

Dance Data Project® Data Byte

Women-Founded U.S. Ballet and Classically Based Companies 2024

In honor of the women shaping the dance industry, Dance Data Project® has compiled a listing of women-founded ballet and classically based professional companies in the United States. To the extent possible, DDP has reached out to the greater dance community to source female founders. We are, however, cognizant that there likely will be additional women and companies sourced going forward.

Keeping track of these female-founded ballet companies is vital in understanding the pivotal and often unknown role of women in shaping the American ballet sector. These companies represent the talent, groundbreaking innovation, and perseverance of their female founders, and their significant impact on the evolution of ballet

especially regionally. They serve as inspiration to aspiring dancers, choreographers, and leaders within the industry, challenging norms and pushing boundaries.

The [Chicago Opera Ballet](#) was the first American ballet company and was established in 1910. In [1929](#), Dorothy Alexander was the first woman to establish a ballet company when she started the Atlantic Civic Ballet, later becoming the currently active Atlanta Ballet. This achievement helped pave the way for future women-founded ballet companies.

It is important to note, many of the female-founded companies were established before important laws were enacted to protect women's rights. This includes laws like the

Equal Pay Act ([1963](#)) which ensured women were paid fairly, and the Equal Opportunity in Education Act ([1972](#)) which provided equal education opportunities regardless of gender. Additionally, women weren't granted the right to open a bank account or apply for a credit card on their own until [1974](#). These instances highlight the significant obstacles many women faced and overcame to establish successful ballet companies.

In this Data Byte, DDP has gathered information for 179 ballet companies founded or co-founded by women between 1929 and 2024. The Data Byte further distinguishes between currently active and defunct/inactive companies.

Women Founders of Ballet Companies Currently Active in the United States

Listed below are professional ballet companies founded by women that are currently active. They are listed in alphabetical order.

Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Year Founded	Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Year Founded	Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Year Founded
1. Ajkun Ballet Theatre	Chiara Ajkun	2000				55. California Contemporary Ballet ¹	Aerin Holt	2008
2. Alabama Ballet	Dame Sonia Arova (Thor Sutowski)*	1981	27. Ballet Initiative	Casie Nicole, Lauren Nasci, Christina Voreis, Cheyanne Darnielle-Elam, and Ola Tarnowski	2020	56. Canyon Concert Ballet	Carole Torguson	1979
3. Albany Berkshire Ballet	Madeline Cantarella	1969	28. Ballet Legato	Jennifer Muselin	2019	57. Carolina Ballet Theatre	Barbara Selvy	1972
4. American Ballet Theatre	Lucia Chase (Richard Pleasant)*	1939	29. Ballet Lubbock	Suzanne Aker	1969	58. Central Illinois Ballet	Rebekah von Rathonyi	2015
5. American Contemporary Ballet	Theresa Farrell (Lincoln Jones)*	2011	30. Ballet Magnificat!	Kathy Thibodeaux	1986	59. Central New York Ballet	Cara Connolly, Lucy Hamilton, Claire Solis, Abigail Stewart (Xavier Pugliese-Ciulei, Lukas Figliozzi)*	2024
6. American Midwest Ballet	Erika Overturff	2009	31. Ballet Memphis	Dorothy Gunther Pugh	1986	60. Central West Ballet	Juline Schmitz, Gretchen Vogelzang	1987
7. American Repertory Ballet	Audrée Estey	1963	32. Ballet Minnesota	Cheryl Rist (Andrew Rist) *	1990	61. Chamber Dance Project	Diane Coburn Bruning	2000
8. ARC Dance Company	Marie Chong	1999	33. Ballet North Texas	Nicolina Lawson	2017	62. Chamberlain Ballet	Kathy Chamberlain	1984
9. Armitage Gone! Dance	Karole Armitage	2004	34. Ballet Palm Beach	Colleen Smith	2001	63. Charlottesville Ballet	Sara Clayborne, Emily Hartka	2007
10. Ashley Boudier Project	Ashley Boudier	2014	35. Ballet Pensacola	Gioia Michelotti	1978	64. Cincinnati Ballet	Myrl Laurence, Virginia Garrett, Nancy Bauer	1963
11. Asian American Ballet Project	Elizabeth Mochizuki	2022	36. Ballet Project OC	Ally Helman, Emily Helman Berry	2019	65. City Ballet of San Diego	Elizabeth Wistrich (Steven Wistrich)*	1993
12. Atlanta Ballet	Dorothy Alexander	1929	37. Ballet Quad Cities	Joedy Cook	1996	66. Civic Ballet of San Luis Obispo	Lorilee Moser Silvaggio	1978
13. Atlantic City Ballet	Phyllis Papa	1982	38. Ballet Rhode Island	Christine Hennessey (Winthrop Corey)*	1978	67. Cleveland Ballet ²	Gladisa Guadalupe (Michael Krasnyansky)*	2014
14. Avant Chamber Ballet	Katie Puder	2012	39. Ballet San Antonio	Nancy Smith (Vladimir Marek)*	1970	68. Colorado Ballet	Freidann Parker, Lillian Covillo	1961
15. Azara Ballet	Kate Flowers (Martin Roosaare)*	2022	40. Ballet Theatre Company	Tracy Dorman	1999	69. South Carolina Ballet ³	Ann Brodie, Naomi Calvert (James Montjoy Calvert)*	1961
16. Ballet 5:8	Julianna Rubio Slager, Amy Kozol Sanderson	2012	41. Ballet Tucson	Mary Beth Cabana	1986	70. Convergence Ballet Company	Jennifer Cafarella Betts	2010
17. Ballet Ariel	Ilena Norton	1998	42. Ballet Virginia	Janina Michalski, Suzanne Lownsbury	2008	71. Coriolis Dance	Natascha Greenwalt, Christin Call	2008
18. Ballet Arkansas	Lorraine Cranford (Donald C. Cranford)*	1978	43. Ballet West	Glenn Walker Wallace (William F. Christensen)*	1963	72. Dallas Black Dance Theatre	Ann Williams	1976
19. Ballet Austin	Barbara Carson	1956	44. Ballet Wyoming	Kathy Vreeland	2005	73. Dance Alive National Ballet ⁴	Mary Ellen Pofahl	1966
20. Ballet d'Jèrri	Carolyn Rose Ramsay	2023	45. Ballethnic Dance Company	Nena Gilreath (Waverly T. Lucas)*	1990	74. Dance Aspen	Laurel Winton	2021
21. Ballet des Amériques	Carole Alexis	2011	46. BalletMet	Daryl Kamer	1978	75. Dayton Ballet	Josephine Schwarz, Hermene Schwarz	1937
22. Ballet Des Moines	Julie Grooters	2002	47. BalletNext	Michele Wiles	2011	76. De La Dance Company	Meredith Benson, Mario de la Nuez	2005
23. Ballet Embody	Emily Runkle, Melissa Lineburg	2019	48. Ballets with a Twist	Marilyn Klaus	1996			
24. Ballet Fantastique	Donna Marisa Bontrager, Hannah Bontrager, Ashley Bontrager	2000	49. BalletX	Christine Cox (Matthew Neenan)*	2005			
25. Ballet Hartford	Elizabeth McMillan	2016	50. Baltimore Ballet	ElysaBeth Muscat (Cem Catbas)*	2000			
26. Ballet Hispánico	Tina Ramirez	1970	51. Boston Ballet	E. Virginia Williams	1963			
			52. Boulder Ballet	Barbara Demaree, Wanda Tierney	1982			
			53. Brandywine Ballet	Donna L. Muzio	1979			
			54. Brooklyn Ballet	Lynn Parkerson	2002			

1 California Contemporary Ballet began in 1996 but re-established themselves as a professional company in 2008.

2 The currently active Cleveland Ballet was the third iteration of the company, with both iterations prior being founded by men.

