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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY - AKRON AND THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON SCHOOL OF DANCE, THEATRE, AND ARTS ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCE THE FALL 2021 COMMUNITY COMMISSIONING RESIDENCY



Jennifer Stahl and Ben Needham-Wood rehearsing AVOIDANCE (Maximillian Tortoriello).

AKRON, OH (September 28, 2021) — **The National Center for Choreography - Akron (NCCAakron) and The University of Akron School of Dance, Theatre, and Arts Administration (DTAA)** are proud to announce this year's **Community Commissioning Residency**, the annual fall phase of **Ideas in Motion** program. The 2021 Community Commissioning Residency artist is **Ben Needham-Wood** (San

Francisco, CA), selected for his choreographic research intersecting mental health and communal dance exchange.

The Community Commissioning Residency process invited The University of Akron School of Dance, Theatre, and Arts Administration faculty and NCCAkron team members to nominate working choreographers to apply for this opportunity. Artist applications were reviewed by an Artist Selection Committee including members from The University of Akron dance faculty, students, and NCCAkron. The Artist Selection Committee chose Ben Needham-Wood as the 2021 Community Commissioning Residency artist for his extensive practice and knowledge of dance, his interest in centering mental health in his choreographic research, and his excitement to engage The University of Akron dance students through a community-driven process.

“The focus on mental health resonated with the university’s students and faculty with the return to campus and navigating the often potent mental and physical demands that come with being a college student and a dancer,” explains **NCCAkron Program Manager Kat Wentz**. “The intersection of dance and mental health is even more timely to explore after a year of psychological turmoil navigating COVID, the rise in social justice movements, and witnessing the immense pressure put on athletes coming to a head with women like Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka speaking out.”

From October 11 - 22, Needham-Wood will serve as a guest teacher for The University of Akron’s Ballet V-VIII course. “I am excited to have Ben working alongside my students this semester,” says **Assistant Professor Colleen Barnes**. “The experience is going to be rich with new opportunities and views for these students to launch into their own research and exploration.”

“With this residency, I am excited to explore how my recent research on the body’s capacity to influence our mental health can be integrated into a communal dance exchange,” Ben Needham-Wood. “During my time on the ground in Akron for the residency, I’ll be engaging Akron community members to gather their expertise and inform my choreographic research.”

In addition to Needham-Wood’s guest teaching, he will engage university and greater Akron community members through conversations concerning the body, psychology, and substance abuse. During his residency, Needham-Wood will meet with **Dr. Judith Juvancic-Heltzel** (Associate Professor; Interim School Director, Fellow, Institute for Life-span Development & Gerontology at The University of Akron), **Marc Lee Shannon** (Musician and Author of *The Devil Strip’s Sober Chronicles*), **Dr. Linda Subich** (Acting

Dean of Buchtel College of Arts & Sciences at The University of Akron).
Needham-Wood will also visit the **Cummings Center for the History of Psychology** and **Dr. Bob's Home**, a historic house museum that belonged to one of the cofounders of Alcoholics Anonymous, to visit the organizations' museums and archives.

Two artistic collaborators, **Sadie Brown** (Aspen, CO) and **Weston Krukow** (New York, NY), will join Needham-Wood for this residency. With them, he will choreograph movements and explore concepts introduced through the Akron community conversations and engagements.

Ideas in Motion is a joint initiative to engage The University of Akron students and the greater Akron community with today's working dance artists. Ideas in Motion is supported by NCCAkron, The University of Akron, The University of Akron Foundation, and the Mary Schiller Myers Lecture Series in the Arts. The initiative began in the spring of 2020 with the capsule series "21st Century Dance Practices", which has brought 17 choreographers from 11 cities including San Francisco, Minneapolis, and New York.

To continue this work, NCCAkron initiated the Community Commissioning Residency as the annual fall phase of Ideas in Motion. Last year, choreographer, filmmaker, and screendance expert Cara Hagan was selected as the inaugural Community Commissioning Residency. During her residency, Hagan guest taught the dance program's Choreography I class engaging students in the creation of their own short dance films, which then premiered during an event hosted by NCCAkron in December 2020. As part of the community commissioning component of her residency, Hagan and her artistic collaborators explored artistic surrogacy working long-distance across 5 cities and created a collection of short dance films that premiered on Juneteenth 2021 .

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About NCCAkron

The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron supports the research and development of new work in dance by exploring the full potential of the creative process. In addition to offering studio and technical residencies to make new work, activities focus on catalyzing dialogue and experimentation; creating proximity among artists and dance thinkers; and aggregating resources around dance making. For more information, visit nccakron.org.

The establishment and general operation of NCCAkron are made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

About Ideas in Motion

Ideas in Motion is a joint initiative supported by NCCAkron, The University of Akron, The University of Akron Foundation, and the Mary Schiller Myers Lecture Series in the Arts. The annual fall phase of Ideas in Motion is the Community Commissioning Residency, where a nominated and selected artist engages and works across the community. The spring phase of Ideas in Motion is a capsule series called “21st Century Dance Practices”, where working dance artists are invited to guest teach classes in a dance course at The University of Akron.

About The University of Akron School of Dance, Theatre & Arts Administration

The University of Akron School of Dance, Theatre, and Arts Administration (DTAA) prepares students for successful performing, academic, and administrative careers in the arts. Its diverse student body works with distinguished, award-winning faculty in classes that offer technical training, theoretical study, practical experience, and creative skill-building. The Dance Program offers both a B.F.A. and B.A. with Business Cognate. The school’s M.A. in Arts Administration provides students the education necessary to work in all disciplines of the non-profit arts. DTAA is headed by Marc Reed, D.M.A., who also directs the School of Music. For more information, visit uakron.edu/dtaa/.

About the Mary Schiller Myers Lecture Series in the Arts

Ideas in Motion is made possible by the support of The University of Akron Foundation’s Mary Schiller Myers Lecture Series in the Arts. NCCAkron is grateful to Stephen E. Myers, trustee of the University of Akron Foundation and the Myers Foundation and son of Mary Schiller Myers, for his support. Established in 1979 under the sponsorship of the Mary and Louis S. Myers Foundation, this endowed lecture series brings significant representatives of the arts to campus and community annually, to share their particular talents with students, faculty, and residents of the community. These events can include performances, lectures, and masterclasses.

Biography

Ben Needham-Wood (San Francisco, CA)

Ben Needham-Wood is a San Francisco-based choreographer, filmmaker, and dance educator. As a performing artist with the Louisville Ballet, he was elected company representative, advocating for the organization’s dancers in the company’s strategic planning. In San Francisco, Ben took on the role of rehearsal assistant for Smuin Contemporary Ballet. In his rehearsal assistant capacity, Ben helped run rehearsals, teaching company classes and repertoire, and fielding audition applications from potential future hires. In 2018 Ben was appointed as the first-ever artistic fellow of Amy

Seiwert's Imagery. This position affords Ben mentorship from both managing director, Annika Presley, and artistic director, Amy Seiwert, on the operations and leadership practices necessary to sustain a small, non-profit arts company. bneedhamwood.com