



# MOSAIC

Dance Theater Company

presents

# IMPRESSIONS OF THE ALHAMBRA

Adapted from *Tales of The Alhambra* by Washington Irving

Adapted & Directed by  
Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Choreography by  
Samara Adell ✨ Carlos Fittante

September 28 & 29, 2024

First Congregational Church  
40 S. Fullerton Avenue, Montclair, NJ 07042



Made possible by funds from the Essex County  
Division of Cultural Affairs, a partner of the New  
Jersey State Council on the Arts.



# A Journey to the Alhambra

Almost two hundred years ago, Washington Irving travelled from Seville to Granada, and subsequently documented his journey in the bestselling *Tales of the Alhambra*. More than twenty years ago, Irving's enchanting work set off a spark in my mind, that an adaptation would be a delightful way to combine different dance forms while hearing Irving's incredible use of the English language to take us to different times and places. I am reminded of the old wine commercial with Orson Wells: "We will sell no wine before its time." Such is the case for *Impressions of The Alhambra* — timing is everything.

While an adaptation of *Legend of the Three Beautiful Princesses* was created for inclusion in a school assembly program (which also played at the NY International Fringe Festival), I knew that at some point an adaptation of Irving's work was in the cards. Over these past twenty-odd years, I would often pick up the book, and note passages that I thought particularly adaptable for dance and theater. And that list of passages kept on growing. An eight-hour extravaganza was just not practical! But, I was continually envisioning the project on stage.

When the 2024 Essex County (NJ) Local Arts Program grant cycle started in June of 2023, I knew that (finally!) the time was right to realize this project. I winnowed down the text I had already chosen, then went about choosing music. Irving's words were parsed to the music, in a different kind of editing process. The script and soundtrack were ready; the creative team (Samara, Carlos, and I) was ready; the project was cast, and rehearsals began. Along the way, costumes and props were created, and projections were assembled. Today, you see the full theatricality of our impressions under lights.

Washington Irving's words have created a magical place for me, and I hope that we, the cast and crew of *Impressions of The Alhambra*, do the same for you. Enjoy the show!



Morgiana Celeste Varricchio  
Producing Artistic Director

***Special thanks to Sivas,  
a dancer, a costumer, and a friend,  
whose generous donation of fabric and  
trimmings can be seen in several costumes  
created for Impressions of The Alhambra.***

## WARNING

The photographing, audio or video recording of this performance or the possession of any device for such photographing or audio or video recording inside this theater, without written authorization is prohibited by law. Violators may be punished by ejection and violations may render the offender liable for money damages.

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Adapted from *Tales of the Alhambra* by  
Washington Irving

Adapted & Directed by  
Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Choreography by  
Samara Adell ❁ Carlos Fittante

featuring

Samara Adell

Anna Berkun ❁ Nina Brewton ❁ Carlos Fittante

Kendra Dushac McCarthy ❁ Barbara Romero

Mina Rose ❁ Katherine Shamdin ❁ Michael Takiff

and

Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Stage Manager  
Bob Greenwald

Lighting Designer  
Nicholas Von Hagel

Costumes by Casa delle Sarte

Set Pieces Designed & Constructed by  
Bob Greenwald

*Impressions of The Alhambra* will be performed with one short pause, and one 15-minute intermission. Please turn off all cell phones and all other electronic devices.

# **THE JOURNEY AND THE PALACE**

Washington Irving.....Michael Takiff

## ***The Journey Begins***

Choreographed by Samara Adell

Performed by Anna Berkun, Nina Brewton, Mina Rose,  
Katherine Shamdin, Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Music: Live Better Media

## ***The Muleteer/Sancho***

Choreographed by Jerane Michele after Luisa Preicet

Performed by Carlos Fittante

Music: Castellon; *El Vito* performed by ensemble Francisco de Goya  
Mr. Fittante's costume courtesy of BALAM Dance Theatre

