



**Ballet Austin Presents  
The World Premiere of  
*The Magic Flute*  
by Stephen Mills  
Featuring Innovative Design & Shadow Puppetry  
Set to Mozart's Masterpiece**

**WHO:** Ballet Austin  
Choreography by Stephen Mills  
Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Musical Accompaniment by The Austin Symphony  
Musical editing by Dr. Donald Grantham  
Set design by Michael Raiford  
Shadow play by Larry Reed and ShadowLight Productions  
Costume Design by Susan Branch Towne

**WHAT:** *The Magic Flute*

**WHEN:** May 6-7 at 8 p.m., May 8 at 3 p.m. (Mother's Day Weekend)

**WHERE:** The Long Center for the Performing Arts  
701 W. Riverside Drive, 512.457.5100

**TICKETS:** \$24 – \$74 at 512.457.2163, [www.balletaustin.org](http://www.balletaustin.org)  
At Ballet Austin's Box Office at 501 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street,  
10 a.m. – 6 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Saturday

**AUSTIN, Texas** — Austin is home to a new World Premiere as Ballet Austin brings the innovative work of Stephen Mills to the stage at The Long Center on Mother's Day Weekend with a new production of *The Magic Flute*. This world premiere is set to a commissioned re-imagining of Mozart's timeless classic, with a backdrop of visually arresting shadow puppetry and fantasy-invoking costumes. The creative collaboration between award-winning ShadowLight Productions, acclaimed costume designer Susan Branch Towne (*Cult of Color: Call to Color*, 2008) and the choreography and creation of Ballet Austin Artistic Director Stephen Mills reveals Mills' exquisite and delightful approach to this beloved classic.

Telling a story wrought with mythical creatures and fantastical imagery, this innovative new dance production of *The Magic Flute* draws audiences into a world where a flute has the power to change the hearts of men. The ballet tells the tale of the handsome Prince Tamino and Princess Pamina who must survive magical ordeals before they can be together. In the end, everyone celebrates the victory of light over evil.

When asked about the inspiration for this project, Mills recalls a 2009 trip to the *Venice Biennale*. Mills had been considering this story as a concept for a new ballet for several years, but was searching for a unique approach to translate this well-known opera into a ballet.

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Mills recalls, "While at the (Venice) fair, I noticed many film and installation artists creating their pieces through the use of shadow. It occurred to me that this approach might create the mysterious world of *The Magic Flute* and allow this new ballet some separation from its beloved predecessor." When Mills returned home, he immediately began researching US companies working with shadow puppetry. He continues, "Discovering ShadowLight Productions out of San Francisco opened a new world of possibilities for my vision for this world premiere." Working with ShadowLight, Mills created a unique world of fantasy in which this wonderful story unfolds.

In order to re-imagine Mozart's opera as a ballet score, Mills collaborated with Dr. Donald Grantham—composer and music professor at the University of Texas. Together they edited Mozart's original 4-hour long score into a dance length format of about 1.5 hours. Grantham's new score transforms the arias of the original production, allowing the interesting instrumentation and musical accompaniment of the Austin Symphony Orchestra to 'sing,' while the dancer's movement brings the score and the story to life.

*The Magic Flute* opening marks Mills' 11<sup>th</sup> full-length world premiere for the company. In support of the creation of the work, Ballet Austin was awarded a \$20,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in the category of "Access to Artistic Excellence."

## **SHADOWLIGHT PRODUCTIONS**

ShadowLight Productions was founded in 1972 to nurture indigenous shadow theater traditions and to explore and expand the possibilities of the shadow theatre medium by creating innovative interdisciplinary, multicultural works. The company has twice been awarded the UNIMA/USA Citation for Excellence from the International Puppetry Association. ShadowLight has also been nominated for a theatrical design award by the American Theater Wing.

## **SUSAN BRANCH TOWNE**

Susan Branch Towne's costume designs have been seen on stages across the country, including The Denver Center Theatre Company, New York City Opera, Pioneer Theatre Company (Salt Lake City), The Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Yale Repertory Theatre, Utah Shakespearean Festival, Skylight Opera Theatre (Milwaukee), Austin Lyric Opera, Madison Repertory Theatre, Virginia Stage Company, Zachary Scott Theatre (Austin), Ballet Austin, Lake George Opera Festival, Connecticut Repertory Theatre, New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, Riverside Theatre and Maltz Jupiter Theatre (Florida), Harvard and Cornell Universities, and for numerous companies Off-Broadway. She holds a BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University and an MFA from the Yale School of Drama.

## **DR. DONALD GRANTHAM, COMPOSER**

Professor of Composition at the University of Texas at Austin's Butler School of Music, Donald Grantham is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes in composition, including the Prix Lili Boulanger, the Nissim/ASCAP Orchestral Composition Prize, First Prize in the Concordia Chamber Symphony's Awards to American Composers, a Guggenheim Fellowship, three grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and

First Prize in the National Opera Association's Biennial Composition Competition. Dr. Grantham's music has been praised for its "elegance, sensitivity, lucidity of thought, clarity of expression and fine lyricism" in a Citation awarded by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

### **STEPHEN MILLS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

Mills has created more than 40 works for companies in the United States and abroad. His ballets are in the repertoires of such companies as The Atlanta Ballet, Washington Ballet, Cuballet in Havana, Cuba, BalletMet Columbus, The DaytonBallet, The Sarasota Ballet of Florida, Ballet Pacifica, Dallas Black Dance Theater, The Louisville Ballet, The Nashville Ballet, Fort Worth/Dallas Ballet and Kaleidoscope. He has worked in collaboration with such luminaries as the eight-time Grammy<sup>®</sup> Award-winning band, Asleep at the Wheel, and Shawn Colvin.

In addition to his work as a choreographer, Mr. Mills is committed as a master teacher to developing dancers. He has been a teacher at many pre-professional academies including Goucher College; Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing Arts in Dallas; The Virginia School of the Arts; The New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts; Stephens College and Point Park College in Pittsburgh. Mr. Mills also serves on the Board of Trustees of the national dance service organization, Dance USA. The 2010/11 Season marks Mr. Mills' 10<sup>th</sup> year as artistic director.

### **ABOUT BALLET AUSTIN**

As distinctive and dynamic as the city it calls home, Ballet Austin welcomes audiences near and far to participate in its "classically innovative" vision for the democratization of dance. With a rich history spanning five decades, acclaimed productions, and one of the nation's largest classical ballet academies, the organization is poised for an even greater future. From their new home at the Butler Dance Education Center and Community School in downtown Austin, Ballet Austin and artistic director Stephen Mills actively engage the community, dancers, and audiences alike. *The New York Times* proclaims Ballet Austin "a company with big ambitions" originating work that is "absorbing."

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

501 West Third Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

Box Office: 512.476.2163  
Academy: 512.476.9051  
General info: 512.476.9151  
Fax: 512.476.3973

**IMAGES:** Contact David Wyatt at david@wyattbrand.com and 512.450.4395 for print-ready, password-free images

**MEDIA:** For interviews, details contact David Wyatt at david@wyattbrand.com and 512.450.4395

**WEB:** [www.balletaustin.org](http://www.balletaustin.org)

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