



VITACCA BALLET

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**VITACCA BALLET SCHOOL FOR DANCE ANNOUNCES
2023-2024 SEASON RESIDENT ARTIST PROGRAM (RAP)
CHOREOGRAPHER MELODY MENNITE**

Houston Icon Mennite is a current Principal with Houston Ballet

RAP is a unique, collaborative choreographic dance education program



August 19, 2023: HOUSTON, TEXAS – Vitacca Ballet School for Dance, Houston, Artistic Director + Founder [Kelly Ann Vitacca](#), and Resident Artist Program (RAP) Director [Andrea Dawn Shelley](#) are proud announce the 2023-2024 RAP Resident Artist [Melody Mennite](#).

Artistic Director Vitacca states, “Vitacca Ballet School is thrilled to have a Houston icon as the school’s resident artist this season. Ms. Mennite has built her vast dance career in Houston and rooted her reputation as a remarkable artist, which many of our students have seen and respected over the years. We are beyond thankful to have a homegrown artist work with our students this season.”

RAP Director Shelley comments, “I had the opportunity of observing Ms. Mennite lead a four-hour choreographic workshop for the dance community in Houston. In this workshop,

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offered to movers of different dance experience and ability levels, what stood out the most was her kindness, open mindedness and level of respect given to every individual in the studio. Her preparedness, collaborative, task-oriented development of movement vocabulary and dance architecture, is the type of collaborative spirit and experience we wish to offer our participating Resident Artist Program artists.” Ms. Shelley continues, “With the addition of composition study and research to our program last season, Ms. Mennite is a professional choreographer who will provide our young artists with a welcoming, collaborative choreographic process as well as heartfelt mentorship as they develop their own choreographic work throughout the season.”

RAP Choreographer Mennite is excited to work with Vitacca Ballet School, she eloquently states, “I love making new work with dancers who are open and willing to enter that wonderful unknown space that is the creative process with me. I also really appreciate the concept of this program in general. Transparency and mentorship through modeling in artistic processes is such a valuable thing for both choreographers and dancers. I love that the RAP experience is built to foster that. Honestly the time spent conceptualizing and building a new piece has become one of the most rewarding things I experience, so this opportunity has lit a flame of inspiration for me to warm my artist heart with these next few months. I cannot wait to meet and get to know my fellow collaborators in the dancers and share my ideas and experience with them. Everything about it excites me!”

Ms. Mennite is a choreography dance educator at heart making sure the process is a shared collaboration, she shares, “My biggest goal in choreography has become not only creating work that honors the dancers’ individualities and human experience but also creating a process and environment that invites each of them in to attuned connection with themselves and each other. We can get so outwardly focused on ballet and dance training that we lose the magic and wisdom of our intuitive movement. My work as a choreographer is an ongoing exploration in learning to foster that.”

This dance education process fundamental to RAP develops a well-rounded dancer. Ms. Mennite comments, “Dancers need a solid foundation of technique and consistent, persistent work that is quote measured and repetitive. The boundaries of this create a kind of mastery of form over time. But it is also crucial that dancers as artists push their own limits and learn how to embody qualities of spontaneity, courage, and explosive freedom within the structure of the training they labor so hard at. Being in the creation of a new work and performing it, as well as simply working with many choreographers and their differing processes and cues, is the main way that dancers can expand into these other qualities that only happen outside the class setting. That is why this program is beneficial to the dancers becoming more well-rounded.”

RAP is truly a unique program setting Vitacca Ballet School out as a dance education school, Ms. Mennite comments, “I haven’t before seen a program that fosters the kind of choreographer/dancer mentorship and education aspect the way that RAP is set up to.”



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Resident Artist Program (RAP)

The Vitacca Ballet School's RAP offers dancers a holistic approach to training and artistic development in a personal and professional environment with leading dance professionals. RAP is designed to build relationships with influential industry professionals and bridge the gap between guest master teacher and student.

