

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Julie Hebb (Artistic Director) brings with her decades of experience performing, teaching, choreographing, and staging original ballet, modern, jazz, and contemporary works in New York City, the greater Boston area, and northern New England. With her deep foundation in various ballet techniques, predominantly the Russian Vaganova style, along with her wide experiences in contemporary training that includes Paul Taylor, Lester Horton, Rebecca Kelly, Jennifer Muller, and others, she brings to The Dance Annex a relevance in training that is essential for today's dancers. Ms. Hebb received her training at Boston Ballet, Hartford Ballet, Ballet Theater of Boston, STEPS, Marjorie Mussman, Madame Gabriela Darvash, City Center Studios, Peridance, and the Paul Taylor School. She moved from Boston to New York City where she taught and performed principal roles with Rebecca Kelly Ballet from 1992-2006, and was ballet mistress for the company and assistant to the director for choreography, workshops, and summer programs. Ms. Hebb performed as guest artist for North Country Ballet Ensemble, Impulse Dance Company and North Atlantic Ballet of Boston, MA; Several Dancers Core of Atlanta, GA; and other ballet, modern, and musical theater companies throughout the Northeast. In New York, Ms. Hebb taught at STEPS NYC, Joffrey Ballet School, Berest Dance Studio, Garden City Community Dance Project, and Rebecca Kelly Ballet. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in a combined major of Psychology and Exercise Science from Brooklyn College. After returning to New England, she began teaching at studios in and around New Hampshire and Maine. Ms. Hebb founded The Dance Annex Studio in Kittery in the Fall of 2012 and Annex Contemporary Dance Company (ACDC), the studio's resident troupe of professionals, in 2016. ACDC has produced multiple evening-length concerts at The Dance Hall in Kittery, Maine, and has collaborated with many local and visiting artists and musicians from the New England area and NYC. The Company has presented original work at The Music Hall in Portsmouth, NH, the Ogunquit Performing Arts Center, Jose Mateo's Dance for World Community Festival in Cambridge, MA, and Lila Dance Festival in Rochester, NH.

Naomi Sawyer (Sugar Plum Fairy, Nov 24-26; Snow Queen & Dew Drop Fairy, Dec 2-3) received her early training in ballet, tap and jazz under Kay Welch in Lyndonville, Vermont, with summer intensives at Broadway Dance Center, the Joffrey ballet in NYC and the Boston Ballet School. As a student in Boston Ballet's training program, she performed in Boston ballet's *Nutcracker* and *Sleeping Beauty*, and went on to perform with the Orchesis Dance troupe while attending her physical therapy studies at the University of Vermont. Naomi has been performing with the Northeastern Ballet Theatre since 2013 under the direction of Edra Toth with soloist roles in *Le Corsaire*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Nutcracker*, and several lead roles including Wilhelmina in *Dracula*, Anna in *The Snow Queen*, Katrina in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Sugar Plum Fairy, Maria in *The Sound of Music*, and Odette/Odile in *Swan Lake*. She had made guest appearances as Sugar Plum Fairy, including with Dance Annex. She is a homeschooling mother of two, and works as a licensed physical therapist providing neuro and vestibular rehab, as well as physical therapy specialized for the needs of dancers, including per diem for the Boston Ballet company. Naomi is passionate about injury prevention, bringing together her knowledge as a therapist with her experience as a dancer to help other dancers fulfill their potential and "dance longer, dance stronger!"

Assaf Benchetrit (Cavalier, Nov 24-26; Snow King, Dec 2-3) began his dance and music studies at the Rubin Academy for Music and Dance in Jerusalem, Israel. Upon graduation, he danced with the Jerusalem Dance Theater, the Panov Ballet, and later with The Israeli National Ballet Company.

During his military service, Assaf received the “Remarkable Dancer” prize from the Israeli government which allowed him to continue dancing while serving. After completing his military service, he arrived to United States to dance with companies such as The Joffrey, Metropolitan Classical Ballet, Alabama Ballet, Connecticut Ballet, Portland Ballet and Gelsey Kirkland Ballet. Throughout his career, Assaf toured through England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and numerous other countries. Assaf holds a joint B.S in computer science and B.F.A in dance degrees with academic honors from Montclair State University, and an M.F.A degree in dance from Hollins/ADF/ Frankfurt. He is currently an Associate Professor of Theatre and Dance at the University of New Hampshire, and was a faculty member at Yale University, Columbia University (Barnard College), Rutgers University, Montclair State University, and Raritan Valley Community College.

