



Presents

synapse
contemporary dance theater

May 2, 2026 & May 3, 2026

Founder:

Linda Gold

Artistic Directors:

Jae Lee and Mark Tomasic

Guest Choreographers:

Malia Baker, João Ducci

Faculty Choreographers:

Angela Jordan, Jae Lee, Karen McDonald, Vanessa Van Wormer

Student Choreographers:

Maite Garcia, Kiari Lee Montgomery, Chai Nwagbara, Liz Perez

Guest Artist:

Kybele Dance Theater

Directors' Note

Through this production, we delight in sharing the creativity of prestigious faculty and guest artists as well as our own Synapse student choreographers. You will witness many contemporary voices in dance expressed by and through our dancers. As you engage in this performance, we invite you to open your hearts and find truth, beauty, inspiration, and meaning wherever you might.

Jae Lee & Mark Tomasic



JAZZ

Last Train

An ode to public transportation and public life. We're all different with unique approaches but a shared experience unites us.

Choreographer: Malia Baker

Music: “*Last Train*” by Allen Toussiant and “*(Its Not the Express) Its the JB Monaurail*” by The JB’s

Dancers: Marissa Aniel, Sierra Estrada, Kiari Lee Montgomery, Sonny Lira, Kenza Ndiaye, Liz Perez, Molly Ritter, Aaron Stokes, Meira Tuller, Samara Williams

Additional Credits: Associate Choreographer, Mckinsey Shea



CONTEMPORARY

tidal treasures

Choreographer: João Ducci (in collaboration with dancers)

Music: *"Embodied"* and *"Everything Is In Everything"*
by Roger Goula, Violeta Vicci

Dancers: Ezelle Frees, Oscar Herrera, Pigeon Lee-Spera, India Loveless,
Abdiel Montes, Chai Nwagbara, Calen Sotebeer, Lucy Tate

CONTEMPORARY

Anima Oppressae (Part 1)

Choreographer: Seda Aybay

Music: *"Abandon Sight"* by Jun Miyake

Performance by: Kybele Dance Theater

Dancers: Seda Aybay, Brin Domino, Evan Lavo, Mayu Oishi, Ariel
Scott

HIP HOP

Common Ground

For this piece, we wanted to portray how community feels in motion. Different individuals moving with their own style, yet united by rhythm, and shared joy. Additionally, we hope for this piece to leave the audience with a lingering sense of warmth, and connection.

Choreographers: Maite Garcia, Kiari Lee Montgomery, Liz Perez

Music: “*The way I are*” by Timbaland and “*No. 1*” by Tyla feat Tems

Dancers: Marissa Aniel, Maite Garcia, Venice Gonzales, Kiari Lee Montgomery, India Loveless, Chai Nwagbara, Liz Perez, Molly Ritter

CONTEMPORARY BALLET

Unmapped

Unmapped explores the act of moving into the unknown. With no fixed path or destination, this piece navigates shifting space and direction, guided by instinct and change. Each moment unfolds without certainty, revealing a journey that is still taking shape.

Choreographer: Jae Lee

Music: “*Whitesuperstructure*” by Robert Lippok

Dancers: Sierra Estrada, Oscar Herrera, Ezelle Frees, Pigeon Lee-Spera, Sonny Lira, Abdiel Montes, Kenza Ndiaye, Calen Sotebeer, Aaron Stokes, Lucy Tate, Meira Tuller

INTERMISSION

CONTEMPORARY

Driven

Driven explores the invisible forces that move us forward in life: ambition, resilience, hope and purpose. In life, it is our duty to be driven to succeed. Being driven comes in many shapes and forms; what motivates us is not always the obvious. Our heart and spirit often determine our rightful path. In this piece, we invite you to find the things that drive you and inspire you to experience your own greatness. Do it with pride, joy, and your own powerful sense of creating your best self.

I dedicate this piece to Tau and Kamala Flagg, my incredible children, and my true inspiration. Thank you to the SMC Dance Department for inviting me to be a part of Synapse.

Choreographer: Karen McDonald

Section One:

"Never let Your fear be Greater than your Desire."