"Vitacca Ballet School's Resident Artist Program is unique in that the program affords each young artist the continued opportunity to work intimately with the presented guest Resident Artist throughout the season. Beyond the initial setting of the Resident Artist's ensemble choreography, the Resident Artist returns throughout the season to continue working with our young artists through master classes, workshops, rehearsals, and mentorship. A genuine relationship develops, as together, they continue to build, fine tune, and collaborate on their set, often evolving choreography," states RAP Director Shelley when discussing the importance of the RAP Program in the Houston dance community. "The RAP program also offers participating young artists composition study and research with a focus on Production, including Stage Production; Costuming; Promotion and Fundraising."

Past season notable choreographers include Gregory Dolbashian, Norbert De La Cruz III, Jess Hendricks, Carlos dos Santos, Jr., and Autumn Eckman.

RAP 2023/24 Resident Artist Melody Mennite Biography

Melody Mennite has graced the cover of both *Dance Magazine* and *Dance Europe* and is celebrated as the Audrey Hepburn of ballet due to her dynamic acting and a predisposition for comedic roles. As an actor Mennite has achieved two award winning performances in film including her role in *Self Sabotage* and in *Bryan*. Mennite is currently a Principal ballerina with Houston Ballet. She has toured internationally to perform the classics as well as contemporary work in dance. Some of her classical Principal roles include Odette/Odile, Aurora, Kitri, Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, Cinderella, Manon, Juliet, The Sylph in Bournanville's *La Sylphide*, Marie in the ballet *Marie*, Tatiana and Olga in *Onegin*, Stephanie and Mary Vetsera in *Meyerling*, Swanhilda in *Coppelia*, Valencienne in *The Merry Widow*, and Lise in *La Fille mal Gardee*.

Mennite has choreographed over 13 commissioned ballets and been the choreographer for several films and spoken at many events on embodied movement and trauma resolution. She is certified as an integrative somatic trauma therapy practitioner and integrates that skillset into her movement practices and leadership positions, making her a trauma informed choreographer and teacher.

Her hobbies include spending time in the outdoors and with her son and two dogs, singing/making music, reading, writing, and practicing new ways to make art.



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RAP Director Andrea Dawn Shelley Biography

Andrea Dawn Shelley born in Miami, Florida, received her classical ballet training predominantly from Magdalena Maury and Magda G. Auñon. She studied dance at the University of South Florida under Gretchen Ward Warren and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance Education from Florida International University. Andrea began her professional career with Southern Ballet Theatre as a member of the corps de ballet and has since danced as a principal artist with Maximum Dance Company, Miami Contemporary Dance Company, Dominic Walsh Dance Theater, State Street Ballet and iMEE. She is the Co-Founding Director of iMEE Dance Company, est. 2009.

As a choreographer, Shelley has created original works commissioned by professional dance companies and festivals such as: iMEE, Ballet Florida, Miami Contemporary Dance Company, Dominic Walsh Dance Theater, State Street Ballet, O Dance, Ad Deum Dance Company, The Dance Gallery Festival / Level UP, palcoscenico danza, METdance, Island Moving Co., the black box INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL THEATRE & DANCE, Festival Ballet Providence, Bellingham Repertory Dance, 16th Annual Mid-Atlantic Choreographic Showcase, Houston Contemporary Dance Company & Vitacca Ballet. Her choreographic works have been presented throughout the United States, Mexico and Europe. She has participated in Residencies and created original works for dance programs such as: Sam Houston State University, Salve Regina University, Providence College, Western Kentucky University and High School of Visual & Performing Arts / Houston (PVA).

As a dance educator, Shelley has had the distinguished honor of serving as an annual preliminary panelist for the National Young Arts Foundation, Young Arts program in Choreography, Ballet & Modern in Miami, Fl. She was Adjunct Ballet Faculty at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI as well as Resident Choreographer and Company Director for the University's junior company. Currently, Ms. Shelley is on Faculty at the Institute of Contemporary Dance and Senior Faculty at Vitacca Vocational School for Dance where she is also the Resident Artist Program (RAP) Director. Shelley has also worked with Houston Contemporary Dance Company as Ballet Mistress and Rehearsal Assistant and Vitacca Ballet as Rehearsal Assistant.

For more information on Vitacca Ballet School for Dance and the RAP Program visit www.VitaccaDance.com.

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Headshot by Anna Snead