

The *Empress* and her *New Clothes*
&
COMING HOME

Bios

Artistic & Executive Director



Sarah Najera joined MOMENTA in 1999 and has worked as a dancer, choreographer, costume designer and matinee director. Sarah also co-founded MOMENTA Repertory Ensemble (MRE) and served as Artistic Director for many MRE projects, including Innovation/Collaboration, Collective Psyche, Moving in Parallel and Principles of Dance. In 2020, upon the retirement of MOMENTA's Co-founder and Director Stephanie Clemens, Sarah stepped in as the Artistic and Executive Director. Outside of MOMENTA, Sarah has a strong background in Latin and Spanish dance and has performed with Mosaico Dance Troupe, Sones de Mexico, El Ballet Folklórico Revolución, Soul y Duende, and the resident dance company of Universidad de Morelos in Cuernavaca, Mexico. As a costume designer, Sarah has created costumes for MOMENTA, MRE, Aerial Dance Chicago, American Opera Group, 13Carat Productions, Roosevelt University, Pleasant Home Foundation, and the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest.

Assistant Director



Teresa Deziel is an alum of both the Academy of Movement and Music as well as MOMENTA. Teresa traveled to Austria in 2007 with MOMENTA to perform as part of Young Tanzommer. She has dual Bachelor of Science degrees in Dance and Art from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, as well as a Bachelor of Art Degree in Advertising Art Direction from Columbia College Chicago. While at UW-Madison she participated in several college dance conferences, spent a month in Brazil dancing at the Universidade Federal da Bahia, and attended the Dance Education Laboratory at the Harkness Center for Dance in New York City. After graduating, she traveled to the World Dance Alliance-America's conference in Vancouver to perform with Li Chiao-Ping Dance and Jin Wen Yu.
MOMENTA class of 2009

Choreographer & Coach Bios



Tatiana Castañeda is a dancer, singer and actor originally from Oak Park, Illinois. She has trained extensively in ballet, modern, jazz and contemporary dance at the Academy of Movement and Music, the San Francisco Conservatory of Dance and Point Park University. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance from Point Park University in the spring of 2020. Tatiana has performed works by Chloe Jensen, Libby Westra, Matthew Powell, Dominic Walsh, Jay Kirk, Marius Petipa restaged by Susan Stowe, Randy Duncan, Monte Rezell and was a swing for the Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center's 2019 production of *In the Heights* with choreography by Kiesha Lalama. She currently teaches ballet and jazz at the Academy of Movement and Music and is a company dancer appearing courtesy of Aerial Dance Chicago under the direction of Chloe Jensen. Tatiana grew up dancing with MOMENTA and is excited to get to work with them again. *MOMENTA class of 2016*



Born and raised in Taiwan, **Mei-Kuang Chen** received her early dance training in Chinese classical and folk dance as well as ballet and modern dance. Seeking further dance education, Ms. Chen has since received her BFA from Ohio State University and her MFA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Ms. Chen joined Hedwig Dances in Chicago from 1999-2007 and became the Artistic Associate for the company in 2003. Ms. Chen received the prestigious Ruth Page Dance Award from the Chicago Dance Coalition. Ms. Chen also taught Mandarin Chinese at Proviso Math and Science Academy from 2007-2010. Currently on the dance faculty at Loyola University and the Academy of Movement and Music, Ms. Chen is truly grateful for the good fortune to be surrounded by so many wonderful colleagues and students. Performing with MOMENTA is the icing on the cake!



Connor Cornelius (she/her) grew up in Oak Park, IL with MOMENTA and is a choreographer and the social media manager. Connor was also the Artistic Director of fall MOMENTA 2021. Locally, Connor has also choreographed the Oak Park and River Forest High School's (OPRF) musicals and the 2023 Illinois High School Theatre Festival's All-State production. She also directs her own performance project company, GRIT, and has produced three evening length concerts. Connor was nominated for a 3Arts award along with being selected as one of two artists commissioned for Going Dutch 2018 and 2017. In 2016, she was commissioned to choreograph for Simantikos Dance Chicago and selected for the Delve showcase. In 2015, she was selected as one of four choreographers for Dance Chance Redux: 6.0 and chosen as one of ten finalists for Met Dance's Emerging Choreographer competition. That year, Connor was also chosen as one of four choreographers for DanceWorks Chicago's DanceMoves choreography competition. At the 2013 American Dance Festival, she was chosen to perform in Martha Graham's *Helios* as well as present her choreography in the student concert. Connor has choreographed and danced as a company member for Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre and Project Bound Dance for two seasons each and served as DanceWorks Chicago's Administrative support for three years. Connor currently teaches, designs lights and stage manages for Intuit Dance. Connor was honored as the Presidential Scholar of the Department of Dance at Western Michigan University, where she graduated in May 2014 cum laude with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in dance. *MOMENTA class of 2010*



