

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 183 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	27. Ballet Hispánico	Tina Ramirez	1970	56. California Contemporary Ballet ¹	Aerin Holt	2008
2. Alabama Ballet	Dame Sonia Arova (Thor Sutowski)*	1981	28. Ballet Initiative	Casie Nicole, Lauren Nasci, Christina Voreis, Cheyanne Darnielle-Elam, and Ola Tarnowski	2020	57. Canyon Concert Ballet	Carole Torguson	1979
3. Albany Berkshire Ballet	Madeline Cantarella	1969	29. Ballet Legato	Jennifer Muselin	2019	58. Carolina Ballet Theatre	Barbara Selvy	1972
4. American Ballet Theatre	Lucia Chase (Richard Pleasant)*	1939	30. Ballet Lubbock	Suzanne Aker	1969	59. Central Illinois Ballet	Rebekah von Rathonyi	2015
5. American Contemporary Ballet	Theresa Farrell (Lincoln Jones)*	2011	31. Ballet Magnificat!	Kathy Thibodeaux	1986	60. Central New York Ballet	Cara Connolly, Lucy Hamilton, Claire Solis, Abigail Stewart (Xavier Pugliese-Ciulei, Lukas Figliozzi)*	2024
6. American Liberty Ballet	Valerie Mae Brown	2011	32. Ballet Memphis	Dorothy Gunther Pugh	1986	61. Central West Ballet	Juline Schmitz, Gretchen Vogelzang	1987
7. American Midwest Ballet	Erika Overturff	2009	33. Ballet Minnesota	Cheryl Rist (Andrew Rist) *	1990	62. Chamber Dance Project	Diane Coburn Bruning	2000
8. American Repertory Ballet	Audrée Estey	1963	34. Ballet North Texas	Nicolina Lawson	2017	63. Chamberlain Ballet	Kathy Chamberlain	1984
9. ARC Dance Company	Marie Chong	1999	35. Ballet Palm Beach	Colleen Smith	2001	64. Charlottesville Ballet	Sara Clayborne, Emily Hartka	2007
10. Armitage Gone! Dance	Karole Armitage	2004	36. Ballet Pensacola	Gioia Michelotti	1978	65. Cincinnati Ballet	Myrl Laurence, Virginia Garrett, Nancy Bauer	1963
11. Asian American Ballet Project	Elizabeth Mochizuki	2022	37. Ballet Project OC	Ally Helman, Emily Helman Berry	2019	66. City Ballet of San Diego	Elizabeth Wistrich (Steven Wistrich)*	1993
12. Atlanta Ballet	Dorothy Alexander	1929	38. Ballet Quad Cities	Joedy Cook	1996	67. Civic Ballet of San Luis Obispo	Lorilee Moser Silvaggio	1978
13. Atlantic City Ballet	Phyllis Papa	1982	39. Ballet Rhode Island	Christine Hennessey (Winthrop Corey)*	1978	68. Cleveland Ballet ²	Gladisa Guadalupe (Michael Krasnyansky)*	2014
14. Avant Chamber Ballet	Katie Puder	2012	40. Ballet San Antonio	Nancy Smith (Vladimir Marek)*	1970	69. Colorado Ballet	Freidann Parker, Lillian Covillo	1961
15. Azara Ballet	Kate Flowers (Martin Roosaare)*	2022	41. Ballet Theatre Company	Tracy Dorman	1999	70. Confluence Ballet Company	Moselle Haney	2020
16. Ballet 5:8	Julianna Rubio Slager, Amy Kozol Sanderson	2012	42. Ballet Tucson	Mary Beth Cabana	1986	71. South Carolina Ballet ³	Ann Brodie, Naomi Calvert (James Montjoy Calvert)*	1961
17. Ballet Ariel	Ilena Norton	1998	43. Ballet Virginia	Janina Michalski, Suzanne Lownsbury	2008	72. Convergence Ballet Company	Jennifer Cafarella Betts	2010
18. Ballet Arkansas	Lorraine Cranford (Donald C. Cranford)*	1978	44. Ballet West	Glenn Walker Wallace (William F. Christensen)*	1963	73. Coriolis Dance	Natascha Greenwalt, Christin Call	2008
19. Ballet Austin	Barbara Carson	1956	45. Ballet Wyoming	Kathy Vreeland	2005	74. Dallas Black Dance Theatre	Ann Williams	1976
20. Ballet Co.Laboratory	Zoé Emilie Henrot	2018	46. Ballethnic Dance Company	Nena Gilreath (Waverly T. Lucas)*	1990	75. Dance Alive National Ballet ⁴	Mary Ellen Pofahl	1966
21. Ballet d'Jèrri	Carolyn Rose Ramsay	2023	47. BalletMet	Daryl Kamer	1978	76. Dance Aspen	Laurel Winton	2021
22. Ballet des Amériques	Carole Alexis	2011	48. BalletNext	Michele Wiles	2011	77. Danse Lumiere ⁵	Kathryn Roszak	1995
23. Ballet Des Moines	Julie Grooters	2002	49. Ballets with a Twist	Marilyn Klaus	1996	78. Dayton Ballet	Josephine Schwarz, Hermene Schwarz	1937
24. Ballet Embody	Emily Runkle, Melissa Lineburg	2019	50. BalletX	Christine Cox (Matthew Neenan)*	2005			
25. Ballet Fantastique	Donna Marisa Bontrager, Hannah Bontrager, Ashley Bontrager	2000	51. Baltimore Ballet	ElysaBeth Muscat (Cem Catbas)*	2000			
26. Ballet Hartford	Elizabeth McMillan	2016	52. Boston Ballet	E. Virginia Williams	1963			
			53. Boulder Ballet	Barbara Demaree, Wanda Tierney	1982			
			54. Brandywine Ballet	Donna L. Muzio	1979			
			55. 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.

