

MDAA 2023 Fall Workshop, Billings

Guest Faculty



Grant Chenok (Hip Hop) began his training in the San Francisco Bay Area and could have never expected to have lived in Oklahoma City, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas, as a result. He holds a Bachelor of Performing Arts degree from Oklahoma City University. Grant worked professionally in Los Angeles for 8 years working on multiple television, movie, commercial and video productions. He has appeared on NBC's *Days of Our Lives* and *Scrubs*, the Disney Channel's *Drake and Josh*, as well as the History Channel's *Come Home Alive*. Also appearing in the feature film *Zombie Prom* starring Ru Paul, VH1's movie *30 Days Till I'm Famous*, and short film *Mother's Be Good*. Grant's commercial/industrial credits include Burger King, Nike, Paramount, Bugaboo Strollers and Pepsi. He has also performed in music videos with the Pussycat Dolls, Busta Rhymes, U.K. artist Jem, Brittany Murphy, Mandi Leigh, Jahzmyne and Paul Oakenfold. Grant has also worked on the Paul McCartney Tour, with the Vietnamese production *Kim Loi Cali*, and has opened for pop stars, Nina Sky, Tone Loc, and Ashlee Simpson. Some of his live stage credits include the Mission America World Tour, the Miss California Pageant and the West Coast Premiere of *Footloose*. Some of his most memorable moments include the Pussycat Dolls video "Dontcha" and Brittany Murphy video entitled "Faster Kill Pussycat." Grant has been fortunate to work with studios across 40 of the 50 U.S. states, as well as studios in Belgium, Holland, and England. Grant keeps busy spreading the love of dance as proud co-founder of Epic Dance Competition and Workshop, previously known as Flow 40 Dance Workshops.



Sean Stewart (Ballet), who after performing in musical theater productions as a child, began his study of jazz dance and tap with Lisa Clark at the age of 10. He began studying ballet two years later with Yanina Cywinska and was a professional ballet dancer by the age of 14, having joined the Joffrey II Dancers in New York under the direction of Jeremy Blanton and Gage Bush Englund. He studied for a year at the Paris Opera Ballet School before joining American Ballet Theatre. Stewart performed many roles with ABT including Lankendem and Birbanto in *Le Corsaire*, Benno in *Swan Lake*, Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Nutcracker Prince in *The Nutcracker*, Hortensio in *Taming of the Shrew*, the shy stepsister in Ashton's *Cinderella*, as well as featured roles in modern and contemporary works by Merce Cunningham, Mark Morris, Twyla Tharp, Christopher Wheeldon, Alexei Ratmansky, Nacho Duato, Lar Lubovitch, Christian Holder, Lauri Stallings, Aszure Barton, Benjamin Millepied and Stanton Welch among many others. He has performed with Lar Lubovitch's company, as well as Complexions, Alabama Ballet, New York Theatre Ballet, and Washington Ballet, and originated a role in *The Times, They Are A' Changin'*, a musical play directed and choreographed by Twyla Tharp. Stewart performed as a dance double for the character of Sergei in the film *Center Stage*. Stewart has taught company class for American Ballet Theatre, CoLab Dance, and Hamptons Dance Project. He has taught at the ABT Alabama Summer Intensive, at Peridance in NYC, at Eglevsky Ballet, New York Theatre Ballet School, and has served as a judge and teacher for YAGP. He currently serves as the artistic coordinator and rehearsal director of the ABT Apprentice Program, assistant director and ballet master at CoLab Dance and ballet master for Hamptons Dance Project as well as ballet master, stager, and company teacher of Duncan Lyle Dance.



Brent Oplotnik (Tap) grew up studying dance at his mother Patricia Oplotnik's studio Applause Studios in Oklahoma City. At the age of nine Brent appeared on Univision's El Sabado Gigante and Star Search. Other television credits include commercial ads for Taco Mayo and 7-11. Brent was a featured soloist appearing on Dino's Christmas Spectacular on QVC and Andy Williams's Christmas Spectacular. As a teen, Brent was a featured actor in the Fox Movie of the Week, "Rise and Walk: The Dennis Byrd Story" starring Peter Berg. Other credits include the HBO/Amazon Prime Video Special, "Public Enemy #1" starring Alyssa Milano, Theresa Russell, and Eric Roberts. Brent has performed live on stage with names such as Creed, Dino, and Jimmy Osmond, country superstars Neal McCoy and Randy Travis, Melinda the First Lady of Magic, and the late legend, Mr. Christmas, Andy Williams. He was also featured in Dance Spirit magazine with renowned LA choreographer and master teacher Tymme Reitz. Brent has created original choreography for numerous shows in Branson, Missouri in addition to directing and choreographing shows for Six Flags theme parks. A master of many styles, Brent has set award winning competition choreography for dancers and dance studios across the country. For nearly two decades he has been an adjudicator for numerous national dance competitions and organizations in the US. Brent is a Master Teacher currently teaching tap with Force Dance Tour and Epic Dance Workshops. He is also active with many regional chapters and a national faculty member for Dance Masters of America. Other dance conventions include Dance Olympus and LA Dance Magic. He resides, with his wife Marissa and their two sons, in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Brent's personality and experience have created a choreographer and master teacher who is anticipated and in demand.