Music: "Tempo II" by Divan Gattamorta

Section Two:

"Road to Greatness"

Music: "God Moving Over the Waters" by Moby

Dancers: Marissa Aniel, Ezelle Frees, Maite Garcia, Oscar Herrera, Kiari Lee Montgomery, Pigeon Lee-Spera, Sonny Lira, Molly Ritter, Aaron Stokes, Meira Tuller, Samara Williams

CONTEMPORARY

Terminal Escape

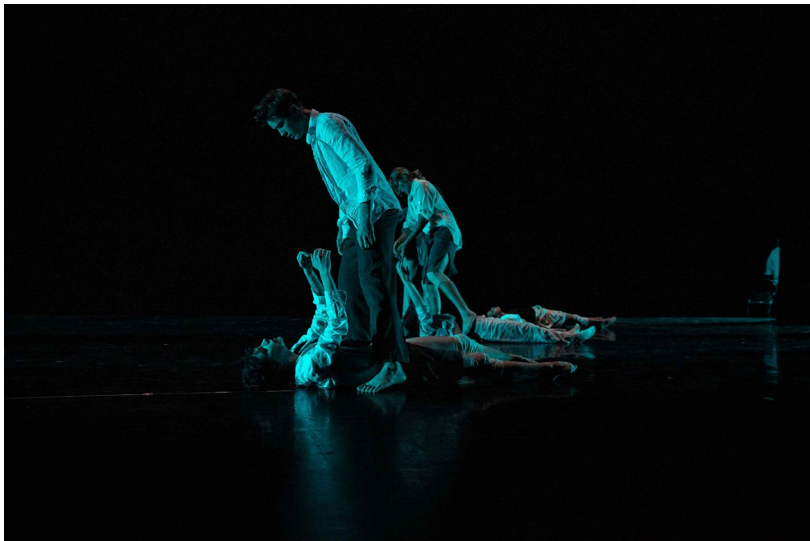
“We live in an era when rapid change breeds fear, and fear too often congeals us into a rigidity which we mistake for stability.”

- Lynn Townsend White Jr.

Choreographer: Chai Nwagbara

Music: “*Idioteque*” by Radiohead

Dancers: Sierra Estrada, Venice Gonzales, India Loveless, Abdiel Montes, Kenza Ndiaye, Liz Perez, Calen Sotebeer, Lucy Tate



CONTEMPORARY

Scarlet Town

Everyone has a story. No one is left unchanged.

For all of my SMC students and colleagues, with gratitude for our time together.

Choreographers: Vanessa Van Wormer with Dancers

Music: “*Out of the Wilderness*” by The Be Good Tanyas, “*Scarlet Town*” by Gillian Welch, and “*The Gold Rush*” by Punch Brothers

Dancers: Venice Gonzales, Pigeon Lee-Spera, Chai Nwagbara, Calen Sotebeer, Samara Williams



CONTEMPORARY

Anima Motus (Part 2)

Choreographer: Seda Aybay

Music: "All Names" by Jun Miyake

Performance by: Kybele Dance Theater

Dancers: Seda Aybay, Brin Domino, Evan Lavo, Mayu Oishi, Ariel Scott

FUSION

Ladies in Red

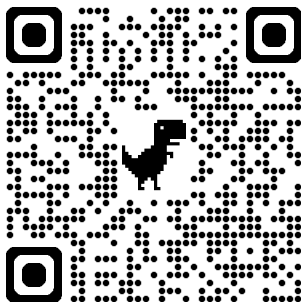
Do the Ladies in Red rule your head?

Choreographer: Angela Jordan

Music: "Abracadabra" by Lady Gaga

Dancers: Marissa Aniel, Sierra Estrada, Ezelle Frees, Maite Garcia, Oscar Herrera, Kiari Lee Montgomery, Pigeon Lee-Spera, Sonny Lira, India Loveless, Abdiel Montes, Kenza Ndiaye, Chai Nwagbara, Liz Perez, Molly Ritter, Aaron Stokes, Lucy Tate, Meira Tuller, Samara Williams

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PRODUCTION CREDITS

Synapse Founder Linda Gold

Artistic Directors: Jae Lee & Mark Tomasic

Dance Production Specialist Endah Redjeki

Dance Administrative Assistant..... Jocelyn Alex

SMC Marketing Coordinator Ming-Yea Wei

Graphic Design Vivian Chu, Jonathan Ng

Web/Social Media..... Paul Trautwein, Jae Lee, Taryn Key

Program Information Contributed.....
.....by Synapse Choreographers

Program Editors Jae Lee & Mark Tomasic

Costume Designer Barbara Rain

Lighting Designer Joy Bice

Videographer and Editor..... Nestor Trujillo

Photographer Jonathan Ng

Production Manager Siamanto Ismaily

Lead Theater Technicians Joy Bice,
..... Tom Carter, Carlos Lucio

Stage Manager Daniel Rosales

Assistant Stage Managers.....Patricia Oliva,
Abigail Sharp, Richard Tahvildaran

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

SMC Media Center/Graphic Center Department, SMC Marketing
Department, SMC Web/Social Media Department

