



# EKKLESIA

CONTEMPORARY BALLET

## SPRING PERFORMANCE

*Featuring excerpts from our signature works of the season including the world premiere of  
Uncaged: Illuminating women Afghan artists through live music & dance*

Sunday, April 13, 2025



# Uncaged

Composer: Sadie Harrison

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

Music: Cuatros Puntos Ensemble

## Uncaged Movement One: "I Dance"

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns,  
Jenna Patton, Rebecca Salerno, Jacob Shoup



Painting by Shajia Azhir

### Artist Note

I have done the painting of Sama's dance using the pastel colour technique. I drew this painting in 1400. I have painted this body rotation to achieve my spiritual goals that have been repressed.

(Sama means "listening", these performances often include singing, playing instruments, dancing, recitation of poetry and prayers, wearing symbolic attire, and other rituals. Sama is a particularly popular form of worship in Sufism. The Whirling Dervishes of the Mevlevi order are probably the best-known practitioners of Sama. Mevlevi practitioners of sema are adult initiates into the order, which historically only meant men. Sama is now also danced by women. Participants move as a group in a circle while also turning each individually. Art is "self expression" and Sama is "selfless expression"-an experience of "fanaa".

### I DANCE

I dance  
Let this nightmare pass!  
I dance  
Until this void period passes  
I dance  
To reach the mature peace and tranquility  
I dance  
To dance my suppressed words  
I dance  
For a free world  
I dance  
So that no more sparks fall into the chest of the oppressed  
I dance  
to break the silence of the night  
I dance  
until the rainbow of great expectations reappear  
I dance  
Until my breath is locked  
I dance  
For the first letter free of bombs  
I dance  
So that the women of the land become of the sun  
I dance  
To freedom and justice  
I dance  
until freedom dances hand in hand with me  
I dance  
Let this nightmare pass!

Shajia Azhir, Kabul, June 2024

می رقصم  
تا این کابوس بگذرد!  
می رقصم  
تا این دوره باطل بگذرد  
می رقصم  
تا صلح و آرامش به بلوغ برسد  
می رقصم  
تا کلمات سرکوب شده ام نیز برقصد  
می رقصم  
تا دنیا بپذیرد که این دنیا آزادم  
می رقصم  
تا دیگر فیشنگ ها به سینه مظلومان فرو نرود  
می رقصم  
تا سکوت شب بشکند  
می رقصم  
تا رنگین کمان آرزو ها دوباره پدیدار شود  
می رقصم  
تا نفس حبس شده ام نیز برقصد  
می رقصم  
تا حرف اول حرفی بمب و سلح نباشد.  
می رقصم  
تا زنان سرزمینم زنان از جنس خورشید شوند  
می رقصم  
تا بی عدالتی از بند اسارت رها شود  
می رقصم  
برقصد  
تا آزادی از راه برسد و  
تا این کابوس بگذرد می رقصم

## Movement Two: “Enough of Silence”

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns

### ENOUGH OF SILENCE

Shout out! Silence is enough!  
Enough of decorative slogans.  
Shout out! Rip off the gag!  
I am a woman, not a second sex.  
Break the hands of the torturer  
A world without war, I seek.  
Enough of war!  
Listen to my silence.  
Enough of ignorance.  
Put hands to the hands of woman - the hands of paradise.  
Enough of selfishness!  
I am the child of a free world.  
Enough of captivity!  
I heard a mother's breathless scream.  
No explosion and no suicide,  
I want lessons and schools.  
Silence the superpowers and their creepy games!  
A revolution, I seek.  
Enough of decorative protests!  
Books and art, I seek  
No more religion!



Painting by Shajia Azhir

Shajia Azhir, Kabul, June 2024

## Movement Three: “I will go to my homeland one day”

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton



Painting by Khadija

### Artist Note

I did this drawing of this young girl from a photo. When I saw her photo, I had a strange feeling, because she looked like she had lost all her dreams and saw her future as dark, but her eyes were still looking for light. When I made this drawing I was in Afghanistan and I was very worried about myself, my future and my art so I was just looked like her mood on that time. I made it with charcoal.

