



Media Contact
Josh Olmstead
Marketing & PR Specialist
267-303-6831
jolmstead@balletx.org

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**BalletX *Winter Series 2017* to Feature World Premieres by
Norwegian Choreographer Jo Strømngren and
Former BalletX Dancer R. Colby Damon
and co-Founder Matthew Neenan's *Credo***

WHAT: On February 10-19, BalletX, Philadelphia's premier contemporary ballet, will present its *Winter Series 2017* at The Wilma Theater. BalletX, whose prolific output "few companies can match" wrote *The New York Times*, continues its commitment to new work, with world premieres on the program by Jo Strømngren and R. Colby Damon, as well as the east coast premiere of Matthew Neenan's *Credo*.

"I am looking forward to our *Winter Series* and giving life to the work of these three choreographers. They are all at very different stages of their career, and represent a breath of innovation to the field of ballet," says Christine Cox, Co-Founder, Artistic & Executive Director of BalletX.

In a case of mistaken luggage, the protagonist in Jo Strømngren's *The Letter* is compelled to choreograph his first "big city" contemporary dance piece to the music of his Nebraskan grandfather's Appalachian folk collection – as opposed to the hip modern soundtrack he originally envisioned. Featuring abstract "art for art's sake" choreography, traditional folk music, and satiric commentary on the dance world showcasing Strømngren's signature absurd wit, *The Letter* is an ambitious, multi-faceted work, which seeks to "find alchemy with three diametrically opposed ingredients" while carving out a "genre of its own," says Strømngren. In the course of his career, Jo Strømngren has created pieces for many ballet companies, including the Norwegian National Ballet, Ballet of the Opera National du Rhin, the Wiener Staatsballett, the Royal Danish Ballet in Copenhagen, the Nürnberg Staatsooper, the Staatstheater Braunschweig and the Royal Swedish Ballet in Stockholm; he has won a number of international awards for his works in theatre, dance, puppets, film, and music.

R. Colby Damon has been transitioning from dancer to choreographer after a brilliant performance career with BalletX and Sacramento Ballet. Since retiring from the stage, he has premiered choreography with Opera Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Ballet II, and Brazil's Vivadança Festival! In his first commission on a major contemporary dance company, Damon's *On the Mysterious Properties of Light* will explore the bizarre characteristics of light at a quantum level, which stems from the choreographer's interest in fusing dance with scientific concepts. "For example," says Damon, "I plan on basing one section of the ballet on the phenomenon of a photon working its way from the center of the sun to the surface over the course of a million years." Using a collection of avant-garde, contemporary classical, various folk songs from different cultures, and spoken text, Damon says his music selections will "cause your body to vibrate in a different way, so that the experience of seeing the piece goes beyond visual."

When BalletX performed co-founder Matthew Neenan's *Credo* at the 2016 Vail International Dance Festival's *Now: Premieres* program, *The New York Times* called it the "best premiere of the evening." The work is named after and set to *Credo* for string quartet (2007) by Pulitzer Prize winning composer Kevin Puts. The score will be performed live onstage by select alumni of the Curtis Institute of Music. Neenan was drawn to Puts' music after learning about the difficulty the composer encountered when he was commissioned to explore the "lighter side of America" for a Miró Quartet program during a time of considerable domestic and foreign upheaval. The composer explained, "I wasn't sure I could deliver. It was hard to find things to sing

about... sometimes it seems all you can do is believe"; hence the music's title, *Credo* (first person singular of Latin *credere*, *to believe*). The conflict in the music between belief and disillusion is evident, as the score oscillates between quick light harmonics and slow-bowed mournful phrases. Kevin Puts' music resonated with Neenan as the choreographer journeyed to India last winter and was immediately struck by the quiet serenity of everyday people practicing Hinduism – the country's predominant belief system – amid the fast-paced commerce-driven hustle and bustle of the major cities. Neenan was inspired to choreograph a piece that “evoked Indian culture, language, and fashion” and dealt with the different ways people “utilize belief as a way to find inner peace in the face of adversity.”

For a closer look at the *Winter Series 2017* production, BalletX invites audiences to various audience engagement programming events, known as the *X-Process*. Starting with a pre-show *Conversations with the Artists* on opening night, audiences are also welcome to attend a *Post-Show Q&A* with the artists after the Saturday, February 11 evening performance.

2-show season subscriptions and single tickets to the *Winter and Spring Series 2017* are available online at <http://www.balletx.org/>, by phone at 215-546-7824, or in person at the Wilma box office at 265 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Due to renovations at the Wilma, *Summer Series 2017* will be held at the Prince Theater, and is available separately as a single ticket online at <http://www.princetheater.org>, over the phone at 215-422-4580, or through the Prince box office at 1412 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

VISUALS: Contemporary ballet, live musicians, music, costumes, stage production

WHO: Christine Cox, Matthew Neenan, Tara Keating, BalletX dancers, Jo Strømngren, R. Colby Damon, select alumni of the Curtis Institute of Music

WHEN:

Friday, Feb. 10, 8:00pm (including *X-Process: Conversations with the Artists* at 7pm)

Saturday, Feb. 11, 2:00pm

Saturday, Feb. 11, 8:00pm (including *X-Process: Post-Show Q&A*)

Sunday, Feb. 12, 2:00pm

Tuesday, Feb. 14, 8:00pm

Wednesday, Feb. 15, 8:00pm

Thursday, Feb. 16, 8:00pm

Friday, Feb. 17, 8:00pm

Saturday, Feb. 18, 2:00pm

Saturday, Feb. 18, 8:00pm

Sunday, Feb. 19, 2:00pm

WHERE: The Wilma Theater, 265 S. Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107

ABOUT: BalletX, Philadelphia's premier contemporary ballet, unites distinguished choreographers with an outstanding company of world-class dancers to forge new works of athleticism, emotion, and grace. Founded in 2005 by Christine Cox and Matthew Neenan, and now under the direction of Cox as Artistic & Executive Director, BalletX challenges the boundaries of classical ballet by encouraging formal experimentation while preserving rigorous technique. The company is committed to producing new works of the highest quality and integrity that bring the combined visions of choreographers and dancers to life and cultivate in audiences a collective appetite for bold, new dance. For more information, visit www.balletx.org.