## ***Traveling in Spain***

Choreographed and performed by  
Carlos Fittante and Barbara Romero

Music: Live Better Media

Mr. Fittante's costume courtesy of BALAM Dance Theatre

## ***The Rock of the Lovers***

Choreographed and performed by  
Samara Adell and Carlos Fittante

Music: Hossam Ramzy and Rafa el Tachuela

## ***The Inn at Arahall and Pepita's Dance***

Choreographed by Carlos Fittante and Barbara Romero

Performed by Anna Berkun, Nina Brewton,  
Carlos Fittante, Barbara Romero,

Mina Rose, Katherine Shamdin, Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Music: Marc Loopuyt, Paco el Lobo, Adel Shems el Din  
*Malaguena* by Ernesto Lecuona, played by Ben Woods

## ***Palace of the Alhambra***

Choreographed by Samara Adell

Performed by Samara Adell with Michael Takiff

Music: Hossam Ramzy and Rafa el Tachuela

## ***The Hall of the Two Sisters***

Choreographed by Samara Adell

Performed by Samara Adell, Anna Berkun, Nina Brewton,  
Mina Rose, Katherine Shamdin, Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Music: Luis Delgado

### ***The Hall of Ambassadors***

Choreographed by Samara Adell

Performed by Samara Adell, Anna Berkun, Nina Brewton,  
Mina Rose, Katherine Shamdin, Morgiana Celeste Varricchio

Music: Luis Delgado

### **✻ SHORT PAUSE ✻**

## **LEGEND OF THE THREE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESSES**

Choreographed by Samara Adell

Music: Luis Delgado, Castellon

Washington Irving.....Michael Takiff  
Storyteller/Kadiga.....Morgiana Celeste Varricchio  
Zayda.....Katherine Shamdin  
Zorayda.....Anna Berkun  
Zorahayda.....Kendra Dushac McCarthy

### **✻ INTERMISSION ✻**

## **LEGEND OF THE ROSE OF THE ALHAMBRA**

Choreographed by Samara Adell and Carlos Fittante

Music: Live Better Media,

*Recuerdos de la Alhambra* by Francisco Tarrega,  
Brandon Acker, Guitarist

Costumes for Mr. Fittante and Ms. Romero  
courtesy of BALAM Dance Theatre

Storyteller.....Morgiana Celeste Varricchio  
King Philip V.....Michael Takiff  
Queen Elizabetha.....Barbara Romero  
Lady-in-Waiting.....Katherine Shamdin  
Ruyz de Alarcon.....Carlos Fittante  
The Ger-Falcon.....Anna Berkun  
Jacinta.....Mina Rose  
Fredegonda.....Nina Brewton  
Zorahayda.....Kendra Dushac McCarthy

## **THE AUTHOR'S FAREWELL TO GRANADA**

Performed by The Company

Music: Luis Delgado

# THE COMPANY



**MORGIANA CELESTE VARRICCHIO**, (*Director, Dance Ensemble, Kadiga, Storyteller*) is MDTC's Producing Artistic Director and Founder. She adapted Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* to create MDTC's new production, *Impressions of The Alhambra*. She is a classically trained actor, a storyteller, a dancer, and a director. Her works have been commissioned and performed internationally, in New York, and at regional and stock theaters throughout the U.S., including such venues as Lincoln Center, the Brooklyn Museum, Paper Mill Playhouse, the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, the Nashville Institute for the Arts, the New York International Fringe Festival, and the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland. An accomplished writer and producer, she has adapted and/or written for the stage, produced, performed, and toured in: *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves; Gypsy Tales; Ovid's Metamorphoses; Banat El Emir or The Dancing Princesses*; and for Mosaic Dance Theater Company, *Tales from The Arabian Nights, Land of The Pharaohs, The Paradise of Children, La Lettera d'Isabella, Troy: Women & War*, and tonight's *Impressions of The Alhambra*. In addition to her numerous acting credits, she worked as production assistant for several Broadway productions, was artistic consultant for the late film star Anthony Quinn, and is privileged to list on her resume the remarkable experience of working at the Dallas Theater Center (TX) during its leadership by the legendary Paul Baker. Morgiana teaches classes and workshops in Middle Eastern dance, and conducts workshops for storytelling and storytheater. She holds an MFA from Trinity University and a BA from Lehigh University.