SMC College President, Dr. Kathryn E. Jeffery

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For over 50 years, Synapse Contemporary Dance Theater has contributed to the cultural life of Los Angeles by offering innovative dance presentations on campus, in schools, and in area theaters. Past performances include the Broad Stage, Getty Center, Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica, The Cast Theater in Hollywood, Electric Lodge in Venice, The Will Geer Theatricum Botanicum in Topanga Canyon, Inter-College Consortium and University Exchanges, College Dance Festivals in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, California, Georgia, and New Jersey as well as travel-study tours to New York City, England, France, and Switzerland. Dances from *Synapse Contemporary Dance Theater* (Dance 55A) were presented at the American College Dance Association (ACDA) conference 2025 and received gala recognition.

Linda Gold (Founder) was the first full-time faculty in Dance at SMC and was able to initiate a full curriculum Dance Program (now Department), Dance Major, numerous dance series, university transfer agreements, travel-studies in Dance and Synapse Contemporary Dance Theater. She has taught in the Mentor Program, been advisor to Dance Club, arranged interdepartmental performing/arts events, community outreach, intercollegiate dance consortium and has served on a variety of college committees. She performed with the Joffrey Ballet Company, Wolf Trap Company, Contemporary Dance Ensemble, Dance/L.A. and won critical praise from international tours with her own Concert Ensemble. She has received grants for her creative work, presented papers at scholarly conferences and adjudicated dance and film competitions. Professor Gold has a BFA in Dance and a Special Education Teaching Certificate from the University of Cincinnati, an MA in Performance and Choreography from UCLA, and is completing work on her doctoral degree from the University of Helsinki.

Artistic Directors

Jae Lee began her dance training in South Korea where she earned a BS degree in Ballet from the Han Yang University. In Korea, she was a member of the Lee Ballet Company and danced professionally. Lee attended the State University of New York, College at Brockport and earned an M.A. degree in Dance. Lee also holds an M.F.A. degree in Dance with an emphasis in choreography from the University of California, Irvine. She has been actively participating in the American College Dance Association and her choreographies, *Interwoven* (2013), *Entangled Somewhere...* (2017), and *A-15510* (2020) have been selected to be performed in 'best of festival' Gala Concerts, as well as the first alternate choice for the National Festival. Lee is an ABT® certified Teacher, who has successfully completed the ABT® Teaching Training Intensive in Pre- Primary through Level 5 of the ABT® National Training Curriculum. Currently, she is a full-time faculty member at Santa Monica College Dance Department, teaching ballet, dance history, while co-directing Synapse Dance Contemporary Theatre as an artistic director.

Mark Tomasic is Chair of the Dance Department of Santa Monica College. At SMC, he has been awarded recognition as “Equity Champion” and “Outstanding Faculty Member of the Year” (2018-19). Mark has performed with a variety of internationally renowned dance companies throughout his professional career of over 20 years. Among others, Mark has performed principal and featured roles in the masterworks of such notable choreographers as Martha Graham, Donald McKayle, Paul Taylor, David Parsons, Sean Curran, May O’Donnell, Antony Tudor, Flemming Flindt, Talley Beatty and Agnes de Mille. As a choreographer, Mark has created works for numerous dance companies, colleges and universities across the country. In Spring 2022, his work “a shard” was selected for presentation at the American College Dance Festival (ACDA) Gala screening. In 2025, the short film was featured in the ACDA dance on film retrospective. Mark’s piece “...*this way*” was selected for presentation at the gala performance of the ACDA Spring

2025 Baja Region conference. Mark has worked extensively in the field of physically integrated dance with the Dancing Wheels Company & School, one of the premier arts and disability organizations in the United States. Serving as Artistic Advisor to the Company, Mark travels nationally and internationally to teach physically integrated dance to students and professionals alike and is the author of the inclusive dance training manual, “Physically Integrated Dance: The Dancing Wheels Comprehensive Guide for Teachers, Choreographers and Students of Mixed Abilities.” Mark holds an AA from Cuyahoga Community College, a BFA in Ballet from the University of Cincinnati, and an MFA in Dance from the University of California, Irvine.

