

# A Conversation With Amy Seiwert

BY HALEY HILTON

"It's always felt very natural for me to create."



**Training:** School for Creative and Performing Arts in Cincinnati (SCPA); University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM)

**Performance:** Sacramento Ballet (1991–99); Smuin Ballet (1999–2008)

**Leadership:** Founded the San Francisco-based company Imagery; artistic director of Sacramento Ballet, effective July 2018

When former Sacramento Ballet dancer Amy Seiwert discovered the company was on the hunt for a new artistic director, she felt compelled to apply. "The announcement launched the community into turmoil," she says. "That, coupled with financial stress, is often detrimental to a company. I wasn't sure Sacramento Ballet would make it through that, and the idea that this company I love might not exist anymore was something I wasn't willing to let happen. I couldn't help but throw my hat in the mix."

In the nearly two decades since her time dancing for Sacramento Ballet, Seiwert has gained valuable experience to prepare her for her new job. She danced nine years with Smuin Ballet, choreographed on companies across the country and founded her own company, Imagery. She's culled repertoire for Imagery's SKETCH series—a yearly event in which choreographers from around the country come to San Francisco to create boundary-defying pieces—and made it her goal to finish each year with 10 percent of Imagery's budget in the bank. Now she'll get to test out these financial skills on an even larger scale with Sacramento Ballet's \$2.76 million budget.

Sacramento Ballet's first season under Seiwert's direction begins in September.

**On maintaining the legacy of Sacramento Ballet** "It's been around for 64 years. When I look at the dancers who are there now, and how they've been trained, it's exactly how I was trained. I used to dance under [exiting artistic directors] Ron Cunningham and Carinne Binda, and they're in my artistic DNA. There is all this kinetic and aesthetic knowledge that's been passed down that I want to continue."

**On her plans for the company** "I don't think it's any secret that the company has had a lot of financial turmoil, so I'm looking to rebuild the community that supports ballet there. Sacramento itself is in an exciting time of growth. When I visit now, it's different from how it was years ago, yet I still recognize it. That's what I want the ballet company to become. The legacy is still there and recognizable, but we are growing. The repertoire I'm picking for next year incorporates the diversity of culture that the city holds. I want to include rather than alienate the community."

**On taking creative risks** "For the Imagery SKETCH series, we invite established choreographers to self-identify a risk they could take in their work and then try it. I want choreographers to come here and try something that they don't know if they're good at. Maybe they'll fail, and that's OK. For example, some choreographers are highly uncomfortable in the abstract—but I'm just the opposite. So, this year, my risk is to tackle a narrative. It will be a huge challenge." **DT**

Photo by David DeSilva, courtesy of Imagery