Sarah Cullen Fuller began her formal training at the Academy of Movement and Music under the direction of Stephanie Clemens. She continued her studies at the Boston and Joffrey Ballet schools before graduating from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a BFA in Dance Performance. In 2001, Sarah joined Hubbard Street 2 under Julie Nakagawa and was promoted to Hubbard Street Dance Company's (HSDC) main company soon after. After her retirement from HSDC in 2008, Ms. Fuller returned to teaching at the Academy of Movement and Music, the Lou Conte Dance Studio, and Loyola University Chicago. Sarah is the founding teaching artist of the "Parkinson's Project," part of the Adaptive Dance Program at HSDC. Ms. Fuller has served on the ad hoc committee for the Adaptive Dance Program at HSDC, was a co-teacher of EveryBody Can Dance, and was a speaker at the National Dance Education Foundation seminar in 2014. Ms. Fuller has choreographed and danced in numerous works for both the MOMENTA Repertory Ensemble and for the MOMENTA. She is the recipient of the Orrin Kayan award for excellence in teaching and is currently a full-time instructor at Loyola University Chicago. *MOMENTA class of 1995*

Betina Dunson-Johnson began her formal dance training at Perfect Rhythm under the direction of Renee Spinks and New Generation Dance Company under the direction of Roxiana Fuqua-Evans, where she trained with Roxiana, Nicole Clarke-Springer, and Tamara Wiley. She continued on into professional training at The Ohio State University where she studied extensively with Victoria Uris of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, John Giffin of Julliard and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in Montreal, Valerie Mockabee of Julliard, Susan Hadley of the Mark Morris Dance Group, Abby Yager and Ming-Lung Yang of the Trisha Brown Dance Company, Dr. Karen Eliot of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Susan Van Pelt Petry of Van Pelt Dance Ensemble of New York, Mary Glimcher of Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Ballet Hispanico, as well as Nicole Stanton, Dr. Melanie White-Dixon, and Teena Custer. Betina has had the opportunity to work with many celebrated choreographers and performers. She is currently choreographing nationally as an Independent Artist, directing/teaching/choreographing at Oak Park and River Forest High School and teaching at New Generation Dance Company. Betina is the recipient of several directing and choreography honors and awards.



Caitlin Dyer is graduating from Loyola University Chicago this May with a BA in Dance and a BBA in Accounting. Her passion for dance started at Kibler Dance Academy in Northeast Ohio. At Loyola, Caitlin has had the privilege of performing in annual MainStage Dance Concerts, Dance Composition Showcases, and other dance opportunities. She has performed around Chicago in the Simantikos Dance Festival and Alluvion's Emergence Choreographic Showcase. In addition to Chicago adventures, Caitlin travelled to Rome to train with Mandala Dance Company and interned with GroundWorks Dance Theater during the summer of 2020. She is the president of Dance Honors Society and has loved volunteering and building community within the dance program at Loyola. Post-graduation, Caitlin will continue dancing and living in Chicago.



Oak Park and Academy-raised **Heléna Gorgol** began her dancing endeavors at the age of three. She performed with MOMENTA through high school in classical ballets, Martha Graham excerpts, and contemporary choreography. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign where she had the privilege to work with former Limon company member Roxane D'Orleans Juste and Omri Drumlevich of the Batsheva company. While at university she also honed her choreographic, dance for camera, and videographic skills. Her short film *Restless Silhouette* was featured in the dance program's student work showcase in 2021. She now works at the Academy Arts preschool program as the creative movement teacher. Heléna is excited to be working with MOMENTA again for its 40th anniversary. *MOMENTA class of 2018*