### I will go to my homeland one day

I will go to my homeland one day  
I will walk along the streets of Kabul again  
I will dance on the street  
I will play a freedom song through my violin  
I will paint peace and love on the walls of Kabul  
I will laugh with children and spread love with them  
I will go back to my homeland one day  
I will teach humanity and love to the children of Kabul  
I will learn more than those who prevented me

I will laugh again

I will leave my hair free for the wind to caress  
I will go to my Kabul one day  
I will listen to Ahmad Zahir songs on the street

I will stand and rise  
I will be free

Alina Gawhary, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 6 January 2024

## Movement Four: “The Colour of My Tears”

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton

### Artist Note

It has several meanings and I'll try and explain as best as I can. First it's waiting, waiting for some good news. There is also women's beauty. Women are beautiful and colourful no matter their circumstance.

However, women are also disappearing amidst the problems in today's society. The paint falling down the page for me represents a person melting and sorrow. But the green colour in the background is the brightness and a ray of hope. No matter what the situation we should not accept defeat. There is so much more that I can say...



This artist still lives in Kabul and she remains hidden as an artist. She takes part in a secret art school supported by the Belfast charity Beyond Skin.

**Painting by Elaha**

### TO FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

To fight for freedom, to fight for peace  
When your soul is restless, your heart is broken,  
In the depths of the night, carrying burdens all alone  
Chasing dreams, seeking lights, scars to atone.  
When the heart abides, the courage in our core  
Helps us fight for freedom, to fight for sunshine  
Changing our destiny with the courage in our heart  
Brave as a warrior in the world of injustice and war.  
I will take you to new a world of freedom and love  
Where peace reigns and school bell chimes above  
To fight for freedom, to fight for love.  
I stay, I fight, I win, with the magic of my paint  
Turning the war's light to freedom's glow.  
In the land of humanity, where injustice shall not sow  
I will take you to a new destination, where our hearts sing.  
To fight for freedom, to fight for life  
I stay, I fly, I fight, with the strength in my soul,  
Dancing in the sky of freedom, with long, tousled hair.  
In the beauty of her eyes, wild, free, an enchanting soul  
Brave, an angel in a world of beauty, holding our dreams.

**Alina Gawhary, Bangladesh, 20 July 2024**

## Movement Five “Warrior Woman”:

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns,  
Jenna Patton, Rebecca Salerno

### WARRIOR-WOMAN

I am a warrior  
I am a woman  
freedom is my way  
flying is my dream  
freedom is my right  
I am a warrior  
I am a woman  
I walk in a bloody street  
fighting is the way to freedom  
My dream is to have a pen  
I make wings through my pen  
I am a warrior  
I am a woman  
I believe I can fly  
to make my pen my gun  
freedom is my right  
I am a warrior  
I am a woman  
Staying at home is not my identity  
Being powerful is my identity  
Being a woman is not my weakness  
I am a warrior! I am a woman!

**Alina Gawhary Kabul, Afghanistan 16 April 2022**



Painting by Khadija

### Artist Note

When Taliban took over Afghanistan again in 2021, they banned schools for girls in the country. However, some of the teachers and other women activists in the society started to protest against this. I felt this situation with my whole body. And then I started to do this drawing for all women and girls that stand and raise their hands and voices the whole day on the streets to fight for millions of girls and women’s rights in the country.

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## Reason for Participating in this Program

### By Khadija

I decided to participate in this program because I believe that art, especially painting, can be a powerful tool for expressing opinions and conveying messages.