Kirsten Evans (Sugar Plum Fairy, Dec 2-3) is a freelance dancer based in NYC and Providence, RI. She danced professionally at Festival Ballet Providence (now Ballet RI) for 13 years, performing a wide repertoire of principal roles in both classical and contemporary works including those by George Balanchine, Christopher Wheeldon, Trey McIntyre, and Annabelle Lopez Ochoa. She is also the founder and director of the dance/music collaborative Revolve Dance Project.

Alex Lantz (Cavalier, Dec 2-3) was born in Rockford Illinois and started dancing with the Rockford Dance Company when he was seven. He then moved to Canada and trained at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School and subsequently joined the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company in 2010. Lantz then came to Festival Ballet Providence in 2012. He has performed works by Mihailo Djuric, Viktor Plotnikov, George Balanchine, Christopher Wheeldon, Twyla Tharp, Jiri Kylián, Ilya Kozadayev, Dominic Walsh, Mauricio Wainrot, Mark Gotten, Yuri Yanowsky, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Trey McIntyre, Chanel DaSilva, and Helen Pickett.

Jonathan Donahue (Nutcracker Prince, Nov 24-26), an improv dancer since he was twelve, began dancing ballet in 2019 during his sophomore year at the University of New Hampshire. That same year, he performed in his first Nutcracker production with Great Bay Academy of Dance. Jonathan has since performed with Northeastern Ballet Theatre, the University of New Hampshire’s Ballet Company, and with choreographer Junichi Fukuda at the Lila Dance Festival. He is currently working toward becoming a certified English teacher and hopes to continue dancing! This is his first season with The Dance Annex’s The Nutcracker.

Don Goettler (Herr Drosselmeyer) is thrilled to be on stage performing again with this phenomenal cast and powerhouse production. At the age of 7 he caught the performing bug with a production of The Nutcracker and has continued to entertain audiences in theater and dance across New England ever since. Some recent theater credits include Anthony Reilly in *Outside Mullingar*, Murray Burns in *A Thousand Clowns*. Ed Boone in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (Best Production winner of 2019 New England Theater Awards) In 2016, Don received a NH Spotlight Award for Best Supporting Actor for the role of Uday Hussain in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* and in 2017, he won a NH Spotlight award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Lyndon B Johnson in *All The Way*. Don would like to thank you for being here today and also to encourage you to go see and support our massively creative and talented performing arts scene here in the Seacoast! Enjoy!

Angela Grassie (Snow Queen, Nov 24-26; Ballerina Doll, Dec 2-3; Peppermint) has been dancing since the age of two at Corinne’s School of Dance in Rochester, NH. She studied at Steps On Broadway and Broadway Dance Center in New York City, and received a full scholarship for the

Rockette Summer Intensive. Angela was a Rockette Teacher Assistant for the weekend Rockette Experiences and the Rockette Summer Intensives for over two years, and performed at Radio City Music Hall. She recently studied precision dance under Rhonda Malkin in NYC. Angela has danced professionally for Ballet New England, The Dance Annex/ACDC, Great Bay Academy of Dance and in Sole City Dance's The Nutcracker. Her favorite roles include Snow Queen, Spanish Soloist, Peppermint Lead, Queen of Hearts, the Lilac Fairy and Dew Drop Fairy. Angela has choreographed for Pippin, Dog Fight, and Jesus Christ Superstar at the Player's Ring in Portsmouth, NH. She is the proud co-owner of Corinne's School of Dance and loves teaching all styles of dance. In 2017, Angela founded CSD Ballet Company and has since directed The Sleeping Beauty, Alice In Wonderland, and The Wizard of OZ.

