Booker T. Washington HSPV in Dallas, TX, USC Kaufman Choreography in Los Angeles, CA and New York Live Arts in New York, NY. Among her many accomplishments, Ms. Jones is the Orion Choreographic Fellowship Recipient, Toulmin Creator Grant Recipient, White Bird panelist "Celebrating Black Women in Dance", YoungArts Honorable Mention in Choreography and Modern Dance and 2020 USC Deans Scholarship (Quarter-Tuition Academic Award).

As she continues to cultivate her passion, Ausia hopes to share her knowledge and love for dance in a way that inspires and educates the next generation of young artists. Jones joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2020.

### **CRYSTAL PITE (CHOREOGRAPHER)**

In a choreographic career spanning three decades, Crystal Pite has created more than 50 works for dance companies in Canada and around the world. She is the founding artistic director of the Vancouver-based company Kidd Pivot, world-renowned for radical hybrids of dance and theatre that are assembled with a keen sense of wit and invention. Ms. Pite is known for works that courageously address such challenging and complex themes as trauma, addiction, conflict, consciousness, and mortality; her bold and original vision has earned her international acclaim and inspired an entire generation of dance artists.

Crystal Pite was born in Terrace, BC, and grew up in Victoria. She began her dance career as a company member of Ballet British Columbia (Ballet BC), then William Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt. She made her choreographic debut in 1990 at Ballet BC, and since then has created works for such prominent companies as The Royal Ballet, The Paris Opera Ballet, Nederlands Dans Theater I, Cullberg Ballet, Ballett Frankfurt, The National Ballet of Canada, Ballets Jazz Montréal (resident choreographer 2001–04), and Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet. She has also collaborated with Electric Company Theatre and Robert Lepage, and is currently Associate Choreographer of Nederlands Dans Theater I, Associate Dance Artist of Canada's National Arts Centre, and Associate Artist of Sadler's Wells in Londo

In 2002, she formed Kidd Pivot, a company that strives to distill and translate universal questions into artworks that connect us to deep and essential parts of humanity. "Running through all of my work is the question of what moves us," she says. Kidd Pivot tours internationally with critically acclaimed works such as *Betroffenheit* and *Revisor* (both co-created with playwright Jonathon Young), *The Tempest Replica*, *Dark Matters*, *Lost Action*, and *The You Show*.

In 2008, Crystal Pite participated in the inaugural GGPA Mentorship Program as the protégée of 2004 GGPA laureate Veronica Tennant, former principal dancer of the National Ballet of Canada.

Crystal Pite is a Member of the Order of Canada. Her other awards and honours include the Benois de la Danse, Canada Council Jacqueline Lemieux Prize, Grand Prix de la danse de Montréal, two UK Critics' Circle Dance Awards, three Laurence Olivier Awards, and an honorary doctorate from Simon Fraser University.

## **ARTISTS**

### **ALYSSA ALLEN**

Alyssa Allen is from Los Angeles, where she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts as a member of the inaugural class at the University of Southern California's Glorja Kaufman School of Dance. Upon graduating in 2019, she joined Hubbard Street Dance Chicago for three seasons. She is excited for her second season with Ballets Jazz Montréal.

### **GUSTAVO BARROS**

Born in Brazil, Gustavo began his professional path as a dancer in his hometown, Goiânia. He then joined some of the best contemporary dance companies in the country such as Deborah Colker cia and Balé da Cidade de São Paulo. He continued his career in Germany, where he danced for Ballethagen and Staatstheater Augsburg. Over the course of his career, Gustavo has performed the work of many renowned choreographers including Alexander Ekman, Mauro Bigonzetti, Crystal Pite, Cayetano Soto, Marco Goecke, and Peter Chu. He joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2020.

### **YOSMELL CALDERON MEJIAS (PRINCIPAL ARTIST)**

Russian-born Yosmell Calderon graduated as a dancer and teacher of both contemporary and folk dance from Cuba's National School of Dance (ENA) in Havana in 2005. He also received a diploma from the University of Arts (ISA) in 2014. Yosmell has collaborated with such outstanding figures in the world of dance as Rafael Bonachela, Mats Ek, Itzik Galili, Carlos Junior Acosta, Jan Linkens, Juan Cuz and Ana Laguna. He has performed as a principal dancer for Danza Contemporanea de Cuba and the Pal Frenak Company, as well as in over 22 works by Cuban and foreign choreographers, touring major festivals and theatre venues around the world. Yosmell is a choreographer for the Cuban National Ballet School and its performances at the International Ballet Festival of Havana. Thanks to his background in Olympic gymnastics, he also choreographs for circus performances. Yosmell joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in July 2016 and was promoted to Principal Artist in 2019.

