



## ASSEMBLÉE INTERNATIONALE 2009

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### San Francisco Ballet School



San Francisco Ballet and the San Francisco Ballet School were both established in 1933 as a single institution by Gaetano Merola, founding director of San Francisco Opera. Merola recognized the need for a thriving academy that would train dancers to appear in opera productions.

San Francisco became the only city in the country, other than New York, to claim a ballet school as an auxiliary to an established opera company. Adolph Bolm was appointed director and ballet master for the Company, which occasionally presented all-dance programs. But San Francisco Ballet truly began to take shape as an independent entity when Willam Christensen became Company ballet master. Two years later he appointed his brother, Harold, director of the School.

In 1942, Willam and Harold Christensen bought the School from San Francisco Opera, which could no longer provide financial support to the ballet operation. As a result, the San Francisco Ballet Guild was formed in order to maintain the Company as an independent performing unit. Willam Christensen was named artistic director of San Francisco Ballet, and Harold continued on as director of the School.

Harold, like his brothers Willam and Lew, the three men most responsible for guiding the Company and the School for some forty-five years, was American trained. He was the preeminent educator among the brothers who directed the development of ballet in the Western United States for an entire generation. Under Harold's guidance, the School evolved into one of the country's finest classical academies. Scholarship programs were initiated and the faculty grew to include numerous prominent classical ballet teachers. Harold directed the School for 35 years, developing many dancers who went on to careers with San Francisco Ballet and other prestigious companies.

When Harold retired in 1975, Richard Cammack became the new director of the School. Cammack oversaw the School's move into its current state-of-the-art facility in 1983. Helgi Tomasson assumed leadership of the School after becoming artistic director of San Francisco Ballet in 1985. In 1986, Tomasson invited former San Francisco Ballet ballerina Nancy Johnson to head the School, a role she held until 1993, when he appointed Lola de Avila to the School's newly established position of associate director. De Avila left the position in 1999 at which time

Gloria Govrin was appointed the School's associate director. In July 2006, de Avila returned to the position of associate director.

Today, the School boasts a distinguished international staff, headed by Associate Director Lola de Avila, a Trainee Program for advanced-level students, a dedicated student residence, and an extensive scholarship program. Of the current Company, over 40 percent of the dancers received all or part of their training at the School, and many San Francisco Ballet School students have gone on to dance with professional companies nationally and internationally.

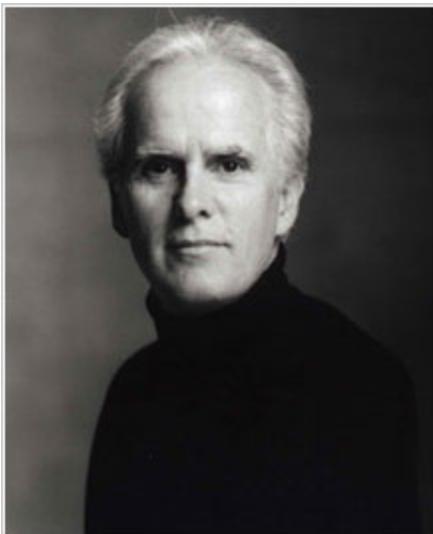
Now, over 75 years after its founding, San Francisco Ballet has, indeed, achieved Gaetano Merola's original goal of elevating San Francisco to a "high position in the realm of dance." In 2008, San Francisco Ballet School celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary along with the Company.

[www.sfballet.org/balletschool](http://www.sfballet.org/balletschool)

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## Helgi Tomasson

Artistic Director & Principle Choreographer, San Francisco Ballet



Before Helgi Tomasson became artistic director of San Francisco Ballet and director of San Francisco Ballet School, he was regarded as one of the supreme classical dancers of his generation. His uncompromising commitment to classicism remains his preoccupation as a choreographer, teacher, and coach, and is the foundation of the School's training.

Helgi Tomasson has held the position of artistic director for San Francisco Ballet since July 1985. Since then, the Company has evolved from a respected regional troupe to an international company praised for its broad repertory, dancers of uncommon range and skill, and a vision that continually sets the standard for the international dance world.

San Francisco Ballet is dancing better than it has at any point in its history. As a choreographer, teacher, and coach, Tomasson has fostered an uncompromising classicism that has become the bedrock of the Company's training. The dancers are energized and inspired by this rigorous training and continue to rise to new heights with each passing year.