## **Morgiana talks about *Impressions of The Alhambra* (Video)**

**SAMARA ADELL** (*Choreographer, Featured Dancer*) is the Artistic Director for Dance for MDTC. She has had a lifelong commitment to the dances of the Near East. A protégé of the late master Ibrahim Farrah, she performed with his internationally acclaimed Near East Dance Group in some of the most prestigious concert arenas in the US, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and the Kennedy Center. As a soloist, she has performed all over the globe, and also with some of the most famous singing stars in the Middle East and with American artists such as Christina Aguilera and fusion pop star Alabina. Samara is a master teacher and teaches nationally, internationally, and in NYC. Additional choreography credits include, NY International Fringe Festival, Brooklyn Ballet, for Broadway star Robert Cuccioli in *Elvis Unbound, Veils (a serial comedy)*, and Kamatsu Kaoru Arabia Dance Company in Tokyo, Japan. As Artistic Director for Dance for Mosaic Dance Theater Company since its inception in 2003, Samara has created a rich and versatile repertoire for which MDTC is known. Also, for MDTC she choreographed *Fo(u)r Women*, which she co-created with singer/songwriter Gary Kupper. Samara has also produced a CD, *Ya Samara*, composed by Maurice Chedid, a collaboration created specifically for Oriental Dance.



## **Samara discusses fusion as it applies to dance (Video)**

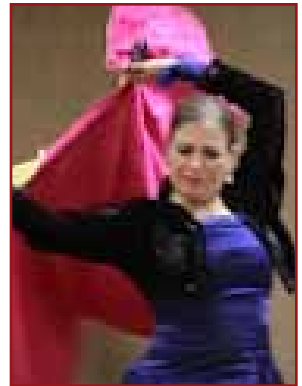


**CARLOS FITTANTE** (*Guest Choreographer, Muleteer/Sancho, Spanish Dancer, Ruyz de Alarcon*), is the Artistic Director of BALAM Dance Theatre, a contemporary cultural dance company inspired by Balinese theatre, blending diverse cultural dances and time periods. He specializes in Baroque, Balinese, and Spanish Escuela Bolera dance styles. Carlos is a graduate of the School of American Ballet and holds a Master of Fine Arts in Dance from the Peck School of the Arts at the University of Wisconsin. His performances and choreography have been featured at prestigious venues such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and the International Bali Arts Festival, among others. Known for his well-researched and imaginative choreography, as well as his charismatic

dancing, Carlos has received critical acclaim from the *New York Times* and Dance Magazine. His choreographic work includes *Garden of Love in Miniature*, a baroque dance entr'acte presented by Gotham Early Music Scene, *Ramayana: Abduction of Sita*, a Balinese fusion story ballet inspired by the Hindu epic, and *Caballo de Rejoneo*, a Spanish Escuela Bolera song and dance number. He has performed extensively throughout the United States and internationally. Currently, he serves as an Adjunct Assistant Professor, teaching Introduction to Dance online in the Dance Department at Queens College, City University of New York.

### Carlos explains Baroque dance (Video)

**BARBARA ROMERO** (*Guest Artist, Spanish Dancer, Pepita, Queen Elizabetta*), specializes in Spanish dance, especially the Escuela Bolera School, while having background and experience in other forms, and is BALAM Dance Theatre's Spanish dance expert. Her dance studies began with ballet and character at the ABT school, and modern dance. Barbara studied with top masters of Spanish dance in the US and in Spain, and considers Mariano Parra and Jerane Michel her most influential teachers. She toured with Dondines Dancers of the Americas and afterwards with Boston Flamenco Ballet for several seasons. She appeared as featured soloist at Meson Asturias in NYC for a number of years while also performing in local tablaos and festivals. Barbara later became co-founder and director with Isabel Soler of Danzas Espanolas, which presented multiple Spanish dance forms in the tri-state area to acclaim. Also a licensed massage therapist and a certified yoga teacher, Barbara currently performs with BALAM Dance Theatre, and with Phyllis Rose Dance Company.



