



NEWS

WEITZENHOFFER FAMILY COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
SCHOOL OF DANCE

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA.

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**OU School of Dance to Host Five Moons Dance Festival
Honoring Five Native American Ballerinas from Oklahoma**

NORMAN, OKLA., July 8, 2021 — A dance festival honoring the five renowned Native American ballerinas from Oklahoma known as the Five Moons will be held Aug. 27-29 on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus.

The five ballerinas –Maria Tallchief, Marjorie Tallchief, Rosella Hightower, Moscelyne Larkin and Yvonne Chouteau created distinguished careers in the dance world during the 20th century. The inaugural festival will highlight both Maria and Marjorie Tallchief and their legacies.

The Five Moons Dance Festival aims to inspire the community’s interest in learning more about the Five Moons’ remarkable accomplishments and to provide a platform for female-identifying choreographers from historically underrepresented populations to present their work, thereby contributing to the future of female leadership in dance. The festival will include an opening night reception on Aug. 27; a series of panel discussions and educational events with dance artists and scholars on Aug. 28 at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art; and culminate in a dance performance on Aug. 29 in the Elsie C. Brackett Theatre.

Performing groups will include American Ballet Theatre, Tulsa Ballet, Oklahoma City Ballet, Osage Ballet, and students from the OU School of Dance. Highlighted choreographers will include Jerome Robbins awardee Stefanie Batten Bland, Osage Ballet’s Jenna Smith, Princess Grace awardee Rena Butler, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, and Oklahoma City Ballet principal dancer DaYoung Jung.

The term “Five Moons” is derived from a ballet created by Cherokee composer Louis Ballard Sr. called *The Four Moons* that was performed at the second Oklahoma Indian Ballerina Festival in 1967. The Oklahoma Indian Ballerina Festivals were held in 1957 and 1967 to celebrate milestone anniversaries of Oklahoma’s statehood. *The Four Moons*, which was performed by four of the ballerinas, excluding Maria Tallchief who had retired from performing, included solos honoring the unique heritage of each dancer.

Celebrated Native American artist Jerome Tiger created a painting titled *The Four Moons*, which was the program cover for the 1967 Oklahoma Indian Ballerinas Festival. The Five Moons have also been honored in a mural titled *Flight of Spirit* by Chickasaw painter Make Larsen, located in the rotunda of the Oklahoma State Capitol and a bronze sculpture installation in Tulsa by Oklahoma artist Gary Henson titled *The Five Moons*. Four of the Five Moons have been inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame.

Each of the Five Moons had notable performing careers, all dancing with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo as well as other renowned companies in the United States and abroad. In addition to being trailblazers in the world of professional ballet, the Five Moons contributed to the future of the art form by teaching the next generation of dancers and founding or leading several major ballet schools and companies, many of which are still active today.



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Moscelyne Larkin, a member of the Shawnee-Peoria tribe, co-founded the Tulsa Ballet with her husband, Roman Jasinski, in 1956. Rosella Hightower, of Choctaw descent, founded the Center for Classical Dance, in Cannes, France, in 1962, and in 1981, she became the first American director of the Paris Opera Ballet.

Yvonne Chouteau, of Shawnee and Cherokee heritage, established OU's Department of Dance, now the OU School of Dance, in 1963 with her husband, Miguel Terekhov. She also founded the Oklahoma City Civic Ballet, now known as Oklahoma City Ballet, in 1963.

This year's festival will have a special focus on honoring the Tallchief sisters, Maria and Marjorie, both of the Osage Nation. Maria Tallchief founded Chicago City Ballet in 1974.

Maria Tallchief is widely considered to be America's first prima ballerina. George Balanchine created several roles for her during her time as a principal dancer at New York City Ballet, including her signature *The Firebird*.

Marjorie Tallchief was the first Native American dancer to become a première danseuse étoile at the renowned Paris Opera Ballet. She served as the director of dance at the Harid Conservatory in Boca Raton, Florida, from 1989 to 1993. She was presented with a distinguished service award from OU in 1992. Marjorie Tallchief is the last surviving member of the Five Moons and resides in Boca Raton.

Excerpts from Wahzhazhe will be presented at the festival. Wahzhazhe was produced by Randy Tinker Smith and choreographed by Jenna Smith, both of Osage descent. Roman Jasinski (Shawnee, Peoria) acted as adviser on the project. The music for the ballet was composed by Lou Brock (Osage) and Joseph Rivers and arranged by Rivers. Costumes were designed and created by Wendy Ponca (Osage) and the late Terry Wann (Osage). Backdrop designer and painter was Alexandra Ponca Stock (Osage).

Stefanie Batten Bland, Jerome Robbins awardee, is an interdisciplinary global artist who interrogates contemporary and historical culture and situates her work at the intersections of dance-theatre, film and installation. A 2021 Baryshnikov Arts Center commissioned artist, and 2021 Toulmin Creator for New York University's Center for the Ballet Arts, Batten Bland is a choreographer for American Ballet Theatre's inaugural Women's Movement Initiative. She created Company SBB in Paris in 2008 and established it in New York City late in 2011.

Warren Queton, former tribal liaison at the OU Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Five Moons Dance Festival planning committee member, said, "A dance festival honoring and celebrating the legacy of the Five Moons ballerinas is long overdue. American Indian people are a dancing people and always have been. Dance is an important part of our identity. It is important to recognize and encourage talent aspiring to follow in the footsteps of the Five Moons and become ballet dancers and choreographers in a field where American Indians are an underrepresented population."

Tickets for the Five Moons Dance Festival are currently on sale. Tickets may be purchased by visiting ou.edu/finearts/universitytheatre or calling the OU Fine Arts Box Office at (405) 325-4101. More information about the festival can be found at dance.ou.edu/fivemoonsfest.

About the OU School of Dance: Originally founded in 1963 by former Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo principal dancers Yvonne Chouteau and Miguel Terekhov, the OU School of Dance is home to one of the leading programs in the nation for training in ballet and modern techniques. Undergraduate and graduate dance majors, along with



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general education students, total approximately 1,000 enrollees in dance classes per semester, which are held in the school's state-of-the-art facilities in the Donald W. Reynolds Performing Arts Center. The School of Dance boasts two active performing companies, Oklahoma Festival Ballet and Contemporary Dance Oklahoma, both of which perform works from the national repertoire as well as a variety of original works. For additional information, visit dance.ou.edu.

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