Born in Reykjavik, Iceland, Tomasson began his early ballet training there with an Icelandic teacher and then joined the National Theatre's affiliated school, which was led by Danish instructors Erik and Lisa Bidsted. At 15, the emerging dancer began his professional career with the celebrated Pantomime Theatre in Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens. Two years later, Jerome Robbins met Tomasson and, impressed by his dancing, arranged a scholarship for him to study at the School of American Ballet in New York City. Soon after, Tomasson began his professional career with The Joffrey Ballet and two years later joined The Harkness Ballet. Over the next six years, he became one of the company's most celebrated principal dancers.

In 1969, Tomasson entered the First International Ballet Competition in Moscow as a United States representative and returned with the Silver Medal (the Gold Medal was awarded to Mikhail Baryshnikov). The following year, Tomasson joined New York City Ballet as a principal dancer and over the course of his career became one of the finest classical dancers of his era. He was one of the foremost interpreters of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins, and both men created several roles expressly for him. In 1980, Tomasson choreographed his first ballet for the School of American Ballet Workshop, which elicited encouragement from Balanchine to continue choreographing.

Tomasson accepted the invitation from San Francisco Ballet to become artistic director of America's oldest professional ballet company in 1985, drawing to a close a glorious performing career. Since assuming this role with the Company, Tomasson has choreographed over 40 ballets, including stunning full-length productions of *Don Quixote* (co-staged by Yuri Possokhov), *Giselle*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Swan Lake* (an all-new production of *Swan Lake*, with choreography by Tomasson, premiered on the Company's 2009 Repertory Season). His intricate and varied works, such as *7 for Eight*, *Chi-Lin*, *Concerto Grosso*, *The Fifth Season*, *Handel—a Celebration*, *Meistens Mozart*, *Nanna's Lied*, and *Sonata*, showcase the unique qualities of individual dancers. Tomasson's *Prism*, which debuted in 2000 at New York City Ballet, received rave reviews and was deemed a "triumph" by *The New York Times*. In 2004, his new production of *Nutcracker*, created in collaboration with an internationally recognized design team, debuted to enthusiastic critic and audience response. *The New York Times* proclaimed, "This is a *Nutcracker* on a grand scale...striking, elegant and beautiful." On December 17, 2008, Tomasson's *Nutcracker* was broadcast nationally on Great Performances on PBS, in partnership with KQED Public Television in San Francisco.

The strong classical base instilled by Tomasson enables the dancers to effortlessly navigate a myriad of styles by a range of internationally distinguished choreographers. Those invited by Tomasson to create works on the Company have included David Bintley, Val Caniparoli, William Forsythe, James Kudelka, Lar Lubovitch, Mark Morris, Paul Taylor, Stanton Welch, and Christopher Wheeldon. Tomasson has also continued to expand San Francisco Ballet's repertory through acquiring works by renowned choreographers such as Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, August Bournonville, Hans van Manen, Wayne McGregor, Agnes de Mille, Nacho Duato, Flemming Flindt, Roland Petit, Jerome Robbins, and Antony Tudor, among others. Tomasson's own works have been performed by New York City Ballet, Royal Danish Ballet, Houston Ballet, Alberta Ballet, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal, Ballet Estable del Teatro Colón, and Asami Maki Ballet. In Denmark, Tomasson's 1993 staging of *The Sleeping Beauty* was the most lavish production ever produced in the Royal Danish Ballet's history and was filmed for Danish public television in April 1995.

Under Tomasson's direction, San Francisco Ballet has toured the world, receiving praise for its purity and verve. Engagements in New York City (1991, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2008), London (1999, 2001, 2004), Copenhagen (1998), and Paris (1988, 1994, 2001, 2005) are among the highlights of the Company's history. For the Company's 2004 London engagement, San Francisco Ballet won the prestigious Laurence Olivier Award, its first, in the category of Outstanding Achievement in Dance. Of the tour, *The Guardian* (UK) noted, "As director of San Francisco Ballet, Helgi Tomasson has started to acquire an aura of infallibility, his expertise in laying down repertory, and in balancing great evenings of dance, is held in envy by the rest of the profession."