As an Afghan woman, women's rights have always been a crucial issue for me. In Afghanistan, after decades of war and violence—and especially following the Taliban’s return to power—the majority of Afghan women have not only lost their basic human rights but have also been erased from public life and imprisoned within their homes. However, time and again, they have proven that they will never surrender to the prevailing social, cultural, and economic pressures. Instead, they have continuously fought for their fundamental rights and, in many cases, achieved significant victories.

Having been born and raised amid war and violence, I deeply feel the pain, suffering, and deprivation of Afghan women. At the same time, I am fully aware of their insatiable

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## Elisa Schroth, Artistic Director, Choreographer, Founder

Director's Note: My intention with the choreography of *Uncaged* is to relay the stories of the Afghan artists in a way that is genuine to their experiences and to how their art speaks to me. The Taliban's oppressive restrictions have forced the majority of women into silence and isolation, but technology has given us a small opening for communication and expression. I used WhatsApp messaging and video exchanges to bring the artists into direct conversation with the process, circumventing these limitations and bridging our vast geographical divide. I shared the choreographic process with the artists by texting them rehearsal videos and zooming them into

rehearsals, and then incorporating their feedback and input into the choreography. In one case, one of the artists even sent us a video of her demonstrating specific movements that represented her story. As dancers, seeing these movements done by the body who is experiencing the pain and struggle first hand helped us understand the meanings more clearly.

For the remaining choreography, I drew from my own experience as a woman in the United States. I drew from times where I have felt shamed, and have felt treated as less than equal to a man. I am thankful to have a husband who treats me as an equal, which is not always the case for women, even here in the United States. One of the Afghan artists that we work with has a supportive husband who believes in women's rights and helps her pursue her art in secret. There are many women and men in Afghanistan who struggle for their freedoms while in hiding.

My experience as a woman in the United States is by no means a comparison to the extremes women are facing in Afghanistan under the Taliban, such as not even being allowed to speak outside of their homes, and having to cover up their windows so they are literally not seen or heard. How do things like this happen, and for what purpose?

I hope as audience members you are able to find universal human parallels with these women. We hope this work inspires people to find resolve in navigating oppressive patriarchal systems, and to showcase the strength we hold together to rise with these women. As the end of the piece suggests, we shall overcome.

## Sadie Harrison, Composer

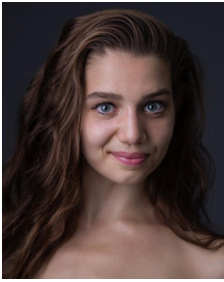
Sadie Harrison is a UK composer known particularly for the socio-political aspects of her music-making with works challenging stereotypes of marginalised peoples, celebrating their creativity and individuality. She has been Composer-in-Residence with Cuatro Puntos (USA), Kunstler Bei Wu Sculpturepark (Germany), and Composer-in-Association with the Afghanistan National Institute of Music. Her symphonic work *Sapida-Dam-Nau* for the Afghanistan Women's Orchestra was premiered at the Closing Concert of the World Economic Forum, Davos in 2017. Sadie's music has been performed in Carnegie Hall, Sydney Opera House, Vilnius Philharmonie, Royal Festival Hall, London by many of world's leading ensembles and soloists, featured on international films and documentaries, also released to critical acclaim on Naxos, Prima Facie, NMC, Cadenza, Sargasso, Toccata Classics, BML, Divine



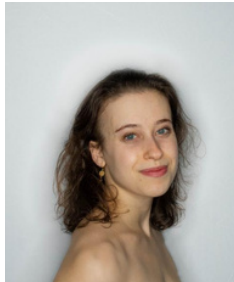
Art/Metier, and Clarinet Classics. Recordings for 2024-2025 include '...ad infinitum...' for Steve Bingham, Owl of the Hazels with Australian bass clarinetist Ros Dunlop, Nani ka itou? with the Isbourne Trio, *Uncaged* with Cuatro Puntos and 10,000 Black Men with the Kreutzer String Quartet. Sadie teaches at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Drama, is a Fellow of Goldsmiths College, London and is currently External Examiner for Composition at the Royal College of Music. Her music is published by UYMP and ABRSM. [www.uymp.co.uk](http://www.uymp.co.uk)