Cole Vernon (Contemporary) is originally from Sonoma County, California. He has performed nationally and internationally with companies including DanceWorks Chicago, River North, Ballet Hispánico, and Bruce Wood Dance. Vernon graduated summa cum laude from the University of Arizona in 2013. He has performed works by master choreographers, including Lar Lubovitch, Yin Yue, and Joy Bollinger, among others. When offstage, his passion for developing the artists of the future as an educator and choreographer has taken him across the globe to spaces such as the Boston Conservatory, the Big Muddy Dance Company, Point Park University, Ballet Memphis, Gus Giordano School, Minkov Tanzakademie, Joffrey Ballet, and Hathaway Academy of Ballet. Vernon joined Bruce Wood Dance in 2019. Photo by Kent Barker.

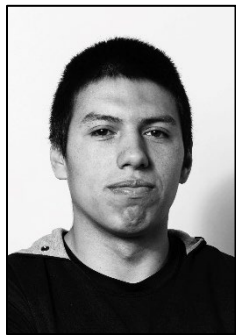


Lauren Giordano Whittington (Jazz) grew up in the dance world witnessing her grandfather Gus Giordano create a legacy. Growing up, Lauren trained in all styles of dance which sparked her love of learning and quest to become a well-rounded dancer. She has experienced every aspect of the dance world from taking class with her grandfather, Gus, to working behind the scenes with her mother Amy. Lauren graduated with a BFA in dance and a business minor from the University of Arizona. She now runs the Company program as the GUS Company Director and is also a full-time teacher at the school, specializing in Giordano Jazz. Lauren is a Gus Legacy Company member where she performs throughout the United States and loves to perform her grandfather's pieces including, Sing, Sing, Sing, Trolley to Chicago, and Gang Hep. She has worked closely with Pattie Obey, Jimmy Locust, Susan Quinn, Marcus Alford, and Elijah Gibson. She has discovered that she is as passionate as her grandfather about teaching jazz throughout the world. Lauren teaches master classes at numerous universities, studios, and conventions around the world to spread her grandfather's technique and love for jazz. After college she found a new love for yoga. Lauren is certified in teaching Power Yoga and Yoga Sculpt and teaches at Corepower Yoga. Her passion for teaching dance and yoga is the perfect combination to inspire students of all ages.



Nicolle Ament (Tap I) grew up dancing in Billings Montana at the age of four. As her love of dance grew, she added other styles at the age of ten; tap, jazz lyrical and modern. Nicolle began assisting in classes at the age of twelve and teaching her own jazz and tap classes at seventeen. She attended the University of Montana earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance with an emphasis in choreography, performance, and teaching in 1999. In 2000-2004 she obtained the role of Assistant to the Artistic Director/Owner at Parker Dance Academy in Parker Colorado. Nicolle has a passion for teaching and helping students and clients reach their goals. From 2004-2016 she owned and directed Billings Dance Academy.

Her school's focus was quality dance training and technique, artistic expression, and creative story telling through dance. In the spring of 2016 Nicolle made the change from studio owner to 'dance instructor nomad' sharing her knowledge and love of dance with area dancers, local dance schools, and theater companies. She also danced with and choreographed for Terpsichore Dance company. Nicolle is certified in UltraBarre, Progressive Ballet Technique and Pilates, giving her more tools and knowledge to help strengthen dancers and assist them through the physical demands of dance, injury recovery, and prevention. She is very excited to be back in Montana again after four years in Oklahoma and even more elated to be teaching for MDAA, which she grew up attending!



Greg Contreraz (Hip Hop I) began dancing at the age of twelve and was self-taught until the age of sixteen when he received his first teaching job under Jodi McDowall at Heights Elite Dance Studio in Billings, MT. A few years later, in 2014, he began teaching hip hop at CDS Performing Arts where he taught for six years and most recently at School of Classical Ballet. At eighteen, Greg started training in jazz, ballet, modern, and tap under Samantha Sandefur at CDS. Greg has had choreography featured on the World of Dance Tour 2016 and the Hall of Fame Stage at Dancerpalooza 2019. Greg has not only done work with local dance studios but has also worked with Billings Public Schools with the "Hip Hop In Schools" program to help spread his love for dance with kids at Newman and

Beartooth Elementary. Greg currently is a coach for the Skyview High School Dance Team and continues to do choreography for studios and independent dancers for competitions.



Ricki Feeley (Contemporary I) was born and raised in Montana and began her dance training at the age of four studying ballet/pointe, jazz, and tap. As a dance major at the University of Montana, Ricki discovered modern dance, which became her focus of study, and she received several scholarships and awards for her dancing and choreography. Ricki was trained in a wide range of dance techniques and dance related studies such as ballet, modern ballet, pointe, jazz, hip-hop, Caribbean, African, Balinese, Pilates, yoga, choreography and performance, anatomy and physiology, dance history, contact improvisation, Laban theory and notation, drama, stage management, teaching dance to

people with disabilities, teaching dance to children, class preparation, meticulously in advanced modern techniques. Summer scholarships lead Ricki to perform and study in Seattle and San Francisco. Receiving Awards of Excellence in 2001 through 2005, Ricki graduated from the University of Montana in 2005 with a BFA in dance with an emphasis in choreography and performance.

