UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

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Meeting the Moment

With new leadership and a new vision, Santa Barbara Dance Theater — UC Santa Barbara's professional company-in-residence — this week begins a fresh chapter in its 45-year history.

What better way to celebrate that anniversary than with a series of performances?

Artistic director Brandon Whited takes over as the company kicks off its new season at Center Stage Theater in downtown Santa Barbara, with shows Thursday, Jan. 13 through Saturday, Jan. 15 at 7:30 p.m.; and a matinee Sunday, Jan. 16, at 2 p.m. A livestream option is available for the Friday, Jan. 14 show and the Sunday matinee.

(Proof of COVID-19 vaccination is required to attend performances, in accordance with theater policy, and masking is mandatory for all audience members.)

"Taking the helm of the company at this moment is an incredible opportunity but also an exceptional challenge given the recent and ongoing limitations and restrictions for live performances," said Whited, also an assistant professor of dance and the director of dance performance at UC Santa Barbara. "I feel incredibly grateful for this platform to create and share my choreographic research, to provide employment for incredible dancers, guest choreographers and design collaborators, and to engage students through performances and work in the studio."

To that end, SBDT's upcoming performances will premiere two of Whited's recent works — *to Harbor*, developed in winter of 2020 and completed this season, and a new quartet, *ARENA*, or *1 of 4 & 4 of 1*. It also will feature two solos: excerpts from

Pandemic Dances, created via Zoom by Nancy Colahan, a senior lecturer at UCSB, and the duet *I Don't Exist Anymore*, by guest choreographer Weslie Ching, an alumna of the UCSB dance program.

Guest artists appearing in the concert are dancers Nicole Powell (Carpinteria), Paige Amicon (Los Angeles), Miche Wong (San Francisco), and Calder White (Vancouver/ Toronto), with apprentice-understudy Riley Haley (UCSB Dance class of 2024).

Holding a unique position as a professional dance company-in-residence at UC Santa Barbara, SBDT since 1976 has been dedicated to collaborative exploration and the creation of new works for performance. With that history and lineage as his guide, and centering research as a central purpose, Whited seeks to investigate the potential of dance and performance through a critical and self-analytical lens.

"Though I do look forward to the return to a sense of normalcy in the presentation of performances, we will continue to adapt and find creative ways to engage audiences whenever possible," said Whited. "I am excited to bring new layers to the company's engagements that draw on my own experience choreographing and dancing in work presented in non-traditional performance spaces — including museums, galleries, site-specific and outdoor venues."

"SBDT also will continue to develop a presence on the national and international stage with participation in festivals and touring performances," he added, "and possibly begin a presence in screen dance."

And he's got more than performance in mind.

Whited also is planning a summer session for students to interact with and learn from guest choreographers and — nodding to the efforts of previous longtime director Christopher Pilafian — aiming to further develop a "robust student apprentice/ understudy program to deepen the impact of the professional company model beyond performance alone."

"My vision for the company is to meet the moment," said Whited, "and to operate in a model that aligns with the challenges and opportunities of the time to bring together dancers and choreographers from near and far who reflect a range of diverse aesthetic perspectives and approaches to dance and performance."

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.