Tomasson's vision, commitment, and dedication to the art of classical dance were demonstrated when he conceived UNited We Dance: An International Festival, produced in San Francisco in May 1995. Created to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations

Charter, it included 12 international companies of the highest caliber that Tomasson had invited to present new works created by native choreographers. Never before had a dance event brought together over 150 artists for an unprecedented two weeks of creative exchange and inspiration. In spring 2008, as part of its yearlong 75th anniversary celebration, San Francisco Ballet presented a New Works Festival of 10 world premieres by 10 of the dance world's most diverse and acclaimed choreographers. The festival was called "ambitious and unprecedented" by The Washington Post and the San Francisco Chronicle hailed it as a "daring onslaught of fresh work... this is what the ballet world needs now."

Tomasson's achievements have garnered him numerous awards and honors, and he has participated as a judge for ballet competitions in Italy, Russia, France, Finland, and Japan. During the 1970s in his homeland of Iceland, he was named a Knight of the Order of the Falcon for his achievements as a dancer. In June 1990, Tomasson was named Commander of the Order of the Falcon by Ólafur Ragnar Grimsson, the president of Iceland, for his continuous achievements in the arts. In 1989, he received Dance Bay Area's Isadora Duncan Award for his outstanding choreography of Swan Lake. In recognition of his artistic excellence, Tomasson received the Golden Plate Award from the American Academy of Achievement in 1992. That same year, he received the Dance Magazine Award in recognition of his contributions to the dance world. In 1995, Tomasson joined the Artistic Advisory Board of The Ballet Theatre in Prague, directed by Jana Kurová. Also in 1995, Tomasson was honored with the Cultural Award of The American-Scandinavian Foundation. In 1996, he was presented with a Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, from Dominican College of San Rafael, in recognition of his value as a role model, his extraordinary career, and his community-service accomplishments. That same year, he was awarded the Isadora Duncan Special Award for UNited We Dance: An International Festival.

Currently, Tomasson serves on the Board of Directors of the School of American Ballet and the Artistic Committee for the New York Choreographic Institute, and has served as a member of the National Endowment for the Arts Dance Advisory Panel. In May 2001, Tomasson was granted the rank of Officier in the French Order of Arts and Letters, established in 1957 to recognize those who have contributed significantly to furthering the arts in France and throughout the world. Hugues Gall, then director of the Opéra National de Paris, presented the award in a ceremony attended by Grimsson, following San Francisco Ballet's triumphant opening at the Palais Garnier. In spring 2002, the Board of Trustees of New York's Juilliard School unanimously voted to bestow an honorary doctoral degree upon Tomasson, as one of five doctorates given annually in different artistic disciplines. Other recipients include playwright Edward Albee and actor and comedian Bill Cosby. In 2005, Tomasson was awarded the prestigious Lew Christensen Medal in honor of his 20th anniversary as artistic director of San Francisco Ballet. In May 2007, during a tour to Iceland's Reykjavik Arts Festival, Grimsson awarded Tomasson the Grand Cross Star of the Order of the Falcon, the country's most prestigious honor. In 2008, he was awarded the Commonwealth Club of California's Distinguished Citizen Award.

In addition to his role as artistic director and principal choreographer of the Company, Tomasson is the director of the San Francisco Ballet School. For Tomasson, the School is central to the life and development of the Company. Just as he expects the finest dancing and most meticulous attention to detail from his dancers, he demands the highest standards for training the students in the School.

Tomasson lives in San Francisco with his wife, Marlene, who was dancing with The Joffrey Ballet when they met. They have two sons, Erik and Kris.

Choreographed for San Francisco Ballet:

<i>Swan Lake</i> (2009)	<i>Sonata</i> (1995)
<i>On a Theme of Paganini</i> (2008)	<i>When We No Longer Touch</i> (1995)
<i>On Common Ground</i> (2007)	<i>Quartette</i> (1994)
<i>Blue Rose</i> (2006)	<i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i> (1994)
<i>The Fifth Season</i> (2006)	<i>Nanna's Lied</i> (1993)
<i>Bagatelles</i> (2005)	<i>Le Quattro Stagioni (The Four Seasons)</i> (1992)
<i>Nutcracker</i> (2004)	<i>Forevermore</i> (1992)
<i>7 for Eight</i> (2004)	<i>Two plus Two</i> (1992)
<i>Don Quixote</i> (2003)	<i>Aurora Polaris</i> (1991)
<i>Concerto Grosso</i> (2003)	<i>Meistens Mozart</i> (1991)
<i>Chi-Lin</i> (2002)	"Haffner" <i>Symphony</i> (1991)
<i>Bartok Divertimento</i> (2002)	<i>The Sleeping Beauty</i> (1990)
<i>Chaconne for Piano and Two Dancers</i> (1999)	<i>Con Brio</i> (1990)
<i>Giselle</i> (1999)	<i>Valses Poeticos</i> (1990)
<i>Silver Ladders</i> (1998)	<i>Handel—a Celebration</i> (1989)
<i>Two Bits</i> (1998)	<i>Swan Lake</i> (1988)
<i>Twilight</i> (1998)	<i>Intimate Voices</i> (1987)
<i>Criss-Cross</i> (1997)	<i>Bizet pas de deux</i> (1987)
<i>Pandora Dance</i> (1997)	<i>Concerto in d: Poulenc</i> (1986)
<i>Soirées Musicales</i> (1996)	<i>Confidencias</i> (1986)
<i>Tuning Game</i> (1995)	

