

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Ballet Hispánico Presents**  
***Diálogos: Black Leadership – Post-Pandemic Reconstruction***  
Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 6:00pm

**Ballet Hispánico**, the nation's largest Latine/x/Hispanic cultural organization and one of America's Cultural Treasures, is thrilled to present ***Diálogos: Black Leadership – Post-Pandemic Reconstruction***, in honor of Black History Month, on Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 6:00pm at Ballet Hispánico's Penthouse Studio.

Ballet Hispánico's signature conversation series exploring the interconnections of the arts, social justice, and Latinx cultures, returns with ***Diálogos: Black Leadership - Post Pandemic Reconstruction***. Hosted by **Eduardo Vilaro**, Artistic Director & CEO, Ballet Hispánico, the panel will feature **Ayodele Casel**, Artist; **Angelo Pinto, Esq.**, Civil Rights Attorney; **Matthew Rushing**, Associate Artistic Director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; **Melissa Young**, Artistic Director, Dallas Black Dance Theatre; moderated by **Tamia Blackman-Santana**, Chief Engagement and Inclusion Officer, Ballet Hispánico. Doors open at 6:00pm, with the panel starting at 6:30pm, followed by a reception at 7:30pm.

Advance registration is requested for this free event - please visit <https://www.ballethispanico.org/community/community-arts-partnerships/community/dialogos>. Seating is general admission and early arrival is recommended.

**Ayodele Casel**, a Doris Duke Artist in the dance category, is an award-winning and critically acclaimed tap dancer and choreographer named one of *The New York Times*' "biggest breakout stars of 2019." Born in The Bronx and raised in Puerto Rico, her practice centers highly narrative works rooted in expressions of selfhood, culture and legacy.

Her projects include her concert and Bessie Award-winning film "Chasing Magic," her one-woman show "While I Have the Floor," and her theatrical and film series "Diary of a Tap Dancer." She serves as a tap choreographer for the Broadway revival of "Funny Girl," which garnered her a 2022 Drama Desk nomination for Outstanding Choreography. A frequent New York City Center collaborator, she created an interactive show for their inaugural "On the Move" five-borough tour and is one of their 2023 featured "Artists at the Center." Her collaboration with Grammy award-winning Latin jazz composer and pianist Arturo O'Farrill is hailed by *The New York Times* as "next level" and "thrilling."

Casel has performed at The White House, Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall, Madison Square Garden, and Off-Broadway with Savion Glover as the only woman in

his touring company N.Y.O.T.s. (Not Your Ordinary Tappers). Her works have been presented at The Joyce Theater, Lincoln Center, New York City Center, Symphony Space, Dance Theater Workshop, The Triad Theater and Joe's Pub at The Public Theater, among others.

**Angelo Pinto, Esq.** has been called a Social Justice warrior, policy guru, movement lawyer and one of the most brilliant minds of our time by some of today's most notable, respected leaders of the social justice movement. He is not only a critical voice in the fight for social change, but a leader who has created prolific impact, built movement institutions, and played a pivotal role in creating and elevating key movement issues.

Attorney Pinto co-created a teach-in at Occupy Wall Street on the prison industrial complex spurring a young movement around criminal justice reform now a national issue. He also co-founded Justice League NYC; a task force of the Gathering for Justice – an organization started by global activist entertainer Harry Belafonte. Justice League led mass demonstrations during the Eric Garner uprisings. In addition, Pinto has lent his expertise to procuring the freedom of rapper Meek Mill, elevating the profile of the NYPD (12 officers who sued the NYPD featured in the full feature documentary Crime and Punishment), helped start the Indigenous Peoples Movement/March that now boasts a social media following of well over a quarter million individuals globally; as well as creating the legislative campaign to Raise the Age of criminal responsibility in New York States which ended the housing of youth in adult jails and prisons which ultimately claimed the life of Kalief Browder and altered the lives of the Exonerated 5.

**Matthew Rushing** was born in Los Angeles, California. He began his dance training with Kashmir Blake in Inglewood, California, and continued his training at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. He is the recipient of a Spotlight Award and a Dance Magazine Award and was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. He was a scholarship student at The Ailey School and later became a member of Ailey II. During his career Mr. Rushing has performed as a guest artist for galas in Vail, Colorado, as well as in Austria, Canada, France, Italy, and Russia. He has performed for Presidents George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, as well as at the 2010 White House Dance Series. During his time with the Company, he has choreographed four ballets: Acceptance In Surrender (2005), a collaboration with Hope Boykin and Abdur-Rahim Jackson; Uptown (2009), a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance; ODETTA (2014), a celebration of “the queen of American folk music”; and Testament (2020), a tribute to Alvin Ailey's Revelations created in collaboration with Clifton Brown and Yusha-Marie Sorzano. In 2012 he created Moan, which was set on Philadanco and premiered at The Joyce Theater. Mr. Rushing joined the Company in 1992, became Rehearsal Director 2010, and became Associate Artistic Director in January 2020.