Jessica Kondrath holds degrees in dance from University of California Santa Barbara (BFA) and California State University Long Beach (MFA). As the Artistic Director of GRAYSCALE she has shown work nationally and internationally, most recently with projects at The Visionary (NY) and at Malakta (Finland). Jessica has been a frequent guest instructor and has had choreography and lighting designs commissioned by colleges and universities throughout Los Angeles for the past twelve years. As a performer, Jessica has danced in the works of Carol McDowell, Liz Hoefner Adams/Immediate Action Dance, and Sarita Smith-Childs. She was a recipient of the Professional Artist Fellowship Grant from the Arts Council of Long Beach for her work with GRAYSCALE. Jessica is also a Pilates Instructor certified at the Kane School of Core Integration under the direction of Kelly Kane and is on faculty in the Dance Departments of El Camino College, Rio Hondo College, and California State University-Channel Islands. *MOMENTA class of 2000*



Xenia Mansour (she/her) is a dancer, mover, and performer based in New York City & Chicago. She is currently a member of Katherine Maxwell's Hivewild and BodyStories: Teresa Fellion Dance. She has also worked with Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener, Angie Moon Dance Theatre, Gabrielle Johnson + Artists, Javier Padilla & The Movement Playground, and experimental dance theater HOLDTIGHT's site-specific and immersive show, *Nourishment*, in both Denver and NYC. She has performed in a range of stage, site-specific, immersive, film and fashion work including as a guest dancer and model for Mexican fashion designer Carla Fernández with choreography by Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener, and as a feature dancer for CXN's Fashion Commercial Come With Us choreographed by Katherine Maxwell. Off the stage, she's curating pop-up contemporary dance experiences with Hi Artist and Airbnb Experiences, boxing and playing softball. Born and raised in Oak Park, IL, she spent her formative years studying at the Academy of Movement and Music and performing with resident company MOMENTA. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance from the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. *MOMENTA class of 2013*



Hannah Marcus is a Chicago-based dance artist and maker whose work explores the nexus between movement and visual design, sound, technology, and language. Hannah holds a BFA in dance with a minor in Performing Arts Management & Entrepreneurship from the University of Michigan. She is a current company member with Hedwig Dances and an artistic collaborator with House of DOV. *MOMENTA class of 2016*



Sage Miller is from Berwyn, IL, and received her early dance training at the Academy of Movement and Music where she studied the techniques and works of Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and Doris Humphrey. She holds a BFA from Cornish College of the Arts, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude, and is a Pilates instructor. Sage has had the honor of performing works by Ohad Naharin, Crystal Pite, José Limón, Michele Miller, Pat Hon, Randy Duncan, and Terence Marling. She has performed and choreographed for MOMENTA in the past, and is very excited to be back with MOMENTA again. *MOMENTA class of 2010*



Sydney Osborne began her training at DanceStation in O'Fallon, Illinois and attended summer intensive programs at Nashville Ballet and Colorado Ballet. She is a senior at Loyola University Chicago and is double majoring in dance and visual communication. Sydney has performed in student choreography works and dance films and choreographed a piece titled "Crowded Mirrors." She has also performed in Loyola MainStage productions "A Dream of Home" and "Nevertheless, She Persisted," performing pieces such as "If Carmen," "Atlas," and "Aphrodite at the Violet Hour." In 2022, Sydney traveled with fellow dance majors to perform with Mandala Dance Company in Rome, Italy. She also had the pleasure of interning with Chicago Dancers United and assisted with fundraising events such as Dance for Life.



Annika Sheaff earned a BFA in dance from The Juilliard School, where she had the privilege of working directly with Ohad Naharin, Paul Taylor, Ronald K. Brown, Jessica Lang, and Jill Johnson. She joined Pilobolus Dance Theater and toured the world performing over 550 times on four continents. In 2012, Sheaff joined GroundWorks Dance Theater and had the privilege to create new work alongside prestigious choreographers. Commercially she has appeared on "America's Got Talent," "Extra!," "Sesame Street," and on the cover of Dance Magazine. Sheaff has choreographed and taught master classes all over the world. She is currently on the dance faculty at Baldwin Wallace University in Ohio. Annika is thrilled to be celebrating MOMENTA's 40th year! *MOMENTA class of 2002*