She has been teaching dance to children and adults for over twenty-five years. Ricki is the co-founder of Montana's children's dance company MADco. She also founded and directed her own professional dance company, Terpsichore, which performed for 9 years in Montana until her departure to North Carolina where she taught advanced contemporary dance classes for five years. Ricki recently moved back to Billings, MT and is proud to be setting choreography and teaching classes and workshops in this beautiful community. She and her husband are busy raising three beautiful children and a puppy.



Jaci Lafountain Card (Jazz I) received most of her dance training in Lebanon, OH under the direction of Zandra Thomas. Jaci developed an early passion for teaching and working with children, and by the early age of fifteen was instructing on a regular basis. After performing with numerous companies nationally and internationally, Mrs. Card placed her focus on choreography and spending time in the studio with young dancers. Jaci has been awarded numerous accolades for her choreography and has been recognized by Dance Spirit Magazine for her artistic concepts. Today you can find this young woman lighting up the dance world with her energetic, inspiring, and passionate approach to teaching the next generation of dancers.



Hannah Monson's (Musical Theater) first love for the arts began with a coupon for one free month of dance classes. While her parents were trying to save a few bucks, Hannah quickly fell in love with dancing and has been doing so ever since. She grew up dancing at the School of Classical Ballet and Diversity Dance Studio in Billings, MT. She jumped to every workshop, scholarship opportunity, audition, and competition she could get to. As a dance performer, Hannah knew she loved the stage. Her ability to sing and act along with dancing brought her into the theater community, performing in several theater productions and eventually working as a choreographer for both Billings Studio Theater and Venture Theater productions. Hannah went on to study dance at the University of Montana for one year, before zooming to the Land Down Unda! In Australia, she danced for The Outback Spectacular on the Gold Coast, performing in a "dinner and a show" type of experience. As an experienced dance teacher and someone who loves working with kids, Hannah began attending Griffith University for an education degree. A few years later, with expired visas and reality knocking at her door, Hannah dragged herself away from the beaches of Australia and began teaching sixth grade in the Billings School District. After four years of juggling teaching school during the day and dance during the evening, Hannah finally decided to solely teach dance. She is now co-owner of Movement Montana Arts Academy. She is the director of the Musical Theater program and teaches dancers ages three to eighteen! She loves teaching dance to the talented youth of Billings and enjoys eating pizza and long walks on the beach.



Leigh Schanfein (Ballet I) is a freelance dancer, choreographer, and teacher as well as an independent researcher in the fields of kinesiology and biomechanics. In October 2020, after eleven years in NYC, she relocated her home to Billings, Montana. Leigh has trained and performed across the USA and abroad in modern, ballet, and contemporary dance. She has performed with companies such as City Ballet of San Diego, Indelible Dance, Christopher Caines Dance Company, Yoo and Dancers, and the Park Avenue Armory, and has guested with Benjamin Briones Ballet, New American Youth Ballet, Lafayette Ballet, and CONNetic Dance. She has performed in commercial productions including on stage with comedian Hannibal Buress as part of the Oddball Comedy Tour, during Fashion Week NYC for designers such as Malan Breton, and for brands such as Xerox, Suave, Oreo, and Estee Lauder. Leigh is a former Director of Dance for Periapsis Music and Dance, where her choreography was described as "gorgeous and lush" (*Dance Informa Magazine*). She taught regularly with NYC Community Ballet (live and online), has subbed at the major NYC open studios, and has been a guest instructor and choreographer for pre-professional schools in Indiana, Montana, California, Idaho, Connecticut, and Ohio (online). In 2021, Leigh founded the Yellowstone Valley Creative Residency to help bring creative minds in dance to Billings, and, in 2022, she co-founded School of Classical Ballet Company, also in Billings. Leigh received her M.S. degree in kinesiology with a specialization in biomechanics from Purdue University, and her B.S. degree in animal physiology and neuroscience with a minor in dance from the University of California San Diego. As a graduate student, she received multiple awards for her research with dancers including two awards through the International Association for Dance Medicine and

Science. Her research has focused on the mechanisms by which humans control balance and how sensory feedback is integrated for the control of posture. For five years, Leigh worked as a research associate at the Harkness Center for Dance Injuries, part of NYU Langone Health. Her research there covered a wide range of topics concerning injury prevention among dancers. Leigh has taught courses in health, motor development, biomechanics lab, and stress at Purdue University, and anatomy at Peridance Capezio Center. From 2015 through 2020, she was adjunct lecturer of biomechanics at Barnard College in the department of dance. She joined the faculty of MSUB for Spring 2021, co-founded workshop series Dance Dissection in 2018, and was a contributing journalist for Dance Informa Magazine from 2011-2019.