

ARTSCAPES

Dazzling Dance from National Choreographers Initiative



Molly Lynch

BY CHRISTOPHER TRELA |
NB INDY

Prepare to be dazzled by dance when the 13th annual National Choreographers Initiative presents its 2016 project on Saturday, July 30 at the Irvine Barclay Theater.

NCI Founder and Artistic Director Molly Lynch of Corona del Mar, Associate Professor of Dance in the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at UC, Irvine, and artistic director for Ballet Pacifica from 1988 to 2003, launched her pet dance project to highlight new and upcoming choreographers from around the country.

This year, Lynch has invited four choreographers – Tom Gold, Nicole Haskins, Stephanie Martinez and Ben Needham-Wood – as well as 16 professional dancers from ballet companies



National Choreographers Initiative dance piece

across the country, to participate in the intensive three-week NCI process.

The process began on July 11 with the choreographers and dancers working on their new pieces at the dance studios of UCI. The NCI program culminates

in a public performance of four world premieres at Irvine Barclay Theatre on Saturday, July 30 at 8 p.m. The evening will include a question and answer session with the choreographers, moderated by Lynch.

According to Lynch, each choreographer is given complete freedom to choose the style and theme of the work. She noted that this is a laboratory for the choreographers to develop their movement and thematic ideas, and that

the choreographers retain the right to promote and license the works they have created to other companies.

"NCI is different from all other dance initiatives of its kind," explained Lynch. "The choreographers enter the rehearsal studio and know they have the ultimate freedom to create and experiment with different genres and styles of movement. And the non-commissioned setting encourages them to grow as artists and further develop their artistic vision."

"The dancers also benefit greatly from this creative process," added Lynch. "They are free to improvise and hone their technique. It's a unique collaboration; it's stimulating and exciting. It changes daily. At the end, there is a dance creation that's not predetermined – it's the heart of their artistic expression, and it is energizing."

National Choreographers Initiative may be a southern California project, but it has national influence. Since 2004, NCI has hosted 48 choreographers and 107 dancers from 41 different companies, and has produced 48 new works – 25 of which have been produced by companies throughout the United States.

CHOREOGRAPHERS

Tom Gold: Founder and director of Tom Gold Dance based in New York City. He was a 21-year member of the New York City Ballet where he was a soloist. Tom also performed with numerous companies around the world

including Twyla Tharp Dance, Donald Byrd/the Group, and New York City Opera. As a freelance choreographer, Gold has created works for Oregon Ballet Theatre, Vassar College, The School of American Ballet, the New York Choreographic Institute, Manhattan School of Music, and many others.

Nicole Haskins: Nicole Haskins was born and raised in Venice Beach, California. She received her ballet training at the Westside School of Ballet in Santa Monica under the direction of Yvonne Mounsey and Rosemary Valaire.

Nicole danced professionally with Sacramento Ballet, Washington Ballet, and currently dances with Smuin Ballet in San Francisco, where she is about to begin her fourth season.

Nicole has been commissioned to choreograph for Sacramento Ballet, Richmond Ballet, Smuin Ballet, and many ballet schools across the country. Her choreography has been presented at the Los Angeles Dance Invitational, the McCallum Theatre's Dancing Under The Stars Choreographic Competition, as well as numerous Regional Dance America Festivals.



National Choreographers Initiative dance piece

Stephanie Martinez: Stephanie Martinez is an award-winning Chicago dance artist with over 30 years professional performing experience on stage, film and television. During her 17-year stint with River North Dance Chicago (RNDT), she worked with guest choreographers Ashley Roland, Kevin Iega

Jeff, Daniel Ezralow, Frank Chaves, Sherry Zunker and Ron De Jesus. Upon leaving RNDT, she made her 2009 choreographic debut with AviMar, for Luna Negra Dance Theater's 10th anniversary season. Since then, she has been traveling across the country setting works on professional companies and universities.

Ben Needham-Wood: Ben Needham-Wood began his dance education with the Boston-based ballet company, Dance Prism, and then joined the Louisville Ballet. Ben later relocated to San Francisco where he is currently an artist with Smuin Ballet.

Ben received his first choreographic commission while an artist with the Louisville Ballet. Since then, he has created premieres for such companies as Smuin Ballet and Dance Theatre of San Francisco, and has had his works presented at festivals across the United States and Canada. Ben participated in NCI 2010 as a dancer and is returning this year as a choreographer.

Tickets for the National Choreographers Initiative performance are \$20 to \$60. Visit thebarclay.org or call (949) 854-4646.