Shelbea Makela (Mouse Queen, Mouse Doll, Tea Lead) has been dancing since the age of two and began taking classes at Dance It Up! dance studio in Massachusetts. There, she trained in ballet, pointe, contemporary and jazz. She participated in summer classes and intensives taught by Kaitlyn Salisbury (creator of MOVE dance intensive) and Tucker Knox (a top contestant on So You Think You Can Dance Season 10), as well as many other guest choreographers. Through various studios she has performed in the Nutcracker, Sleeping Beauty, Alice in Wonderland, and Giselle. Shelbea started assistant teaching beginner ballet classes in 2013 and through dance, found her passion for working with children. She taught as a preschool teacher at the Academy of Little Learners in York, Maine for five years. Shelbea recently graduated from the University of Southern Maine in May 2022 with her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, and is currently a 2nd grade teacher. This is her sixth season dancing with The Dance Annex.

Nathan Moyer (Snow King, Nov 24-26; Peppermint) is originally from Concord, NH and began his dance training at Colby-Sawyer College at the age of 18. He studied in Paris with Wells College for the Arts, and graduated with a degree in theatre and dance from the University of New Hampshire. Nathan performed with Ballet New England in 2005 and 2006, and furthered his training at the Joffrey Ballet School in New York City. In late 2006, Nathan moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina and was accepted into the Teatro Colon's men's ballet program. He currently spends his time performing and teaching as a guest artist throughout New England, and in Argentina. Nathan is the founder and director of DanceAbroad Argentina and co-founder of the Lila Dance Festival. www.liladancefestival.com

Olivia Robbins (Spanish Chocolate; Flower, Dec 2-3) is a professional dancer and Pilates instructor on the Seacoast of NH. She began her training with Peterborough Dance Theatre at the age of 13. At 16, she continued here on the Seacoast at Great Bay Academy of Dance. For the rest of her training years, before becoming a professional ballet dancer with Safe Haven Ballet for two seasons in 2021, she expanded her education at various companies; Northeastern Ballet Theatre, University of New Hampshire with their Ballet Company, and Safe Haven Ballet. To become a more diverse dancer and artist, Olivia attended various workshops and intensives at The Block Collaborative, NSquared, STYX The Company, Ballet RI and more. In Spring 2022, she dipped her toes into the theater world working and choreographing with New World Theatre, playing the lead of "The Unborn" in David Beardsley's world premiere of "Holy and Unruly." Olivia has the experience of teaching Ballet and strengthening/conditioning to all levels, first co-teaching Pre Ballet at GBAD and most recently teaching Mommy and Me, additionally Creative Movement at SHB. She loves storytelling and connecting her emotions and her own story to her dancing; to bring beauty, grace and passion to audiences and people of all ages.

Ian Rodgers (Arabian Coffee; Nutcracker Prince, Dec 2-3) began dancing at the age of 19 when he took his first ballet class at the University of New Hampshire. What began as just a way to fulfill the college art gen-ed requirement quickly changed into a passion for artistic expression through movement. Ian credits his ability to start dancing later in life to the many years spent practicing and teaching gymnastics, which helped to develop instincts for body control and spatial awareness. Over the years his love of dance has grown into a diverse professional career collaborating with many studios and professional dancers across the Seacoast area. Though ballet is the foundation of his dance training, Ian has also studied contemporary ballet, modern, Ballroom, Latin, and traditional folklore dance styles. When he's not dancing, Ian enjoys spending his free time being active outdoors and is a serious nature enthusiast. He has a degree in Zoology and works for a federal land conservation agency protecting farms and wetlands across the country.