**NINA BREWTON**, (*Dance Ensemble, Fredegonda*) a Mosaic company member since its original production in 2003, has had extensive training in ballet, jazz, modern and Dunham technique, having studied at the Clark Center for Performing Arts in New York City where she was awarded a two-year full-time dance scholarship. A former member of Actors' Equity, she performed in *The King and I*, with featured roles as "Topsy" and the "Fan Dancer." Nina also studied Hawaiian dance and culture with several Hawaiian Master teachers in Hawaii. Performing Polynesian dances of the Pacific for many years, Nina toured professionally with three Polynesian dance companies. In addition to Nina's theatrical performances with Mosaic, she has studied with Samara and performed as a soloist at special events and Middle Eastern venues in the NY metropolitan area.



### **Nina shares observations on MDTC through the years (Video)**



**KENDRA DUSHAC MCCARTHY** (*Zorahayda*), in her 14th season with MDTC, studied with Pittsburgh Ballet Theater. She has a BA in Dance and Gerontology from Slippery Rock University, and studied Dance Education at Kent State University. She has worked with various companies in NYC, Pittsburgh and Cleveland including Tina Croll and Company, Annabella Gonzalez Dance Theater, Verlezza Dance, Bodiography Contemporary Ballet and more, performing throughout the US and abroad. A Neuromyofascial specialist, Kendra established her private practice, Lean & Limber Stretch Therapy, in Manhattan to offer pain relief and mobility support to clients ranging from professional athletes to aging seniors. Her hands-on technique promotes healing and improving flexibility while reducing pain, tension, stress and preventing injury.

### **Kendra explores the physicalities of gravity and dance (Video)**

**MICHAEL TAKIFF** (*Washington Irving, Philip V*) appeared off-Broadway in 2022 as author and performer of *Jews, God, and History (Not Necessarily in That Order)*, a solo show directed by Tony nominee Brian Lane Green. *DirectorTalk* raved that Michael "melds his prodigious intelligence and expert showmanship to illuminate the darkest (and most tender) moments in the life and mind of the modern American Jew." Recent stage roles include Caesar in *Julius Caesar* (Shakespeare Workshoppe), Brutus in *Coriolanus* (Worlds Elsewhere Theater Company), Papa in *Goldberg's Kaddish* (New York Theater Festival), and Eichmann in *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann* (Center for Jewish History). Recent feature film work includes principal roles in *Beach Town Maidens*, *Gone Without a Past*, and *The Rabbit Hole*. Trained as a classical singer and jazz dancer, Michael spent ten years



touring the country as a stand-up comic. He is the author of numerous books, including an award-winning biography of Bill Clinton published by Yale University Press.

### **Michael reveals his secrets to learning lines (Video)**





**KATHERINE SHAMDIN** (*Dance Ensemble, Zayda, Lady-in-Waiting*) originally from Mattoon, Illinois, graduated in 2023 from the University of Iowa with a BFA in Dance and a BA in Enterprise Leadership. There she was a member of the UI Dance Company and she performed in works by Stephanie Miracle, Tony Orrico, Armando Duarte, Kristin Marrs and guest choreographers Thomas DeFrantz and Shannon Alvis. Aside from performing, Katherine enjoys working with BalletTech as a Teaching Assistant where she gets to see the excitement of dance ignite. Katherine recently moved to New York City and is excited for her professional debut with Mosaic Dance Theater Company.

### **Katherine considers ballet and modern dance (Video)**

**MINA ROSE** (*Dance Ensemble, Jacinta*), began her dance training in her native Switzerland, continuing her education at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London. Having been selected into the Certificate Program at The Ailey School, from which she graduated in 2024, she had the pleasure of learning and performing works by choreographer Ephrat Asherie. As a member of the Ailey Student Performance Group, Mina explored Alvin Ailey's iconic repertoire and collaborated with choreographers Avree Walker, Branndi Lewis, and Janice Rosario. Through studies in several prestigious schools, she has built a strong foundation in a wide range of dance styles. Recent performances include the Sparks Theatre Festival.