5 Was founded as Anima Mundi, and was renamed to Danse Lumiere in 2006

Women Founders of Ballet Companies Currently Active in the United States

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79. De La Dance Company	Meredith Benson, Mario de la Nuez	2005	106. MOVEIUS Contemporary Ballet	Diana Movius	2010	132. Safe Haven Ballet	Lissa Curtin	2019
80. Delta Festival Ballet	Maria Giacobbe (Joseph Giacobbe)*	1969	107. Nevada Ballet Theatre	Nancy Houssels (Vassili Sulich)*	1972	133. Saint Louis Ballet	Ludmila Dokoudovsky (Antoni Zalewski)*	1975
81. Deos Contemporary Ballet	Tess Sinke (Andrew Hoekstra)*	2018	108. New Ballet	Dalia Rawson	2016	134. San Diego Ballet	Robin Morgan	1991
82. Diablo Ballet	Lauren Jones (Ashraf Habibullah)*	1993	109. New England Ballet Theatre	Rachael Gnatowski, Emily Orzada	2020	135. Savannah Ballet Theatre	Suzanne Braddy	1998
83. Dimensions Dance Theatre of Miami	Jennifer Kronenberg (Carlos Guerra)*	2016	110. New Jersey Ballet	Carolyn Clarck (George Tomal)*	1958	136. Sierra Nevada Ballet	Rosine Bena	2001
84. East Coast Contemporary Ballet	Claire Mazza (Alejandro Ulloa)*	2019	111. New Mexico Ballet Company	Suzanne Johnston (Sidney Johnston)*	1972	137. Skyla Schreter Dance	Skyla Schreter	2023
85. Eglevsky Ballet	Leda Anchutina (André Eglevsky)*	1958	112. New Orleans Ballet Theatre	Marjorie Hardwick Schramel (Gregory Schramel)*	2002	138. Syracuse City Ballet	Kathleen Rathbun, Harriet Casey	1996
86. Eugene Ballet	Toni Pimble (Riley Grannan)*	1978	113. New York Dance Project	Nicole Duffy Robertson (Davis Robertson)*	2016	139. Tampa City Ballet	Paula Nuñez	2018
87. First State Ballet Theatre	Kristina Kambalov (Pasha Kambalov)*	2008	114. New York Theatre Ballet	Diana Byer	1978	140. Terminus Modern Ballet Theatre	Tara Lee, Rachael Van Buskirk (Christian Clark, Heath Gill, John Welker)*	2017
88. Golden State Ballet	Cindy Huang (Raul Salamanca)*	2019	115. Newport Contemporary Ballet	Miki Ohlsen	1982	141. Terpsicorps Theatre of Dance	Heather Maloy	2003
89. Grand Rapids Ballet	Sally Seven	1971	116. North Atlantic Ballet	Lucy Warren-Whitman	2013	142. Texas Ballet Theater	Margo Dean	1961
90. Gwinnett Ballet Theatre	Lynne Snipes	1977	117. NWA Ballet Theatre	Margie Bordovsky, Mariah Bordovsky, Peggie Wallis	2011	143. The Florida Ballet	Laurie Picinich-Byrd (Michael Byrd)*	1978
91. Hollywood Ballet	Petra Conti (Eris Nezha)*	2023	118. Oklahoma City Ballet	Yvonne Chouteau (Miguel Terekhov)*	1963	144. The Georgia Ballet	Iris Hensley	1960
92. Houston Ballet	Natasha Rawson et al.	1955	119. Orlando Ballet	Barbara Riggins, Patti Watson (Kip Watson)*	1974	145. The Minnesota Ballet	Donna Harkins, Jan Gibson	1965
93. Indianapolis Ballet	Victoria Lyras	2018	120. OyoDanceCompany	Rachel Nace	2015	146. The Rosin Box Project	Carly Topazio	2018
94. Inland Pacific Ballet	Victoria Koenig (Kevin Meyers)*	1993	121. Pam Tanowitz Dance	Pam Tanowitz	2000	147. The Roxey Ballet Company	Melissa Roxey (Mark Roxey)*	1995
95. International American Ballet	Analia Farfan	2021	122. Paradosi Ballet Company	Tennille Carver (Joel Carver)*	2007	148. The Sarasota Ballet	Jean Weidner Goldstein	1987
96. James Sewell Ballet	Sally Rousse (James Sewell)*	1993	123. Pegasus Contemporary Ballet	Diana Crowder	2021	149. The Tallahassee Ballet	Helen Salter	1972
97. Kansas City Ballet	Tatiana Dokoudovska	1957	124. PHILADANCO!	Joan Myers Brown	1970	150. The Washington Ballet	Mary Day, Lisa Gardiner	1976
98. Kentucky Ballet Theatre	Jan P. Foody	1998	125. Philadelphia Ballet	Barbara Weisberger	1963	151. Tulsa Ballet	Moscelyne Larkin, Rosalie Talbott (Roman Jasinski)*	1956
99. Los Angeles Ballet	Colleen Neary, Julie Whittaker (Thordal Christensen) *	2004	126. Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre	Loti Falk (Nicolas Petrov)*	1969	152. Twin Cities Ballet of Minnesota	Denise Vogt	mid 1990s
100. Luminario Ballet	Judith FLEX Helle (Charles Evans Jr.)*	2008	127. Pointeworks	Sophie Williams	2023	153. Utah Metropolitan Ballet	Jacqueline P. Colledge	1980
101. Maine State Ballet	Linda MacArthur Miele (Jonathan Miele)*	1986	128. Portland Ballet	Genie O'Brien	1980	154. Ventana Ballet	AJ Garcia-Rameau	2018
102. Mareck Dance	Karen Mareck Grundy	2006	129. Providence Ballet Theatre ⁶	Eva Marie Pacheco	2008	155. Verb Ballets	Susan Miller	1987
103. Miami City Ballet	Toby Lerner Ansin (Edward Villella)*	1985	130. Richmond Ballet	Stoner Winslett	1984	156. Vitacca Ballet	Kelly Ann Vitacca	2020
104. Milwaukee Ballet	Roberta Boorse	1970	131. Sacramento Ballet	Barbara Crockett, Deane Crockett	1984	157. XAOC Contemporary Ballet	Eryn Renee Young	2010
105. MorDance	Morgan McEwan	2014						