**Melissa M. Young** is a Honduran American raised in Santa Ana, California. Melissa is celebrating her thirtieth season with Dallas Black Dance Theatre (DBDT). Young started her career at DBDT as a dancer for eleven years, then moved up the ranks as Rehearsal Director, Academy Director, Associate Artistic Director, Interim Artistic Director, and was appointed as Artistic Director in September 2018. Her most notable performances include The Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors, and for the U.S. Ambassadors to Ireland and Zimbabwe. She has restaged and rehearsed the diverse repertoire of DBDT, which spans over 100 ballets. She was an Assistant to the

Choreographers, Hope Clarke for The Dallas Opera's Porgy and Bess and Christopher L. Huggins for Dallas Theater Center's production of The Wiz. Melissa is most proud of thoughtfully leading DBDT through the pandemic by using the many restrictions as a guide to push the boundaries of her imagination into a creative reality.

Melissa is a graduate of the Leadership Arts Institute, Class of 2022, a program of Business Council for the Arts in Dallas County. She is a member of the International Association of Blacks in Dance, Inc. Melissa has served as an advisory panelist for arts organizations that include the City of Dallas Office of Arts and Culture, Texas Commission on the Arts and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, and is a former board member for the Dance Council of North Texas.

**Tamia Blackman-Santana** is an advocate for dance and the arts. Previously she was Executive Director of the Brooklyn Dance Festival, owner of Jete Dance Center, Resident Dance Director of the Brooklyn Museum, Co-Founder and Executive Producer of the Tap Family Reunion Festival, and producer and Steering committee member of the televised Bessie's New York Dance and Performance Awards. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Santana now raises her own family there. She serves on the Board of Directors for One Brooklyn to the Brooklyn Borough President, Eric Adams, and READ 718. As a prominent concert dance and performance producer, Santana has executive produced and directed concerts and events at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Alvin Ailey Theater, Summer Stage, and The Schomburg Center Barclay's Center, as well as for music artists such as Big Daddy Kane, Thomas Piper, and more. Her previous experience as a dancer has been performing at Madison Square Garden, Carnegie Hall, The Apollo Theater, Lincoln Center, and Europe.

**Eduardo Vilaro** joined Ballet Hispánico as Artistic Director in August 2009, becoming only the second person to head the company since it was founded in 1970. In 2015, Mr. Vilaro took on the additional role of Chief Executive Officer of Ballet Hispánico. He has been part of the Ballet Hispánico family since 1985 as a dancer and educator, after which he began a ten-year record of achievement as founder and Artistic Director of Luna Negra Dance Theater in Chicago. Mr. Vilaro has infused Ballet Hispánico's legacy with a bold and eclectic brand of contemporary dance that reflects America's changing cultural landscape.

Born in Cuba and raised in New York from the age of six, he is a frequent speaker on the merits of cultural diversity and dance education. Mr. Vilaro's own choreography is devoted to capturing the spiritual, sensual, and historical essence of Latino cultures. He created over 20 ballets for Luna Negra and has received commissions from the Ravinia Festival, the Chicago Sinfonietta, the Grant Park Festival, the Lexington Ballet, and the Chicago Symphony. In 2001, he was a recipient of a Ruth Page Award for choreography, and in 2003, he was honored for his choreographic work at Panama's II International Festival of Ballet.

Mr. Vilaro was inducted into the Bronx Walk of Fame in 2016 and was awarded HOMBRE Magazine's 2017 Arts & Culture Trailblazer of the Year. In 2019, Mr. Vilaro was the recipient of the West Side Spirit's WESTY Award, was honored by WNET for his contributions to the arts, and most recently, was the recipient of the James W. Dodge Foreign Language Advocate Award. In 2022 and 2023, Mr. Vilaro was included

in Crain's New York lists of Notable Hispanic Leaders and Notable LGBTQ Leaders; and was acknowledged as one of Forbes' Kings of Culture, Legends of Business.

**Ballet Hispánico** is the largest Latine/x/Hispanic cultural organization in the United States and one of America's Cultural Treasures. Ballet Hispánico's three main programs, the Company, School of Dance, and Community Arts Partnerships, bring communities together to celebrate the multifaceted Hispanic diasporas. Ballet Hispánico's New York City headquarters provide the physical home and cultural heart for Latinx dance in the United States. It is a space that initiates new inclusive cultural conversations and explores the intersectionality of Latine cultures. The Ballet Hispánico mission opens a platform for new social dialogue, and nurtures and sees a community in its fullness. Through its exemplary artistry, distinguished training program, and deep-rooted community engagement, Ballet Hispánico champions and amplifies Latine voices in the field. For over fifty years Ballet Hispánico has provided a place of honor for the omitted, overlooked, and othered. As it looks to the future, Ballet Hispánico is pushing the culture forward on issues of dance and Latine creative expression.

Ballet Hispánico's Community Arts Partnerships engage and enrich communities through innovative experiences in dance and culture.

Ballet Hispánico's Community Arts Partnerships program is supported, in part, by Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations and the Fund for the City of New York, The Hearst Foundations, Louise and Ardé Bulova Fund, Con Edison, Burke & Company, Goldie Anna Charitable Trust, The Bay and Paul Foundations, May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation Inc., and by public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

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