**The music for *Uncaged* was commissioned in 2024 by Cuatro Puntos- a CT organization whose mission is to amplify silenced, persecuted and underrepresented musicians and their unique types of music. For more information about the work of Cuatro Puntos, please visit [www.CuatroPuntos.org](http://www.CuatroPuntos.org) .**

# Ekklesia Contemporary Ballet Company Dancers



Sasha  
Biagiarelli,  
Assistant Director



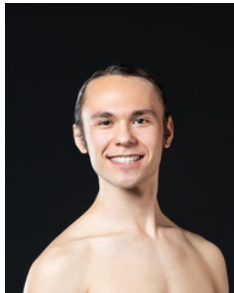
Hope  
Blackburn-Shoup



Tiffany  
Oltjenbruns



Jenna  
Patton



Jacob  
Shoup



Rebecca  
Salerno



**Read Dancer Biographies Here**

## **Cuatro Puntos Ensemble**

Violin: Aaron Packard, Annie Trépanier

Viola: Steve Larson, Kevin Bishop

Cello: Allan Ballinger

## **Ekklesia Contemporary Ballet Board Members**

Mary Blankson: Chair

Kasey Harding: Treasurer

Maria Bouffard: Secretary

Reverend Julie Hoplamazian: Director

Merly de le hoz Cookson: Director

Elisa Schroth: Artistic Director



## **A Note From Composer Sadie Harrison**

Afghanistan has been at the heart of my musical career for the past 25 years, its people and culture a constant source of inspiration that has found expression in 15 works thus far, from solo piano pieces to songs to orchestral works and concerti. The first of these works, *The Light Garden*, was commissioned by a British ensemble for performance in Carnegie Hall in 2001. The connection between myself in the UK, Afghanistan, and the United States continues to this day with *Uncaged* and its celebration of the extraordinary artwork and poetry of Afghan women, performed by my long term colleagues and friends Cuatro Puntos (to whom I owe so much) and to new friends Elisa and Ekklesia Contemporary Ballet.

Over the years I have worked with a number of Afghan musicians, including Ustad Yusuf Mahmoud, Ustad Abdul-Wahab Madadi and Ensemble Bakhtar, and more recently as Composer-in-Association to the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, composing several works for the young musicians whose courage continues to shine today, dispersed as they are across Europe and America since the return of the Taliban four years ago.

Of course, writing music which celebrates Afghanistan is hugely enriching, but much more important to me has been the development of personal relationships with Afghan women that have come about as a result of the Taliban's takeover of the country in 2021. And of all of these, the most extraordinary and life-changing has been with Alina Gawhary, a 17 year old artist in Kabul who wrote to me out of the blue in October 2021 after her paintings had been burnt in front of her by Taliban soldiers. She spoke little English, and I spoke no Persian whatsoever, but over the next two years we corresponded several times a day, discussing books, poetry, art, music, our families and above all Alina's desire to get out of a country where she was no longer allowed an education, where she had to paint by candlelight in secret, where the music I sent her each day had to be wiped off her phone for fear of being found by the Taliban who frequently searched her house. Getting Alina out of Afghanistan seemed absolutely impossible for years with countless setbacks, terrifying journeys back and forth across Taliban checkpoints, numerous visa rejections, and huge financial barriers. But against all the odds Alina joined the Fine Art Department in Belfast University last year! What started out as a simple message 'Hello, my name is Alina Gawhary. I am an artist' became the catalyst for an unbelievable journey to freedom. So many people helped along the way, including Darren Ferguson from the Belfast charity Beyond Skin and other members of the International Campaign for Afghan Musicians. Together, Darren and I have now smuggled large numbers of artworks by women out of Afghanistan, selling them and returning 100% of sales to the women whose families rely on this income for their survival.