Faculty Choreographers

Seda Aybay is the Founder, Artistic Director, and Choreographer of the Kybele Dance Theater. Since emigrating from Istanbul, Türkiye, she was recognized as the 2019 Cultural Ambassador of LA by the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs. Aybay choreographed John Woo’s movie *The Killer*, produced by Universal Pictures and Peacock. Her work has received numerous awards, including New Century Choreography, McCallum Choreography Festival, Front and Main Dance Festival, and Dance Under the Stars Festival. Seda’s works have been presented in Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Las Vegas, San Francisco, New York, Istanbul, and Seoul. She was artist in resident at USC Glorja Kaufman School of Dance, Santa Monica College, Marcus Residency at Washington University/St. Louis, and Glorja Kaufman Performing Arts Center. Aybay is a certified Horton teacher and a Tenure Adjunct Faculty at SMC and LMU.

Angela Jordan received her BA and MFA in Dance from UCLA. A recipient of several fellowships, Jordan has conducted research in Havana, Cuba and Guinea, West Africa. She has choreographed and danced in music videos, TV shows, and independent films. Jordan has taught at the Bates College Dance Festival, American College Dance Festival, UCLA, Cal State Long Beach, Lula Washington Dance Theater,

Long Beach City College, and El Camino College. She is currently on staff at Santa Monica College and the Debbie Allen Dance Academy.

Jae Lee, see artistic director's bio

Karen McDonald, (she/her) is a director, choreographer, educator, and artist whose work has shaped generations through the power of dance. With a career spanning over six decades, she has contributed to concert dance, theater, and commercial work, including Broadway productions (*Purlie*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*) and collaborations with artists such as Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Lionel Richie, Beyoncé, and Alicia Keys. Born in St. Louis and raised in Los Angeles, Ms. McDonald trained under Carolyn Skyers and earned a scholarship to Dance Theatre of Harlem. She later founded The New Age Dance Workshop, where she developed “The McDonald Method,” a practice rooted in artistic rigor, self-discovery, and community. A deeply devoted educator, she has mentored generations of students through LAUSD, Hamilton High School, and Santa Monica College. Her work continues to inspire through performance, teaching, and a lifelong commitment to movement as both expression and a way of life.

Vanessa Van Wormer is originally from Spokane WA. She has performed and presented choreography for Ballet Spokane, Bill Evans Dance Company, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, The Spokane Opera, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, The American Dance Guild Festival, the Royal Academy of Music in London, The American School in Switzerland. Florence Summer Dance, and numerous regional festivals. Van Wormer is an Associate Professor at Santa Monica College where she teaches ballet, contemporary and choreography. Previously Van Wormer was Visiting Assistant Professor at SUNY Brockport where she was artistic director of Chamber Ballet Brockport. Van Wormer holds an MFA from SUNY Brockport, and is an ABT certified instructor.

Guest Choreographers

Malia Baker is a professional dancer, choreographer and teacher. Recent work includes Purple Disco Machine Coachella 2024 & Paradise European Tour - Choreographer & Dancer, Sofi Tukker Spiral Music Video starring Heidi Klum - Choreographer. Malia believes that dance is a universal language that transcends barriers and hopes to use it to bring communities together. Through her teaching, performing and choreography, she aims to make dance accessible to anyone who watches and hopes to inspire others to discover the joy of movement.

João Ducci, is a Brazilian choreographer, dancer, and educator based in Southern California. He began his training at Santa Monica College and attended Yuri Grigoriev School of Ballet on full scholarship. He earned BFAs in Dance Performance and Choreography from UC Irvine, receiving the Excellence in Dance Choreography Award. João was a company dancer with Backhausdance and a guest artist with Ballet Project OC, C. Eule Dance, and Fuse Dance Company. He's had the pleasure of performing works by Lar Lubovitch, Donald McKayle, Jennifer Backhaus, and Tommie-Waheed Evans, among others. In 2025, João received an MFA in Dance from UC Irvine.

Student Choreographers

Kiari Lee Montgomery has been dancing since the age of four and has developed a strong foundation through training in multiple styles, including ballet, tap, jazz, contemporary, Latin, and hip-hop. Throughout her academic journey at Santa Monica College, she has continued to refine her craft while balancing her studies. She is currently in her final semester at SMC and plans to transfer to Loyola Marymount University in the fall. There, she will pursue a degree in Communications, with hopes of pursuing a career in Broadcast Journalism. While continuing to advance her training and involvement in dance.