3 Formerly Columbia City Ballet.

4 Formerly Gainesville Civic Ballet.

Women Founders of Ballet Companies Currently Active in the United States

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Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Year Founded	Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Year Founded	Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Year Founded
77. Delta Festival Ballet	Maria Giacobbe (Joseph Giacobbe)*	1969	103. Nevada Ballet Theatre	Nancy Houssels (Vassili Sulich)*	1972	128. Safe Haven Ballet	Lissa Curtin	2019
78. Deos Contemporary Ballet	Tess Sinke (Andrew Hoekstra)*	2018	104. New Ballet	Dalia Rawson	2016	129. Saint Louis Ballet	Ludmila Dokoudovsky (Antoni Zalewski)*	1975
79. Diablo Ballet	Lauren Jones (Ashraf Habibullah)*	1993	105. New England Ballet Theatre	Rachael Gnatowski, Emily Orzada	2020	130. San Diego Ballet	Robin Morgan	1991
80. Dimensions Dance Theatre of Miami	Jennifer Kronenberg (Carlos Guerra)*	2016	106. New Jersey Ballet	Carolyn Clarck (George Tomal)*	1958	131. Savannah Ballet Theatre	Suzanne Braddy	1998
81. East Coast Contemporary Ballet	Claire Mazza (Alejandro Ulloa)*	2019	107. New Mexico Ballet Company	Suzanne Johnston (Sidney Johnston)*	1972	132. Sierra Nevada Ballet	Rosine Bena	2001
82. Eglevsky Ballet	Leda Anchutina (André Eglevsky)*	1958	108. New Orleans Ballet Theatre	Marjorie Hardwick Schramel (Gregory Schramel)*	2002	133. Syracuse City Ballet	Kathleen Rathbun, Harriet Casey	1996
83. Eugene Ballet	Toni Pimble (Riley Grannan)*	1978	109. New York Dance Project	Nicole Duffy Robertson (Davis Robertson)*	2016	134. Tampa City Ballet	Paula Nuñez	2018
84. First State Ballet Theatre	Kristina Kambalov (Pasha Kambalov)*	2008	110. New York Theatre Ballet	Diana Byer	1978	135. Terminus Modern Ballet Theatre	Tara Lee, Rachael Van Buskirk (Christian Clark, Heath Gill, John Welker)*	2017
85. Golden State Ballet	Cindy Huang (Raul Salamanca)*	2019	111. Newport Contemporary Ballet	Miki Ohlsen	1982	136. Terpsicorps Theatre of Dance	Heather Maloy	2003
86. Grand Rapids Ballet	Sally Seven	1971	112. North Atlantic Ballet	Lucy Warren-Whitman	2013	137. Texas Ballet Theater	Margo Dean	1961
87. Gwinnett Ballet Theatre	Lynne Snipes	1977	113. NWA Ballet Theatre	Margie Bordovsky, Mariah Bordovsky, Peggie Wallis	2011	138. The Florida Ballet	Laurie Picinich-Byrd (Michael Byrd)*	1978
88. Houston Ballet	Tatiana Semenova	1955	114. Oklahoma City Ballet	Yvonne Chouteau (Miguel Terekhov)*	1963	139. The Georgia Ballet	Iris Hensley	1960
89. Indianapolis Ballet	Victoria Lyras	2018	115. Orlando Ballet	Barbara Riggins, Patti Watson (Kip Watson)*	1974	140. The Hollywood Ballet	Petra Conti (Eris Nezha)*	2023
90. Inland Pacific Ballet	Victoria Koenig (Kevin Meyers)*	1993	116. Oyo Dance Company	Rachel Nace	2015	141. The Minnesota Ballet	Donna Harkins, Jan Gibson	1965
91. International American Ballet	Analia Farfan	2021	117. Pam Tanowitz Dance	Pam Tanowitz	2000	142. The Rosin Box Project	Carly Topazio	2018
92. James Sewell Ballet	Sally Rouse (James Sewell)*	1993	118. Paradosi Ballet Company	Tennille Carver (Joel Carver)*	2007	143. The Roxey Ballet Company	Melissa Roxey (Mark Roxey)*	1995
93. Kansas City Ballet	Tatiana Dokoudovska	1957	119. Pegasus Contemporary Ballet	Diana Crowder	2021	144. The Sarasota Ballet	Jean Weidner Goldstein	1987
94. Kentucky Ballet Theatre	Jan P. Foody	1998	120. PHILADANCO!	Joan Myers Brown	1970	145. The Tallahassee Ballet	Helen Salter	1972
95. Los Angeles Ballet	Colleen Neary, Julie Whittaker (Thordal Christensen) *	2004	121. Philadelphia Ballet	Barbara Weisberger	1963	146. The Washington Ballet	Mary Day, Lisa Gardiner	1976
96. Luminario Ballet	Judith FLEX Helle (Charles Evans Jr.)*	2008	122. Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre	Loti Falk (Nicolas Petrov)*	1969	147. Tulsa Ballet	Moscelyne Larkin, Rosalie Talbott (Roman Jasinski)*	1956
97. Maine State Ballet	Linda MacArthur Miele (Jonathan Miele)*	1986	123. Pointeworks	Sophie Williams	2023	148. Twin Cities Ballet of Minnesota	Denise Vogt	mid 1990s
98. Mareck Dance	Karen Mareck Grundy	2006	124. Portland Ballet	Genie O'Brien	1980	149. Utah Metropolitan Ballet	Jacqueline P. Colledge	1980
99. Miami City Ballet	Toby Lerner Ansin (Edward Villella)*	1985	125. Providence Ballet Theatre ⁵	Eva Marie Pacheco	2008	150. Ventana Ballet	AJ Garcia-Rameau	2018
100. Milwaukee Ballet	Roberta Boorse	1970	126. Richmond Ballet	Stoner Winslett	1984	151. Verb Ballets	Susan Miller	1987
101. MorDance	Morgan McEwan	2014	127. Sacramento Ballet	Barbara Crockett, Deane Crockett	1984	152. Vitacca Ballet	Kelly Ann Vitacca	2020
102. MOVEIUS Contemporary Ballet	Diana Movius	2010				153. XAOC Contemporary Ballet	Eryn Renee Young	2010

5 Providence Ballet Theatre is the third branch originating from the Providence Ballet School in 1995.

Women Founders of Defunct/Inactive Ballet Companies in the United States

Listed below are professional ballet companies founded by women that are no longer active or defunct. They are listed in alphabetical order.