Gina Sigismondi began her formal dance training in Oak Park at the Academy of Movement and Music. Gina danced on scholarship for 4 years at Northern Illinois University where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Dance Performance. Her professional experience includes dancing for Chicago area independent choreographers Paula Frasz, Kirby Reed, Winifred Haun, Sarita Smith Childs, Sandra Kaufmann and as a member of Fox River Dance Company, MOMENTA Repertory Ensemble and MOMENTA. She has taught ballet, jazz, modern, creative movement and physical fitness. Gina is currently teaching students ranging in age from pre-school to adult at the Academy of Movement and Music. She continues to perform and choreograph for MOMENTA. *MOMENTA Class of 1989*

Performing Artists

Mary and **Dan Deziel** are the parents of Academy and MOMENTA dancers, teachers and choreographers: Caroline TeDesco, Teresa Deziel and Audrey Deziel. They also have three sons. Dan is delighted to again be appearing with MOMENTA after nearly a four year interlude. He was one of the original "Dancing Dads" in 2001 and has since appeared in dozens of MOMENTA and Academy shows. Select credits: *Don Quixote* (Sancho Panza), *Peter Pan* (Captain Hook), *Harry Potter* (Professor Dumbledore), *Alice* (Mad Hatter), *Wizard of Oz* (Wizard). He has been honored to work with Sarah Najera in her productions of *Kaleidoscope: A Circus Ballet* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*. Most proudly, he has been privileged over the years to perform with all three daughters and to be directed by Caroline. Someday he hopes to perform with his granddaughters. Dr. Deziel is Professor and Chairman Emeritus of Surgery at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago.

Ladonna Freidheim, founder of ReinventAbility, is passionate about inclusion, dance, science, and joy! She is a classically trained dancer and experienced arts administrator. After a progressive disability ended her ballerina life, Ladonna recovered from surgeries at the Rehabilitation Center of University of Illinois UC, where she was introduced to disability culture. While Ladonna is able to get around with the assistance of leg braces and a cane, it is her wheelchair that allows her to continue dancing. She is forever indebted to Alana Wallace, founder of Dance>Detour, for training her in the art of wheelchair dance. In 2014, Ladonna founded ReinventAbility, to promote and realize inclusion in the world of dance, and in the world at large, by enriching perceptions of disability and inspiring joy! Ladonna is a company dancer with MOMENTA and also shares her skills as a grant writer and a board member.

Mary Kelly is excited to return to MOMENTA and perform with the Junior Company. She has been dancing at the Academy of Movement and Music for many years and is a long-time dancer and choreographer for MOMENTA. Mary graduated from Columbia College in Chicago with a Bachelor of Arts in Dance and earned her Masters from DePaul University in Elementary Education. She is currently teaching fourth grade in Oak Park, IL.

Maypril Krukowski (May+April w/o A) is the self-declared TikTok Queen. Her hometown is Wonder Lake and she loves to dance. Besides dancing her favorite activities include fishing, golfing, singing, bowling, making videos, traveling and visiting family. In her free time Maypril loves to clean, organize and learn to cook. Her favorite animals are cats and dogs. Maypril works part-time in her dream job and loves her bosses. She will soon restart college classes and is looking forward to seeing her professors and tutors again. Maypril dreams of soon moving to her own apartment, far away from her parents. She has enjoyed being a part of CounterBalance and MOMENTA because everyone is so nice and welcoming.

Kris Lenzo has been national champion in wheelchair basketball and wheelchair track several times. He first performed with MOMENTA in 2003 in Larry Ippel's "Sharing the Moment." He has performed at Spring to Dance St. Louis (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013), Dance Chicago, Duets for my Valentine, Bodies of Work Festival of Disability Arts and Culture (2006 & 2013), CounterBalance, the Chicago Disability Pride Parade, and Chicago LIVE at Navy Pier. Kris is a teacher in MOMENTA 's EveryBody Can Dance! (EBCD) workshops and a 2015 3Arts awardee.