Additional Ballets:

*Prism* (2000), choreographed for New York City Ballet's Spring Season

"*Much Ado...*" (1999), choreographed for Alberta Ballet

*Ballet d'Isoline* (1983), choreographed for School of American Ballet

*Giuliani: Variations on a Theme*, choreographed for School of American Ballet

*Menuetto*, originally choreographed for New York City Ballet, premiered during its 1984 summer session at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center

*Contredanses*, which he choreographed in 1984 for Finis Jhung's Chamber Ballet USA

*Beads of Memory*, originally choreographed in 1985 for Houston Ballet

## Lola de Avila

Associate Director, San Francisco Ballet School



Lola de Avila was trained in Zaragoza, Spain and went on to study in Cannes, Cologne and Paris. She performed with a multiple companies throughout her career, including the Claude Giraud Ballet, Royal Chamber Ballet of Spain, Ballet of Madrid, and Teatro de la Zarzuela.

In 1978, de Avila was named Director of the School of Victor Ullate in Brussels. In 1979, she was appointed Ballet Mistress at the National Ballet of Spain and in 1983, she was named both Assistant to the Artistic Director and Head of the School. In 1989 de Avila opened the Maria de Avila Ballet School, where she created a youth ballet.

De Avila first taught at San Francisco Ballet School in 1990. In 1992, she assumed the role of Associate Director, a position she held until 1999. After returning to Europe, de Avila became Director of the Maria de Avila Ballet School. From 2000 to 2002, she was Resident Ballet Mistress at Ballet de Genève. In 2006, de Avila returned to the San Francisco Ballet School as Associate Director.

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## Jean-Yves Esquerre

Trainee Program Supervisor, San Francisco Ballet School

Born in France, Jean-Yves Esquerre first studied dance with Monique Malo and continued his training at Maurice Béjart's Mudra school in Brussels. From 1974 to 1986, Esquerre danced with Les Ballets du XXème Siècle, Hamburg Ballet, and Nederlands Dans Theater. He created and danced numerous leading roles and worked with a wide variety of choreographers, including Maurice Béjart, Christopher Bruce, William Forsythe, Jirí Kylián, Lar Lubovitch, and John Neumeier.

Esquerre began his teaching career at Brussels' Conservatoire de Danse and Mudra School. In 1984, he also taught at Nederlands Dans Theater II, and the following year he collaborated with a number of European dance companies. In 1986, he was appointed ballet master of Le Ballet du Louvre, a 35-member company originally formed by Rudolf Nureyev and based in Paris. From 1988 to 1992, Esquerre served as artistic director of Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo. During his five-year tenure, the breadth of the company's repertory expanded significantly, and it garnered international acclaim through extensive touring.

Esquerre has worked internationally as a teacher and ballet master for a variety of companies, including English National Ballet and School, Le Centre International de Danse de Cannes, San Francisco Ballet and School, Boston Ballet and School, Steps/Broadway, Cirque du Soleil, and Les Ballets Jazz de Montreal, among others. He has also served as a juror or chairman in several international ballet competitions, including the Prix de Lausanne.

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## Myles Thatcher

Student Choreographer, San Francisco Ballet School

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Myles Thatcher, began his training at Ellison Ballet before completing his training with San Francisco Ballet School's Trainee Program. He was named apprentice with San Francisco Ballet in 2009. With the Company, he has performed Balanchine's *Stravinsky Violin Concerto*, as well as Tomasson's *Swan Lake* and *Nutcracker*.

The work Myles has created for the Assemblée Internationale is entitled *Time Piece*.