Several of these artworks form part of the *Uncaged* project - art and poetry by Shajia, Khadija, Alina and Elaha. Tonight's performance is a true collaboration between these fabulous, brave artists whose work has inspired my music and the dancers who have interpreted the art and my music to bring the paintings to life with passion and commitment. Although our Afghan friends are not with us in body as they would wish to be, they are in our musician's hands, our dancers' feet and in all our hearts.

## Khadija's Biography

My first attempt is to be able to survive to depict the visions and sufferings of Afghan women in my paintings in the future. I want to live to bring the message and dreams of a 19-year-old girl and her contemporaries to the people of the world who survived the war, poverty, and problems and fought for their rights. Afghan women are too strong to give up their rights and struggle under the stone age laws of the Taliban. Afghan women have nothing to lose. Even if the world leaves us alone, we will continue to fight for our freedom and rights in different ways, and we believe that Afghan women and girls will win in the end.

### Read More about Khadija's Story Here



### Shajia's Note About Her Paintings

I am Shajia Azhir, a painter from Kabul. I am the daughter of a land that has been burned in the fire of war for years. For the last two and a half, the Taliban has systematically excluded women and girls from civil and public life. And it is not only women but almost all democratic and progressive forces of society that face violence and ignorance under Taliban rule. To me, as an artist, it is the peak of a nightmare that can happen in a world where its leaders chant about justice, equality, human rights, and dignity. Women and their socio-psychological struggles for life and freedom in such a system of suppression are the main subject matter of my paintings. I paint, but I can't exhibit. I shout and show the pain and injustice with the hope of freedom and life to return back to my home. I paint to make eyes see and chant to make ears hear. My artistic utopia is a world where no blind eyes and no deaf ears exist to see and hear freedom, life, and dignity. Shajia lives in Kabul, Afghanistan.

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## Tech Crew

Poster Artwork: Shajia Azhir  
Lighting Designer: Christopher Bell  
Poetry Reader: Zuhra Samimi  
Poster Design: Jon Schroth  
Photography: Jon Schroth  
Videography: Natalie Silver  
Sound Engineer: Taylor Warren  
Stage Design: Taylor Warren  
Sound Technician: Erica West  
Stage Manager: Erica West

### **As It Is In Heaven**

Music Ennio Morricone

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

Company Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns,  
Jenna Patton, Jacob Shoup

### **Blackbird**

Music: Paul McCartney, John Lennon, The Gray Havens

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

Company Dancers: Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Jacob Shoup

### **Emergence**

Music: Oliver Davis

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

ESB Youth Company Dancers: Mya Schulze, Ellie van Yperen, Isabelle Weissberg

### **We Are**

Music: Sweet Honey in The Rock

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

Company Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton,  
Rebecca Salerno, Jacob Shoup

### **In My Skin**

Music: Tremor

Choreography: Claire Mazza

Company Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton,  
Rebecca Salerno, Jacob Shoup

### **JIVE**

Music: Lusine

Choreography: Alejandro Ulloa

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton, Rebecca Salerno,  
Myalene Schulze, Jacob Shoup, Ellie van Yperen, Isabelle Weissberg

### **Gloria**

Composer: Antonio Lucio Vivaldi

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton, Rebecca Salerno,  
Myalene Schulze, Jacob Shoup, Ellie van Yperen, Isabelle Weissberg

### **\*10 Minute Pause\***

### **Uncaged**

Composer: Sadie Harrison

Choreography: Elisa Schroth

Company Dancers: Sasha Biagiarelli, Hope Blackburn-Shoup, Tiffany Oltjenbruns, Jenna Patton,  
Rebecca Salerno, Jacob Shoup



All photography is strictly prohibited during the performance.



All videography is strictly prohibited during the performance.



Please turn off cell phones during the performance..

## Save the Dates!

EKKLESIA  
CONTEMPORARY BALLET

### ***Summer Intensive***

AUGUST 11TH-15TH, 2025

AGES 10-24



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