Chai Nwagbara is a soon-to-be graduate at Santa Monica College, who aims to expand her abilities as a versatile artist. Nwagbara has trained in various genres including contemporary, modern, ballet, tap, jazz, and hip hop. Nwagbara has performed in several live theatre and dance productions, as well as performances on film. Nwagbara's long term goals include studying for her BFA, and dancing/choreographing for repertory companies.

Elizabeth (Liz) Perez is an SMC Dance Major and professional dancer born and raised in Los Angeles County, CA. Liz began dancing at 4 years old, training in Ballet, Jazz, Tap, Modern and Hip Hop at her childhood studio. She danced with Versa-Style Street Dance Company as a member of the junior company, Versa-Style Next Generation (VSNG), training in various street dance styles. Liz's professional credits include dancing in a short film, performing for the Republic of China in Beijing with SMC's Global Motion World Dance Company, dancing as a member of the WNBA Los Angeles Sparks' "Sparks Crew," and being an "Ice Crew" member for the NHL Los Angeles Kings.

Guest Artist

Kybele Dance Theater, founded in 2003 by Artistic Director and Choreographer Seda Aybay, Kybele Dance Theater (KDT) seeks to cultivate an experience that infuses theatrical and contemporary dance with Turkish socio-cultural narratives and imagery. Drawing from a diverse tapestry of experience, Aybay uses her unique multicultural approach to craft gestural movement, syncopated rhythms, and lush curves into repertoire that abstracts and amplifies the forgotten moments of everyday life; the mundane becomes powerful, seductive, and profound. Through a sophisticated lens, KDT fosters an ever-evolving vocabulary including evening length programs, mixed repertory work, educational performances, and festivals. The company has toured Aybay's work throughout the United States including Los

Angeles, Long Beach, San Jose, Palm Desert, San Diego, Houston, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, New York and Seoul/South Korea.





Full-time Dance Faculty: Marissa Moreno, Jae Lee, Sri Susilowati, Mark Tomasic (Department Chair), Vanessa Van Wormer

Part-Time Dance Faculty: Seda Aybay-Owens, Laura Canellias, Keali'i Ceballos, Angela Jordan, Karen McDonald, Cynthia Molnar, Sophie Monat, Raquel Ramírez, Charlotte Richards, Joseph Wiggan, Roberta Wolin-Tupas

Dance Accompanists: Mark Litver – lead accompanist, John Carbone, Matthew Mallinger, Alla Plotkin, Gnenemon Soro, Malik Sow

Dance Production Specialist: Endah Redjeki

Dance Department Administrative Assistant: Jocelyn Alex

FALL AUDITIONS 2026

SYNAPSE CONTEMPORARY DANCE THEATER

Synapse Dance 55A

This course offers performance experience and is organized as a modern dance company for concerts and dance productions. Students participate as dancers and/or choreographers. Styles range from modern to postmodern, contemporary ballet, jazz, and hip-hop fusion.

Student Choreographers:

Tuesday, September 1, 2026 at 3:00pm (sign-in at 2:30pm) in CPC 304
Students must present two minutes of live dance material they wish to be developed for the Spring production.

Dancer Audition:

Thursday, September 3, 2026 at 3:00pm (sign-in at 2:00pm) in CPC 304. Students must be warmed up and wear black-on-black dance wear.

GLOBAL MOTION WORLD DANCE COMPANY

Global Motion Dance 57A

This course offers performance experience and is organized as a world dance company. Dancers and choreographers audition, rehearse, and perform on stage traditional and contemporary forms of world dance. Styles include dances of Africa, Asia, Latin America, México, Europe (ballet), and USA (jazz, tap, hip hop).

Student Choreographers:

Wednesday, September 2, 2026 at 6:00pm (sign-in at 5:30pm) at CPC 310. Students must present three minutes of their work to be developed along with a description of origin and authenticity.

Dancers Audition:

Friday, September 4, 2026 at 3:00pm (sign-in at 2:00pm) in CPC 310

DANCE DEPARTMENT FALL 2026 PERFORMANCES

Global Motion, World Dance Company

Saturday, November 7, 2026 at 7:30pm

Sunday, November 8, 2026 at 7:30pm

Synapse, Contemporary Dance Theater

Saturday, November 14, 2026 at 7:30pm

Sunday, November 15, 2026 at 7:30pm

For the latest updates on current and future SMC Dance Department events, please visit: www.smc.edu/dance or visit us on Instagram [@smc_dance_dept](https://www.instagram.com/smc_dance_dept)

