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**Media Contact**

Leslie Rivers

(414) 902-2102

[lrivers@milwaukeeballet.org](mailto:lrivers@milwaukeeballet.org)



**MILWAUKEE BALLET COMBINES AFRICAN MOVEMENT  
AND CLASSICAL DANCE IN *LAMBARENA***

***-Groundbreaking work to be presented alongside two world premieres, April 4-7-***

**MILWAUKEE – March 7, 2019** – Milwaukee Ballet presents Val Caniparoli’s lively *Lambarena* April 4-7, 2019 at the Marcus Performing Arts Center. This innovative work weaves classical ballet with African movement in a joyous celebration of dance. *Lambarena* makes its Milwaukee debut leading a mixed repertory program that also features world premieres from English choreographer George Williamson and Italian choreographer Enrico Morelli, both of whom were finalists in Milwaukee Ballet’s *Genesis* competition in 2017.

“*Lambarena* showcases our long-cherished belief that dance is universal. I’m pleased to offer our artists and patrons the opportunity to experience this philosophy first hand,” said Milwaukee Ballet Artistic Director Michael Pink. “Connecting communities is a core component of our mission, and *Lambarena* is uniquely suited to bring people of various backgrounds together for a shared experience that will leave them inspired.”

Premiering in 1995, Val Caniparoli’s groundbreaking ballet was inspired by a composition that merges music from Johann Sebastian Bach with melodies from the Gabon region of West Africa. The score was originally created as an homage to Albert Schweitzer by composer Pierre Akendengué and arranger Hughes de Courson. Schweitzer is highly regarded for his medical missionary work in Africa, where he founded a hospital in the Gabonese city of Lambaréné in 1913. A Bach enthusiast, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.

Caniparoli saw the music as bridging a cultural divide and wanted the dance to convey the same feeling. “The score is a marriage of these two kinds of music, and I wanted the choreography to be the same thing. I wanted to show that you can do either kind of movement to both kinds of music,” he said.

He recruited distinguished African dancer/choreographers Zakariya Sao Diouf and Naomi Geo Johnson-Washington as advisors to ensure the authenticity of the movement.

Dancer Roxy Kess and musician Yaya Kambaye of Xalaat Africa Drum and Dance for Life are teaching a series of African Dance classes to the Company, Milwaukee Ballet II and School & Academy during the *Lambarena* rehearsal process. Kess and Kambaye will also teach an open class for the community March 30, 2019 at Milwaukee Ballet’s current headquarters, the Jodi Peck Center.

*Lambarena* has been performed in more than 20 cities in the United States as well as an engagement in South Africa. In 1997, it was nominated for the Prix Benois de la Danse for Best Choreography.

Celebrated American choreographer Val Caniparoli began his career at San Francisco Ballet, where he premiered his most famous works, *Lambarena* and *Lady of the Camellias*, and still dances as a principal character dancer. He has contributed to the repertoires of more than 50 dance companies internationally and served as resident choreographer for Ballet West (1993-97) and Tulsa Ballet (2001-06).

*Lambarena* will be staged by Maiqui Mañosa. Milwaukee Ballet has also presented Caniparoli's *Gustav's Rooster* (2009) and *Blades of Grass* (world premiere, 2010).

*Lambarena* appears alongside world premieres from international, award-winning choreographers Enrico Morelli and George Williamson.

"George Williamson and Enrico Morelli are superb examples of the talent we discover through our international choreographic competition, *Genesis*," said Pink. "Both premiered memorable pieces in 2017, and I'm excited to see what they will create next."

George Williamson presented his first work for English National Ballet, *Firebird*, in 2012 at the London Coliseum. In 2013, he choreographed *Tempus* for The Queen's Coronation Festival at Buckingham Palace. Since winning *Genesis*, Williamson became first-ever recipient of the BRB Ballet Now commission, an initiative between Birmingham Royal Ballet and Sadler's Wells.

Enrico Morelli won several choreographic competitions throughout Italy and received the Silver Medal of the President of the Italian Republic in recognition for his accomplishments as a dancer. Morelli remains a dancer/choreographer at Italy's MM Contemporary Dance Company and the Artistic Director of the Junior Company Agora Coaching Project.

### **Tickets and Sponsors**

*Lambarena* runs April 4-7, 2019 at the Marcus Performing Arts Center, 929 N Water Street, Milwaukee. The performance schedule is as follows:

- **Thursday, April 4, 7:30pm**
- **Friday, April 5, 7:30pm**
- **Saturday, April 7:30pm**
- **Sunday, April 7, 2:00pm**

To order, call 414-902-2103 or visit [milwaukeeballet.org](http://milwaukeeballet.org). Tickets also available through the Marcus Center box office. *Lambarena* is sponsored by Stanley Kritzik. The 2018-19 season is presented by Donna and Donald Baumgartner, with support from the United Performing Arts Fund.

### **Pre-Show Presentations**

Milwaukee Ballet invites *Lambarena* ticket buyers to arrive early for a presentation. The schedule is as follows:

- **Thursday, April 4, 6:45pm:** The choreographers share an inside glimpse into their work.
- **Friday, April 5, 6:45pm:** Enjoy a performance from Xalaat African Youth Ensemble.
- **Saturday, April 6:45pm** Learn more about the music in *Lambarena*.
- **Sunday, April 7, 1:15pm:** Yaya Kambaye showcases an African instrument, the kora, in a performance.

### **Free African Dance Class for the Community**

Milwaukee Ballet School & Academy proudly hosts an open African Dance class from Yaya Kambaye and Roxy Kess of Xalaat Africa Drum and Dance for Life March 30, 2019 at Milwaukee Ballet's Jodi Peck Center. Open to children 10 and older and adults. Please wear comfortable dance/fitness attire with bare feet. Details at [milwaukeeballet.org](http://milwaukeeballet.org).

### **About Milwaukee Ballet**

Milwaukee Ballet was founded in 1970. Led by Artistic Director Michael Pink, Milwaukee Ballet transforms lives and connects communities through inspiring performance, community engagement, education and training. Milwaukee Ballet hosts an international company of dancers and is one of the few companies in the nation to maintain its own orchestra. Milwaukee Ballet School & Academy is the only professional dance school in the Midwest accredited by the National Association of Schools of Dance. Milwaukee Ballet's award-winning Community Engagement department serves nearly 40,000 people in Southeastern Wisconsin each year through original, interactive programs. Milwaukee Ballet celebrates its 50th Anniversary next year in the 2019-20 season.

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*Note to Editors: Interviews with Milwaukee Ballet Artistic Director Michael Pink and high-resolution images are available upon request.*