

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**After 30 Years, Richmond Ballet Returns to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in March 2025**  
VMFA welcomes Richmond Ballet to Leslie Cheek Theater after \$5.3 million renovation



Pictured on stage in the Leslie Cheek Theater at VMFA are Richmond Ballet dancers Eri Nishihara, Khaiyom Khojaev, Zacchaeus Page and Mikell Graf. Photograph by Sandra Sellars, © 2025 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

**Richmond, VA** — With renovations to the Leslie Cheek Theater nearing completion, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) and Richmond Ballet formally announced that beginning March 20, 2025, the ballet company will move its repertory series, rebranded as Moving Art, to the museum’s theater.

“The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts welcomes the return of Richmond Ballet to the newly enhanced Cheek Theater,” said VMFA Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. “We’re delighted to be the new home for the Ballet’s innovative Moving Art performance series, which presents exciting opportunities for our audiences and artists.”

Richmond Ballet last performed in VMFA’s theater in the 1990s. For more than four years, museum officials have been in discussions with the ballet company about returning. Before its first Moving Art performance next month, Richmond Ballet will have time to rehearse on the new stage to ensure an exceptional audience experience.

“It is truly such an honor to once again perform within the walls of VMFA,” said Richmond Ballet Founding Artistic Director Stoner Winslett. “It has been a dream of mine to one day return to the Leslie Cheek Theater, and we are so

grateful that the recent renovation has made this dream into a reality. We could not be more thrilled to forge a strong partnership with VMFA, and we look forward to the countless opportunities that it will present for our community.”

Richmond Ballet’s Moving Art performances, formerly called the Studio Series, will feature both contemporary and classical ballet in an intimate theater setting. Kicking off the return to the Cheek Theater, [Moving Art One](#) running March 20 to 30, 2025, will include three distinct ballets on the program.

In *Pentaptych*, a painter takes the stage alongside the dancers, using brushstrokes influenced by their movements to create a wholly unique painting. A true piece of moving art, *Pentaptych* is choreographed by Richmond Ballet Artistic Director Ma Cong with original music composed by Ryan Lott. The pas de deux from Christopher Wheeldon’s *After the Rain* explores the connection between two dancers. Set to music by Arvo Pärt, this mesmerizing duet evokes a sense of longing, intimacy and vulnerability through subtle and tender choreography. A joyous and exuberant celebration of life, Val Caniparoli’s *Lambarena* fuses the structure of classical ballet with the grounded rhythms of West African dance. Inspired by a score of the same name, this ballet blends traditional African music with extended passages from compositions by Johann Sebastian Bach.



Richmond Ballet dancers Eri Nishihara and Khaiyom Khojaev.  
Photograph by Sandra Sellars, © 2025 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

[Moving Art Two](#) — also featuring three works each performance — will run between May 8 and May 18, 2025.

Joshua L. Peugh’s *Slump* is a quirky ballet that explores the concept of modern courtship through lively choreography and complex partnering. *Slump* is set to a culturally diverse score ranging from klezmer to jazz music. Premiered at VMFA in 1996, Stoner Winslett’s *Echoing Past* has evolved into a signature Richmond Ballet work and was part of the company’s New York City debut. The hauntingly beautiful music by Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel carries one woman through a reflection on her journey to a peaceful conclusion, finding everlasting riches along the way. Yury Yanowsky returns to Richmond to complete *Fading Creatures*, the popular piece that he began at Richmond Ballet’s 2023 New Works Festival. Drawing inspiration from the melting clocks of Salvador Dalí’s surrealist painting *The Persistence of Memory*, this world premiere will be a bold finish to an exhilarating season.



Richmond Ballet dancers Mikell Graf and Zacchaeus Page. Photograph by Sandra Sellars, © 2025 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

“The Moving Art series will allow Richmond audiences to witness the full breadth of our artform,” said Ma Cong. “It is my goal to bring some of the world’s most sought-after contemporary ballets, as well as cutting-edge world premieres and classics of enduring value, to our community. By performing this series in the legendary VMFA, we are delighted to celebrate and uplift the arts in Virginia.”

Tickets for Moving Art performances at the Cheek Theater are available exclusively through Richmond Ballet at [www.RichmondBallet.com](http://www.RichmondBallet.com) or by calling (804) 344-0906, extension 224.