### **JOHN CANFIELD**

Originally from Virginia, John Canfield grew up training at local dance studios before moving to Canada to attend Canada's National Ballet School in Toronto. Upon graduating in 2014, he joined the Alberta Ballet, where he danced for five seasons, working directly with choreographers Aszure Barton, Jean Grand Maitre, Anne Plamondon, Yukhichi Hattori, and Wen Wei Wang, among others. In 2020, John joined Cas Public as a dancer, performing the work of Hélène Blackburn for one season. In addition to his involvement with a number of private movement research programs across Canada, John has attended Springboard Danse Montréal and Creative Gesture at the Banff Centre for the Arts. He joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2021.

### **TUTI CEDEÑO**

Born and raised in Panamá, Tuti began her training at the Academia de Danzas Steps. She continued her studies at the Boston Conservatory, where she obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Contemporary Dance. In addition, she attended various summer intensive programs and festivals such as Springboard Danse Montréal, VIM VIGOR, Opus Ballet, and B12. Tuti has had the honor of performing works by Andonis

Foniadakis, Ihsan Rustem, Juliano Nunes, Anne Plammond, Azsure Barton, Crystal Pite, Ausia Jones, Shannon Gillen. She joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2020.

### **ASTRID DANGEARD**

Born in Paris, France, Astrid Dangeard joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2020, performing works by Andonis Foniadakis, Azsure Barton, Ausia Jones and Anne Plamondon. She played Iris Kelly in *Fame, The Musical* at the Casino de Paris (2019-2020) and has worked with Chet Walker, James Kinney, Rémi Esterle (Argentine Tango) and the Verdon/Fosse Legacy. She collaborates regularly with mixed medium artists and has appeared in experimental theatre works, short movies (FIFA Montréal) and exhibitions.

### **SHANNA IRWIN**

Shanna Irwin grew up in New Jersey, where she began training as a competitive dancer. She later switched her focus to ballet when she was accepted into The New Jersey Dance Theatre Ensemble under the direction of Nancy Turano. Shanna went on to continue her studies at Marymount Manhattan College and began touring with Complexions Contemporary Ballet during her senior year. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance in May 2014.

Shanna completed five seasons with Complexions and joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2019. Her career has led her to perform in opera houses across five continents, where she has danced the works of Crystal Pite, Dwight Rhoden, Azsure Barton, Itzik Galili, Andonis Foniadakis, Juliano Nunes, among others. This is her fifth season with Ballet Jazz Montreal.

### **MIU KATO**

Born and raised in Japan, Miu Kato has been training in classical ballet since childhood at the Kaneta Kono Ballet Academy. She has received numerous awards at both the national and international level including 2nd place at the Japan Dance Competition in 2014 and 3rd place at the Youth American Grand Prix New York Final in 2016. Since 2018, she has been actively involved in the activities of La Dance Contrastée. In 2019, she served as a choreographic assistant to Megumi Nakamura for the production of *Huis clos* at KAAT. Miu has also performed in works by Ayuko Kaneta, Megumi Nakamura, Mari Nakahara, Masahiro Yanagimoto, Kaoru Kagaya, Naoko Ikegami, Harumi Takeuchi, Yuya Yoshizaki, Travis Clausen-Knight, Paul Julius, and others. Since 2021, she has been a member of The Choreographic Center of Japan's artistic team. In recent years, she has also been actively involved in choreography and teaching. Miu joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in August 2023.