Jessica-Jess Martin is a dancer, choreographer, producer, public speaker, and writer. They have been a proud member of MOMENTA Dance Company for over a decade and have had the majority of their training at the Academy of Movement and Music in Oak Park, Illinois. They have also been very fortunate to study with well-known choreographers, teachers, and dancers throughout Chicagoland. They also have studied with Dancing Wheels Company and School, virtually and in person with Axis Dance Company, and at the Michigan Arts Symposium. In 2011, they choreographed their first piece called "Flying Friends" with the help of Stephanie Clemens, the co-founder of MOMENTA Dance Company. They have been fortunate to perform all over the Chicagoland area including Pride Arts Films and Plays, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Center on Halsted, to name a few. In 2017, they were inspired to create their own dance company, called EXPLORATION: An Evening of Dance, Discovery, Creativity, and Fun to help give marginalized dancers a place to feel welcome and be their authentic selves. They have also been teaching and guest teaching a lot since the pandemic. If you would like to connect with Jess on social media you can go to their page, Explore Through Dance. There are two different groups, one is community based and the other highlights things such as shows and classes. They are honored to be performing in MOMENTA's 40th Anniversary Concert.

Michael Allen Rose is a writer, musician, and performer based in Chicagoland. He was awarded the 2021 Wonderland Award in the category of Best Bizarro Novel for his book "Jurassichrist." Michael has been published by a variety of small presses and publications, writing mostly bizarro fiction, horror, and comedy. He also makes electronic music under the name Flood Damage, and hosts the Ultimate Bizarro Showdown at BizarroCon. When he isn't creating or trying to promote his books and music, you can find him at your local library, where he works in adult services. He likes tea and cats. Michael is absolutely delighted to take part in this ballet, which is a fun way to reconnect with the many years of theatre he did in his college days.

Robby Williams has been a wheelchair user for 3 years now and has been dancing with MOMENTA since fall 2019. Before wheelchair life, Robby was dancing Argentine Tango with Balboa and Lindy with Nicole Wood and Desiree Roffers and was a fitness enthusiast/coach-in-training. A survivor of gunshot wounds and a spinal cord injury he has jumped head-first into the disabled community. During intense PT/OT at SRALab, he was introduced to MOMENTA Dance Company by one of his therapists. Robby attended the 2nd Annual Chicago Inclusive Dance Festival and was invited to an Everybody Can Dance workshop. During the workshop, Robby was paired with Julia Cox, a great area dancer with whom he felt he moved naturally. Robby and Julia were asked to work with Sarah Najera and Kris Lenzo to create a piece that would become Sarah's "Duet in C Major." Robby is exploring what he can do to give back to the community through MOMENTA's school outreach program, ReinventAbility's outreach program, and working with Tango 21 Dance Theater to find where tango and disability can meet. Robby is also exploring the other arts in the disabled community through his poetry. Robby is grateful to his wife, family, friends and the community for making this transition in his life an incredible exploration. Robby is also a MOMENTA Board Member.

MOMENTA 2023 Graduating Seniors



Heidi Enger is a senior at Oak Park & River Forest High School. She has been dancing at the Academy since 8th grade and has performed in multiple MOMENTA shows over the years. Heidi will miss the community here, but she's excited to see what's next! She will be majoring in International Relations and will continue dancing in college. When she isn't dancing, Heidi loves playing the cello, reading, and spending time outside. She is so grateful to all her friends and teachers at the Academy for their support through the years.



Faye Evans has been dancing for the past 15 years at the Academy of Movement and Music, and with MOMENTA for the past 2 years. Outside of dance, Faye enjoys hanging out with friends, baking, and playing with her dog. Faye loves to travel and hopes to do a lot more of it in the future. After high school, she plans on pursuing a degree in environmental science and business in hopes to get her MBA. She hopes to join a dance club in college, as she is eager to continue this passion. Faye is so grateful for all the opportunities and friendships she has built while dancing!



Mia Ferrigno has been dancing at the Academy since she was three and has been a MOMENTA member for seven years. When she is not dancing at the Academy, Mia participates in Orchesis, the dance club at Oak Park and River Forest High School. Mia is interested in pursuing a career in medicine. She hopes to attend college with a kinesiology or neuroscience major. She enjoys cooking, making pottery, and watching *Gilmore Girls* when she is not dancing. She is committed to her friends and family and hopes to make the most of life.



Trijntje MacKay Masoncup began dancing at the age of 3 and immediately fell in love with the art form, inspiring her to pursue this demanding, but rewarding career. She hopes to share her dedication and love for the art as she travels the world, learning about different cultures and food. Her favorite things outside of dance are reading, writing, having quality conversations, and drinking coffee whenever possible. She's committed to making the best out of any situation, living in the moment, and taking life as it comes!