6 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.

Company	Female Founder(s) Name (Cofounded with male founder)*	Years Active
1. American Concert Ballet	Mary Jane Shea (William Henry Dollar, Todd Bolender)*	1943 - 1945
2. Ashley Boudier Project	Ashley Boudier	2014 ⁷
3. Aspen Santa Fe Ballet ⁸	Bebe Schweppe	1996-2021
4. Amy Seiwert's Imagery	Amy Seiwert	2011-2024
5. Ballet Florida	Marie Hale	1986-2009
6. Ballet Montana ⁹	Sallyann Mulcahy	1995-2013
7. Ballet New England	Debra Smith Pinkney	1980-2009
8. Ballet Omaha	Valerie Roche	1965-1995
9. Ballet Pacifica	Lila Zali	1962-2007
10. Barak Ballet	Melissa Barak	2013-2022
11. California Ballet	Maxine Mahon (Robert Mahon)*	1968-2019
12. Capitol Ballet	Doris W. Jones, Claire Haywood	1961- 1989
13. Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet	Nancy Laurie	2003 - 2015
14. Chicago City Ballet	Maria Tallchief	1974 - 1987
15. Chicago Opera Ballet ¹⁰	Ruth Page	1955 - 1969
16. Fugate/Bahiri Ballet NY	Judith Fugate (Medhi Bahiri)*	1997 - 2020
17. Harkness Ballet	Rebekah Harkness	1964-1975
18. Indiana Ballet Company	Alyona Yakovleva (Russ Smith)*	2005-2010
19. Jessica Lang Dance	Jessica Lang	2011-2019
20. Municipal Ballet Company	Sarah Longoria	2012-2021
21. National Ballet of Washington, D.C.	Jean M. Riddell (Frederic Franklin)*	1962-1974
22. North Atlantic Ballet ¹¹	Rachel Whitman (Cletus "Skip" Warren)*	1980-1995
23. Page-Stone Ballet Company	Ruth Page (Bentley Stone)*	1938 - 1950
24. San Diego Ballet ¹²	Nancy Johnson (Richard Carter)*	1961-1984
25. Suzanne Farrell Ballet	Suzanne Farrell	2007-2017
26. Slavenska Franklin Ballet Company	Mia Slavenska (Frederic Franklin)*	1952-1954
27. The Littlefield Ballet ¹³	Catherine Littlefield	1935-1941

⁷ Ashley Boudier Project is currently on hiatus.

⁸ Aspen Santa Fe Ballet shuttered their professional company in 2021, but their school and presenting organizations are still in operation.

⁹ Ballet Montana began as Artisan Dance in 1995, but was nationally trademarked in 2010.

¹⁰ Also known as Ruth Page's International Ballet.

¹¹ North Atlantic Ballet was revitalized in 2013.

¹² Not affiliated with the currently active San Diego Ballet.

¹³ 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.