### **DAMOND LEMONTE GARNER**

Charlotte, North Carolina native, DaMond LeMonte Garner attended Point Park University, where they received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance, with a concentration in Modern Dance. While at Point Park, they performed the work of choreographers Alexandra Damiani, Sidra Bell, Lucinda Childs, Lar Lubovitch, Jessica Hendricks, and Anthony Tudor with the Conservatory Dance Company. DaMond has also continued their training and artistic development at Springboard Danse Montreal, Movement Invention Project, and Northwest Dance Project's LAUNCH. After graduating, DaMond joined METdance in Houston, TX and performed works by Kyle Abraham, Christian Denice, and Kate Skarpetowska. Garner has worked as a guest artist with The Francesca Harper Project, The Black Iris Project, Texture Contemporary Ballet, and The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Upon moving to New York City, DaMond joined Parsons Dance Company, where they collaborated with choreographers Rena Butler, Chanel DeSilva, and Matthew Neenan and performed the work by David Parsons. In addition to their work at Parsons, DaMond was a Principal Dancer with The Metropolitan Opera and a freelance artist in New York City. DaMond joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in August 2023.

### **LARISSA LEUNG**

Toronto-native Larissa Leung received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance at The Juilliard School under the direction of Alicia Graf Mack and Mario Alberto Zambrano. At Juilliard, Larissa was fortunate to perform in the work of Ohad Naharin, Hofesh Shechter, Aszure Barton, Jermaine Spivey, Spenser Theberge, Bobbi Jene Smith, and Donald McKayle. Additionally, she has learned works by Crystal Pite, Jiří Kylián, Yue Yin, and Andrea Miller. To further her artistic and technical development, Larissa attended summer programs with Nederlands Dans Theater, Springboard Danse Montreal, and Arts Umbrella.

As a choreographer, her piece *so we won't forget* was chosen to be performed in Juilliard's Choreographic Honors 2022, and she premiered a new work *memory the heart* for Juilliard Dance Senior Production 2023. Ms. Leung joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in August 2023.

### **AUSTIN LICHTY**

Born in Stratford, Ontario, Austin trained at the Arts Umbrella Graduate Program under the direction of Artemis Gordon and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Toronto Metropolitan University. He has participated in Springboard Danse Montréal, Arts Umbrella International Summer Dance Intensive, and TransFormation Danse, summer programs. Throughout his professional development, Austin has worked with choreographers such as James Kudelka, Crystal Pite, Guillaume Côté, Emily Molnar, Lukas Timulak, and Amos Ben Tal. Austin joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2020.

### **MARCEL MEJIA**

Marcel Mejia is originally from Miami, Florida and graduated from the New World School of the Arts before attending George Mason University's School of Dance under the direction of Susan Shields. He has performed works from world-renowned choreographers such as Lar Lubovitch, Nacho Duato, Andonis Foniadakis, Ivan Perez and Alejandro Cerrudo. Marcel also attended summer dance programs such as Springboard Danse Montréal in Canada, where he performed works by Johannes Wieland and Rachel Erdos, as well as at the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance, dancing original works by Tom Weinberger, Alex Ketley, and excerpts of Ohad Naharin's repertory.

Marcel has served on the faculty of the Thomas Armour Youth Ballet and as a volunteer dance instructor at the Lotus House Shelter in Miami, Florida. He joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2019.

### **ANDREW MIKHAIEL**

Originally from Mississauga, Canada, Andrew Mikhaiel earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts, with a concentration in ballet at Marymount Manhattan College, under the direction of Katie Langan. He has danced in works choreographed by Alexandra Damiani, Andonis Foniadakis, Anne Plamondon, Aszure Barton, Barak Marshall, Crystal Pite, Ihsan Rustem, Itzik Galili, Jo Strømngren, Juliano Nunes, Larry Keigwin, and Paul Taylor just to name a few.

He attended Springboard Danse Montréal in 2016. Andrew graduated as a member of the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) Honour Society and is a member of the British Association of Teachers of Dancing (B.A.T.D). He has been a faculty member for BJM\_360, NYCDA's Winter Contemporary Intensive, Candance Competition, Rutherford Movement Exchange, Northern Movement as well as a guest teacher at Steps on Broadway. While in NYC, Andrew directed and organized a dance outreach program for NYC public schools, serving 240 3rd-5th graders. Andrew has taught and choreographed across Canada, United States, Finland, France, Germany, Brazil, Spain, Italy, and Israel. Andrew enjoys working with dancers of all ages and abilities to help strengthen their technique, deepen their artistry, and fuel their passion for dance.

Andrew joined Ballets Jazz Montréal in 2017 and, as a result of his work ethic, team spirit, and dedication, became the company's Artistic Coordinator in 2020, providing support to the Artistic Director and the entire artistic team.