### **Mina tells of her move to the US (Video)**



**ANNA BERKUN** (*Dance Ensemble, Zorayda, Ger-Falcon*), was born in New York City, and calls Brooklyn her home. She began her training in ballet as a two-year-old. Her studies took her to Russia, where she continued her professional dance education in Saint Petersburg. Her many performances there included the Shanghai International Dance Festival. Having recently returned to NYC, Anna regularly performs in the Russian Character Dance show at the world-famous Tatiana Restaurant in Brooklyn.

### **Anna compares US and Russian schools of ballet (Video)**

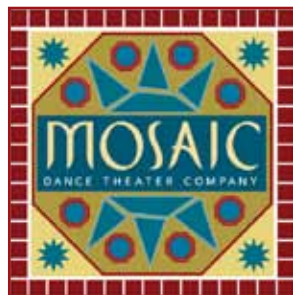
**BOB GREENWALD** (*Technical Director/Stage Manager*) has been with Mosaic since its initial production in 2003, serving as stage manager, webmaster, IT department, video editor, tour coordinator, and set and prop construction as needed. His creations include an Ancient Egyptian sarcophagus, a Trojan Horse, an assortment of spears, swords, Egyptian animal-head masks, and the folding, pop-up market stalls in last season's *Alhayat Raksa (Life Is a Dance)*. Bob was stage manager for New York Performing Artist Company, and has worked backstage in various technical roles for theaters, supper clubs, and special events in New York City, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.



### **Bob shows you the enchanted silver lute (Video)**

**NICHOLAS VON HAGEL** (*Lighting Designer*) holds a BA in Technical Theater from King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and works a freelance Lighting and Sound designer. He has designed lights for MDTC's previous performances here at the First Congregational Church of Montclair, and at the Westminster Arts Center at Bloomfield College. He was nominated for the Montclair Theater Nights Awards for Bloomfield High School's *Radium Girls*, *Trojan Women*, *The Crucible*, and *Almost Maine*. Nicholas has also designed lights for a number of Disney Pilots, including; *Finding Nemo Jr.* (pilot), *Frozen Jr.* (pilot), *Newsies Jr.* (pilot) with Aspire Performing Arts. Nicholas has designed both lights, multimedia projections, and audio for many local groups including NJSDA, Gas Lamp Players, 4th Wall Theatre, and Montclair Operetta Club, Wayne Hills High School, Theater League of Clifton, and West Orange School District. Nicholas works at the School District of the Chathams as their Theater Arts Technical Director and Auditorium Coordinator.

**MOSAIC DANCE THEATER COMPANY** (*MDTC*) is dedicated to the dance and folkloric traditions of the Mediterranean—North Africa, the Middle East, and southern Europe—creating dance, theater, and educational programs which celebrate the rich diversity of cultures of this region. The dances and music, the stories and myths, and the history and legends of this fascinating area form the wellspring of inspiration for MDTC's creative vision. Founded in 2003, this award-winning company is known for its artistry and authenticity, not only in creating the critically acclaimed original works that comprise its repertory, but also in faithfully researching their origins to ensure cultural integrity. Touring nationally to performing arts venues, universities, schools and community organizations, the Company is the recipient of the Sunshine Award for its contribution to the performing arts, recognized by NARAS (National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences) and the United Nations. In a world engulfed by popular culture, MDTC embraces the historical treasures of the past, the ways of tradition, and the sensibility of the present in its passionate goal to celebrate the remarkable varieties and similarities of the Mediterranean cultures.



**Visit MDTC's website**

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[www.MosaicDanceTheaterCo.org](http://www.MosaicDanceTheaterCo.org)

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Thank you in advance for your generosity.

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