<i>Company</i>	<i>Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*</i>	<i>Years Active</i>
1. American Concert Ballet	Mary Jane Shea (William Henry Dollar, Todd Bolender)*	1943 - 1945
2. Aspen Santa Fe Ballet ⁶	Bebe Schweppe	1996-2021
3. Amy Seiwert's Imagery	Amy Seiwert	2011-2024
4. Ballet Florida	Marie Hale	1986-2009
5. Ballet Montana ⁷	Sallyann Mulcahy	1995-2013
6. Ballet New England	Debra Smith Pinkney	1980-2009
7. Ballet Omaha	Valerie Roche	1965-1995
8. Ballet Pacifica	Lila Zali	1962-2007
9. Barak Ballet	Melissa Barak	2013-2022
10. California Ballet	Maxine Mahon (Robert Mahon)*	1968-2019
11. Capitol Ballet	Doris W. Jones, Claire Haywood	1961- 1989
12. Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet	Nancy Laurie	2003 - 2015
13. Chicago City Ballet	Maria Tallchief	1974 - 1987
14. Chicago Opera Ballet ⁸	Ruth Page	1955 - 1969
15. Fugate/Bahiri Ballet NY	Judith Fugate (Medhi Bahiri)*	1997 - 2020
16. Harkness Ballet	Rebekah Harkness	1964-1975
17. Indiana Ballet Company	Alyona Yakovleva (Russ Smith)*	2005-2010
18. Jessica Lang Dance	Jessica Lang	2011-2019
19. Municipal Ballet Company	Sarah Longoria	2012-2021
20. National Ballet of Washington, D.C.	Jean M. Riddell (Frederic Franklin)*	1962-1974
21. North Atlantic Ballet ⁹	Rachel Whitman (Cletus "Skip" Warren)*	1980-1995
22. Page-Stone Ballet Company	Ruth Page (Bentley Stone)*	1938 - 1950
23. San Diego Ballet ¹⁰	Nancy Johnson (Richard Carter)*	1961-1984
24. Suzanne Farrell Ballet	Suzanne Farrell	2007-2017
25. Slavenska Franklin Ballet Company	Mia Slavenska (Frederic Franklin)*	1952-1954
26. The Littlefield Ballet ¹¹	Catherine Littlefield	1935-1941

⁶ Aspen Santa Fe Ballet shuttered their professional company in 2021, but their school and presenting organizations are still in operation.

⁷ Ballet Montana began as Artisan Dance in 1995, but was nationally trademarked in 2010.

⁸ Also known as Ruth Page's International Ballet.

⁹ North Atlantic Ballet was revitalized in 2013.

¹⁰ Not affiliated with the currently active San Diego Ballet.

¹¹ Shortly after inception was renamed the Philadelphia Ballet, which is not affiliated with the currently active Philadelphia Ballet.

Methods & Limitations

DDP sourced founder names, gender, and years active primarily from company websites, social media, news articles, archival news articles, and the New York Public Library's Archives and Manuscripts online search. Pronouns were used as an indicator of gender. The companies included in this Data Byte were gathered from the sources listed previously and from DDP's annual Largest US Ballet and Classically Based Companies Report. All information was collected in a shared Google Spreadsheet. Following initial data collection, data was reviewed and verified by a separate research team member for accuracy.

DDP also requested input from the public via social media platforms for additional women-founded ballet companies in the US for inclusion in this Data Byte. We extend our gratitude to those who responded for their contributions. DDP especially wants to acknowledge Diana Byer and Dr. Elizabeth McPherson for responding to our request and providing additional founders included in this Data Byte.

Despite our best efforts, DDP acknowledges the possibility that not all women-founded ballet companies are included in this Data Byte, particularly inactive companies. Many defunct and inactive companies no longer have websites or never had an online presence, and archival press information is also scarce. This underscores the significance of historical archives in preserving women's contributions to the dance industry. We invite you to share any additional companies and founders not included in this Data Byte with research@dancedataproject.com.

At this time, DDP has only collected information on U.S. based ballet companies, but intends to expand to include U.S. based contemporary and modern companies, as well as ballet companies outside the United States. DDP is also interested in exploring the longevity of women-founded companies v. those founded by men.