



The Joffrey Ballet Announces Major Leadership Reorganization for Joffrey Academy of Dance

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 by Dance News Desk



The Joffrey Ballet is pleased to announce a major leadership reorganization for the Joffrey Academy of Dance featuring a new team comprised of respected dance industry veteran **Raymond Rodriguez** as Head of Studio Company and Trainee Program, effective late October, and Joffrey Ballet's Karin Ellis-Wentz as Head of Pre-Professional Programs, effective immediately. Both of these newly created director-level positions will report to Karine Provost, who will serve in a newly elevated role as Academy Director. Additionally, Joffrey Ballet's Artistic Director **Ashley Wheeler** will now serve as Artistic Director of both the Academy and the Company - assuming creative leadership across the organization.

"We must evolve to maximize our artistic excellence for the Academy," said Executive Director **Greg Cameron**. "**Raymond Rodriguez** brings to Joffrey decades of experience in professional ballet, performing in and managing premiere companies worldwide. His exceptional leadership and commitment to dance will undoubtedly help the Academy gain strength and greater discipline to become one of the best and most comprehensive training programs in the country. We're thrilled to welcome Raymond to the team and congratulate all on their new roles within the Academy."

"We're in the midst of exciting change at The Joffrey Ballet," **Ashley Wheeler**. "This new structure allows us the opportunity to fully realize our vision for the Academy at every level - developing and executing a training syllabi, ensuring the Trainee Program and Studio Company continue to be feeders into Joffrey's Company and furthering our mission of providing world-class dance training and education. We're taking an important step for our students and I look forward to re-imagining and re-shaping the Academy into its next evolution with the exceptional support of our talented new team."

Raymond Rodriguez comes to the Joffrey with 35 years' experience in professional ballet, most recently serving as Managing Director of Silicon Valley Ballet. In his new role, Rodriguez will work with Wheeler to oversee the artistic vision of Joffrey's Studio Company and Trainee Program, aimed at preparing students ages 17 and older for a career in professional dance, including teaching and readying students for professional work and managing all aspects of the Trainee and Studio Company performances including the Winning Works Choreographic Competition. Additionally, Rodriguez will work to create new performance opportunities for students, will assist in recruiting new dancer and work to ensure excellence throughout the Academy's upper level training. Prior to joining the Joffrey, Rodriguez served as Principal Dancer, Principal Ballet Master and Associate Artistic Director at Ballet San Jose (formerly Cleveland Ballet) in addition to staging numerous ballets for **Dennis Nahat** plus performing, assisting and remounting works by **Flemming Flindt**, including *The Toreador* for which he won an **Isadora Duncan** Award. Rodriguez is also the founding Co-Artistic Director of Pointe of Departure, Cleveland, Ohio's summer classical ballet company. Rodriguez is an ABT® Certified Teacher and member of the Screen Actors Guild, **Actors' Equity** and American Guild of Musical Artists, with television and film credits including *RENT*, *The Smurfs*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *The Drew Carey Show*, and more.

Karin Ellis-Wentz joined the Joffrey Academy Faculty in 2013, where she taught all levels of the Academy's Pre-Professional program in addition to classes in Joffrey's Children's, Youth and Adult Open Divisions and the Joffrey Academy Trainee Program. Ellis-Wentz also prepared students for all Academy performances including the Joffrey's annual Spring Gala and personally coached students for the world renowned Youth America Grand Prix ballet competition. In her new role, Ellis-Wentz will work directly with Wheeler to oversee the artistic vision of Joffrey's Pre-Professional Program, aimed at providing dancers ages 10-18 with a strong foundation in classical ballet, including teaching and rehearsing programming for Academy performances and providing guidance and support for Joffrey's young students. Additionally, Ellis-Wentz will assist in recruiting new students and work with Academy staff and Joffrey's Children's and Youth Faculty to ensure excellence in training throughout the Academy. Prior to the Joffrey, Ellis-Wentz danced professionally for 23 years with companies worldwide including the Atlanta Ballet, the Dutch National Ballet in Amsterdam, Boston Ballet and **American Ballet Theatre**, where she performed many soloist and principal roles and became an ABT® Certified Teacher. After retiring from **American Ballet Theatre**, Ellis-Wentz taught at the Academy of Ballet Etudes, the Musical Theater Conservatory of the New York Film Academy, the ABT® Summer Intensive and served on the Dance Faculty at the Chicago High School for the Arts.

Karine Provost has served as The Joffrey Ballet's Managing Director of the Academy since July 2012, where she increased Academy enrollment by 40%, increased Academy revenue to over \$2 million annually, established housing for year-round students and created new collaborations with the Chicago Park District, Chicago Public Libraries and the Museum of Contemporary Art. As Academy Director, Provost will oversee finance, marketing, policies and operations of the Joffrey Academy of Dance in addition to working directly with Joffrey's Artistic staff to create, implement, and supervise all Academy programs. Previously, Provost served as School Manager for The Washington Ballet before joining Hubbard Street Dance Chicago as Manager of Pre-Professional Programs.

About The Joffrey Ballet

Classically trained to the highest standards, The Joffrey Ballet expresses a unique, inclusive perspective on dance, proudly reflecting the diversity of America with its company, audiences, and repertoire which includes major story ballets, reconstructions of masterpieces and contemporary works.

The company's commitment to accessibility is met through an extensive touring schedule, an innovative and highly effective education program including the much lauded Academy of Dance, Official School of The Joffrey Ballet, Community Engagement programs and collaborations with myriad other visual and performing arts organizations.

Founded by visionary teacher **Robert Joffrey** in 1956, guided by celebrated choreographer **Gerald Arpino** from 1988 until 2007, The Joffrey Ballet continues to thrive under internationally renowned Artistic Director **Ashley Wheater** and Executive Director **Greg Cameron**.

About the Joffrey Studio Company

The Joffrey Studio Company is a scholarship program of the Joffrey Academy of Dance, Official School of The Joffrey Ballet. The Joffrey Studio Company consists of 10 outstanding students selected by Joffrey Artistic Director **Ashley Wheater** and Head of Studio Company and Trainee Program **Raymond Rodriguez**. The Joffrey Studio Company and Trainees have performed on some of the most prestigious stages, including Lincoln Center in NY, the Auditorium Theatre, Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Cadillac Palace Theatre and MCA Stage in Chicago, Music Hall in LA, The Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and more. The individualized training and performance opportunities provided by the Joffrey Studio Company offers students unique insight into the life of a professional dancer, assisting students in preparation for a professional career in dance and helping them expand their technique and artistry.

About the Joffrey Academy Trainees

The Joffrey Academy Trainee Program is a one to two-year program for students ages 17 and older who are preparing for a professional dance career. Students are selected to participate in the Trainee Program by invitation from Artistic Director **Ashley Wheater** and the Head of Studio Company and Trainee Program **Raymond Rodriguez**. This esteemed and rigorous program gives students a unique and well-rounded experience to prepare them for the next step in their careers. Trainees rehearse and perform classical and contemporary works from The Joffrey Ballet's extensive repertoire and have the opportunity to work with guest choreographers throughout the year. Graduates of the Academy have gone on to dance professionally with companies throughout the world including The Joffrey Ballet, **American Ballet Theatre**, New York City Ballet, Staatsballett Berlin, Dresden Semperoper, Complexions, Milwaukee Ballet, Memphis Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, BalletMet, Polish National Ballet, Slovak National Ballet, and many more.

For more information on The Joffrey Ballet and its programs, visit joffrey.org.

For more information on the Joffrey Academy of Dance, Official School of The Joffrey Ballet and its programs please visit joffrey.org/academy.