In addition to being the venue for the Moving Art performance series, VMFA is the official partner for Richmond Ballet’s [Minds In Motion](#) community

engagement program this school year. Through this important initiative, Richmond Ballet creates a bridge for students, starting in fourth grade, to gain a greater understanding of themselves through dance, classroom curriculum, community partnerships and professional performances.

“One of the defining goals of *Minds In Motion* is to make the program an integral part of the school curriculum,” said *Minds In Motion* Director Jordan Glunt. “Partnerships with community organizations like VMFA are a crucial link in integrating the program with the school curriculum and supporting classroom teachers by offering field trips and supplemental learning materials to them, all at no cost to the schools. The 2024/2025 school year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Minds In Motion*. VMFA was the program’s first community partner, and it is so special to once again partner with the organization this momentous year.”

### **The Leslie Cheek Theater at VMFA**

Established in 1954, the theater at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was renamed after the museum’s first director, Leslie Cheek, in 2011. The Cheek Theater hosts a dynamic array of museum programs and performances as well as events from community partners that serve more than 10,000 visitors each year. From artist talks, curator lectures and film screenings to performances from the Latin Ballet of Virginia, *Elegba* Folklore Society and Yu Dance Arts, these programs deepen visitors’ engagement with the museum’s collections and exhibitions and often showcase local arts organizations.

“Beginning in March 2024, the Cheek Theater at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts underwent a \$5.3 million renovation, which was supported by private funds,” said Nyerges. “This marks the first time our theater has been renovated since it was built 70 years ago.”

The renovations have expanded the types of programs that can be held in the Cheek Theater. Improvements include a widened stage to accommodate ballet and other performances, new house and stage lighting, and upgraded audio-visual equipment to enhance programs and performances. Additionally, performers’ dressing rooms and restrooms have been renovated, and the green room refreshed. Seating, which accommodates 472 people, has been refurbished.



Pictured at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts are Richmond Ballet dancers Eri Nishihara, Khaiyom Khojaev, Zacchaeus Page and Mikell Graf. Photograph by Sandra Sellars, © 2025 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Accessibility has been a key focus of the theater renovations. An assisted listening device (ALD) system has been added, while ramps have been installed for improved wheelchair accessibility in the house and to the stage.

The museum’s diverse slate of performances and programs has returned to the Cheek Theater, which recently hosted ChinaFest Family Day performances, a reading of her forthcoming book *Monkey on a Road Trip* by renowned photographer Sally Mann, a showing of the classic film *Casablanca*, curators’ talks, the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders Distinguished Lecture, and Indigenous American storytelling as part of the 2024 Pocahontas Reframed Film Festival Family Powwow. The Cheek Theater is available to rent for community programs and events.

For more information about the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, recently named one of the 20 best art museums in the U.S. by *The Washington Post*, visit [www.VMFA.museum](http://www.VMFA.museum). To learn more about Richmond Ballet, visit [www.RichmondBallet.com](http://www.RichmondBallet.com).

### **About Richmond Ballet**

Since its early days as a civic company in the 1950s, Richmond Ballet, The State Ballet of Virginia, has flourished as a home for the past, present, and future of dance. Richmond Ballet boasts an expansive repertory that includes 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century masterpieces as well as nearly 90 new ballets by contemporary choreographers. The Company made its international debut in London in 2012, followed by a tour to China in 2015, and has performed at The Joyce Theater in New York City in 2005, 2008, 2010 and, most recently, in May of 2017. The Ballet’s scope also includes its

acclaimed School of Richmond Ballet and *Minds In Motion* community engagement program. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Ma Cong, and the enduring legacy of Founding Artistic Director Stoner Winslett, Richmond Ballet continues to further its mission to awaken, uplift, and unite human spirits through the power of dance. For more information on Richmond Ballet, visit [richmondballet.com](http://richmondballet.com).

### **About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass more than 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing I after a transformative expansion, previously the largest in its history. A new expansion, the McGlothlin Wing II, is planned to open in 2028. Comprising more than 170,000 square feet, it will be the largest expansion in the museum's history and will make VMFA the fourth largest comprehensive art museum in the United States.

**The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone (804) 340-1400 or visit [www.VMFA.museum](http://www.VMFA.museum).**

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