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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn to host its second annual *Cocktail Caper* fundraiser event**

**BROOKLYN, NY – 21-March-2024** – Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn (CBT) will host its second annual Cocktail Caper gala fundraiser on Thursday, March 21, 6-8:30pm, at The Riverside Church in New York, NY.

The event will feature live music by the Craig Brann Trio, an open bar and passed hors d'oeuvres, a silent auction, dancing, tributes, and the restaging of a work by Artistic Director and Founder Marla Hirokawa, inspired by the classic 1940's film *Casablanca*. CBT plans to honor its board president and longtime supporter Steven B. Rissman with the Inspired Leadership Award for his critical role in CBT's growth and expansion despite all odds. The company will also recognize the Rebecca and Craig Brann family for their contributions to the dance and music that have helped build CBT over two generations. Event sponsors include Apple Bank, Grand Prix Dance, Eagle Urban Media, Lofty Pigeon Books, Messiah's Congregation, Ridgewood Savings Bank, and numerous individual donors.

"We are so happy to host another successful Cocktail Caper event," says Marla Hirokawa, Artistic Director and Founder. "Our committee has worked hard to cultivate a uniquely engaging program. I am extremely grateful to be able to reacquaint with longtime supporters as well as introduce new friends to the joys of Covenant Ballet."

**About the Honorees**

Steven B. Rissman, Vice President & Associate General Counsel for Philip Morris International (PMI), heads up PMI's Litigation & Investigations practice group. He has global responsibility for PMI's significant litigation matters, including PMI's product liability litigation and claims involving PMI's Reduced Risk Products; commercial lawsuits, patent litigation and criminal matters of company-wide significance; and major governmental and internal investigations. Mr. Rissman also leads PMI's Illicit Trade Prevention group.

Active in philanthropy and the arts, since 2017 Mr. Rissman has served as CBT's President. Under Mr. Rissman's leadership, CBT not only survived the Covid-19 pandemic shutdown (which devastated many small and midsize arts organizations) but emerged on a trajectory of growth. CBT hired its first Executive Director in 2022, hosted its first annual fundraiser as part of its 35th Anniversary celebration in 2023, and returned to the stage with a performance of Marla Hirokawa's beloved ORPHAN TRAIN at City Tech Theater in November, 2023. These milestones were made possible, in good measure, to Mr. Rissman's leadership in strategic planning, fundraising and stakeholder relations. Since becoming Board President, CBT has established a beautiful, permanent home in an underserved Brooklyn neighborhood, enhanced its capabilities and infrastructure, gracefully navigated challenges and took advantage of opportunities, and has continued to flourish as a beacon of arts and culture in south Brooklyn. Mr. Rissman is an avid fly fisherman and outdoorsman, music and photography enthusiast, philanthropist and, most importantly, proud father of Ariel, Gabe and Bella.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Rebecca Brann began studying ballet at the age of 6 at the newly opened Covenant Dance Studio (now Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn) with Artistic Director and Founder Marla Hirokawa. Rebecca graduated with a Certificate of Dance from Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in 2004, and then continued dancing professionally with Covenant Ballet Theatre as a Principal Dancer, originating numerous roles in Marla's ballets. She joined the faculty at Covenant Ballet Theatre Academy in 1995, specializing in Horton technique. Rebecca is also an Arts in Education Teaching Artist, Certified Personal Trainer, and founder of HopeDanceNYC. Her father, Rev. Steve Schlissel, serves on the CBT Board of Advisors and her mother, Jeanne Schlissel, has created beautiful set pieces for Marla's ballets. Originally from Maine, Craig Brann came to NYC in 1996 where he quietly and steadily established himself as one of the elite guitar players of his generation. Now Craig has residencies and regular performances throughout NYC. As CBT's musical director, Craig has collaborated with Marla on some of her most memorable works, such as Nisei at the NY International Fringe Festival (2014), among others. Craig and Rebecca's four children are part of the next generation of young students at CBT Academy: Tehilah (17), Irving (14), Verdinah, (10), and Dorothy (9).

### **About Covenant Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn**

Since 1987, CBT has invested in the children and families of South Brooklyn, where cultural activities and resources are limited. Artistic Director Marla Hirokawa founded CBT on the conviction that a serious ballet education combined with maximum inclusion is needed to advance the art form, train youth, and improve the lives of those within its embrace. In an accepting yet rigorous environment, CBT fosters the love of dance through pre-professional training in its studios and educational programs in NYC schools, and through dozens of original ballet productions conceived and choreographed by Ms. Hirokawa. In its 36 years, CBT has trained hundreds of students, age three through adult, who come from CBT's South Brooklyn region as well as all five NYC boroughs and the tri-state area. Under the direction of Ms. Hirokawa, countless students and audience members have had their lives enriched through the unique combination of love for the art form, generosity, rigor and discipline, acceptance, inclusion, and respect for all. It is these qualities that make CBT the unique dance organization that it is today.

CBT alumni have gone on to study at major performing arts high schools in NYC and virtually every major dance school in New York and beyond, including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, American Ballet Theatre, Ballet Hispanico, Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Julliard School, and the School of American Ballet. Many have apprenticed and danced with professional companies such as Martha Graham Company, Suzanne Farrell Ballet, and the Metropolitan Opera. Others have formed their own dance companies and dance schools. They have also leveraged life lessons acquired at CBT to launch successful careers in education, fashion, finance, health care, law, neuroscience, and public relations, among other fields.

For further information, visit [www.covenantballet.org](http://www.covenantballet.org), call 718-891-6199, or email [info@covenantballet.org](mailto:info@covenantballet.org).

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