Stephanie Salmi-Pepin (Spanish Chocolate; Snowflake; Flower) was born in Miami, FL and began her training with Ballet Master, Orsino del Valle and was later accepted to the Miami City Ballet School. At the age of fourteen, she was granted full scholarship to continue her pre-professional training at the HARID Conservatory in Boca Raton, Florida graduating four years later as her class Valedictorian. Stephanie attended various summer intensives throughout her training including the National Russian Ballet Seminar, the HARID Conservatory, North Carolina School of the Arts, The Hartford Ballet, and The Milwaukee Ballet School. In 2001 Stephanie joined the Montgomery Ballet in Alabama and in 2002 the Arts Ballet Theatre of Florida, under the direction of Vladimir Issaev. Before relocating to Greenville, Maine in 2010, she danced as a principal in the 2009 production of The Nutcracker for Ballet Wichita in Kansas. In the spring of 2010, Stephanie was asked to choreograph and later became the dance coach for the Hutchinson Community College's rendition of "Chicago". In 2018, while running a nonprofit, Greenville School for the Arts, with her now Husband, John, Stephanie toured throughout Maine with The Robinson Ballet completing their Nutcracker Season at the Collins Center with The Bangor Symphony Orchestra in Orono, ME. In addition to Stephanie's dance training background and professional performance experience, she has been on staff or served as a guest instructor at various dance schools, including The Dancexchange, The Montgomery Ballet School, Artistree, The Pointe School of Dance, Wichita School of Performing Arts (WSPA), Bethal College Academy of Performing Arts (BCAPA), and close to home at the Piscataquis Regional YMCA as their dance program instructor and later at the Boothbay Regional YMCA and Montessori School. Currently, she teaches ballet at TNT Dance Studio in Fairfield, ME. From 2020 - 2023, Stephanie took a step aside from the stage and studio to care for the needs of her family. She continues to do so, but was fortunate to be able to perform again with The Dance Annex Studio's The Nutcracker Ballet. Stephanie maintains loving support of her husband John and 17 year old daughter, Kristalyn. Stephanie is looking forward to the opportunity to perform again with The Dance Annex Studio. It has been a fulfillment beyond measure to share space in the studio with the dancers of this company and with the encouragement of Artistic Director, Julie Hebb. Over the course of the past few years, "I have learned to never take even one day for granted."

Meghan McCoy Seedner (Dew Drop Fairy, Nov 24-26) received her early training at the Portsmouth School of Ballet, and spent summers at the Joffrey Ballet in NYC and Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre in Cambridge, MA. She received her BA in Theatre and Dance from the University of New Hampshire. Meghan joined the Portland Ballet Company as an apprentice for their 2010-11 season, and was promoted to company dancer in 2011. During her time with Portland Ballet, she performed in many classical and contemporary works. In 2013, she joined the Teatrul de Balet Sibiu, in Romania. Upon returning to the States, Meghan began her teaching career and continued dancing as a guest

artist with Portland Ballet and other companies and schools across the Seacoast. As a teacher now for 10 years, she enjoys training dancers of all ages in both classical and contemporary ballet.

Janelle Abbott Staley (Arabian Coffee) is a dancer and educator based in southern Maine. She has performed on stages nationally and internationally with dance companies, in theatre, and in film. In New York City, Janelle danced with Andrew Palermo and Taye Diggs' *dre.dance*, *Slam* (rehearsal assistant), *Terra Firma Dance Theatre*, Adam Cates, John Byrne, and *Ollom Dance*, among others. On screen, she was featured in Elton John's *The Red Piano* concert (soloist in "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me"), and in Norah Jones' "Those Sweet Words" music video, both directed by David LaChapelle. Janelle has performed at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, and on Broadway stages in *Broadway Cares' Red Bucket Follies* (award-winner with *Aida* cast) and *Easter Bonnet*, and off-Broadway in *Bacharach to the Future* (New World Stages) and *Broadway Bares* (assistant choreographer). Her regional credits include Shakespeare Theatre Company's *Twelfth Night* directed by Tony Award-winner Rebecca Taichman and choreographed by Seán Curran, *Peter Pan* at the Sondheim Center (Tiger Lily/Dance Captain), *A Chorus Line*, and *Cabaret*. Most recently, Janelle has worked with Boston-based artists Peter DiMuro/Public Displays of Motion, Lorraine Chapman, and Kat Nasti Dance. She is a currently member of Articine, a touring company that integrates performance and arts education with healthcare. Janelle began her early career as a company member of the Grand Rapids Ballet in Michigan, and went on to receive a BFA in Ballet from the University of Utah. She has taught at Broadway Dance Center, Steps on Broadway, and has lead master classes around the country. A certified Pilates instructor, Janelle has trained celebrity clientele at top fitness studios in NYC and Boston and has led movement workshops for Audible and Amazon in Seattle, WA. Janelle is a board member of Lila Dance Festival, an annual summer dance event that presents dance artists from around New England. Since 2016, she has been a faculty member of The Dance Annex, where she has had the great fortune of working closely with Julie Hebb. Janelle's favorite role of all time is Mom to her daughters Willoughby and Penelope. She is thrilled to get to perform alongside them in *The Nutcracker*. Thank you, Julie! And thanks to Bill, for being the greatest dance husband & Dance Dad!

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