

## Seattle dance group launches new international exchange program

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Khambatta Dance Company is launching a new international exchange dance program with this year's Seattle International Dance Festival Winter Mini Fest. (Jim Coleman) **Less** ^

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

*Special to The Seattle Times*

Executive artistic director Cyrus Khambatta feared that the U.S. dance community was losing touch with the international dance scene. So the head of [Khambatta Dance Company](#) — a touring group dedicated to cultural exchange — is creating a network that will help local artists connect and collaborate with dance companies around the world.

“Pretty much everything we do is about bringing cultures together and celebrating differences,” Khambatta said. “We’re trying to uncover things around the world that are different, intriguing, unique — that bring something to our local community.”

The artistic exchange program is called American Cultural Exchange Network for Dance, and it will launch with Khambatta’s Winter Mini Fest. An outgrowth of Seattle International Dance Festival, this year’s [Winter Mini Fest](#) (March 29-April 7 at Erickson Theatre) features workshops as well as performances by KDC, Edmonds-based [Olympic Ballet Theatre](#) and guest company-in-residence [Newport Contemporary Ballet](#) of Rhode Island.

This year’s festival is also a launchpad for the ACEND network, which will allow dance companies from around the world to interact with Seattle audiences — and help local artists collaborate and perform outside the United States.

In recent years, Khambatta has formed a group of partners committed to artistic exchange. During the pandemic, KDC traveled to the Newport Dance Festival in Rhode Island to perform and create new work. Now, the Newport company is returning the favor; its residency is the first exchange coordinated under ACEND.

Khambatta says Newport Contemporary Ballet will be the first of many artists that ACEND showcases to local dance lovers. In June, Seattle audiences will see the next

wave of artists: Seattle-based [Degenerate Art Ensemble](#)'s exchange partner, [Pittsburgh-based slowdanger](#), and Seattle movement artist [Mary Sigward](#)'s counterpart from the [Seoul International Dance Festival in Tank](#), Chumna Dance Company, will both perform at SIDF.

“I guess it’s like Rick Steves,” Khambatta said. “Oh, what are we bringing back to Seattle to share with our audience?” ”

With support from the Raynier Institute & Foundation’s James Ray Residency and Touring Project, nine local companies have joined ACEND, and they’re planning exchanges with partners who will contribute matching funds to the project. [Seattle-based Karin Stevens Dance](#) will revive Stevens’ 2019 work “Sea Change Within Us” at Gonzaga University in September, and she will perform the environment-themed piece locally next year. In October, Sigward’s MS+A will perform in South Korea, and Degenerate Art Ensemble has 2025 exchange performances in Pittsburgh and Lucerne, Switzerland.

The upcoming SIDF festival seemed like a natural pairing with ACEND. With the Winter Mini Fest, now in its seventh year, Khambatta aims to give local crowds a taste of the artistic collaboration that the company experiences on tour.

“It’s basically set up as a residence between Khambatta Dance Company and another company in which we perform our own works the first weekend,” he explained. The two companies spend the interim week creating work to be presented the second weekend of the festival.

At this year’s festival, KDC will premiere Khambatta’s “Dream in the Back of the Head,” a work exploring the concept of time and the ideas that we put off until later. Olympic Ballet Theatre will present “Keep Me in Mind,” set to music by Peggy Lee and choreographed by Eva Stone, who produced the [CHOP SHOP: Bodies of Work](#) festival for more than 10 years and has also created work for Pacific Northwest Ballet.

On the second weekend, Newport Contemporary Ballet will perform executive artistic director Danielle Genest’s “Blind Witness” and “In the Wind,” in addition to the new collaborative work created with dancers from both companies during the residency.

“It will be a surprise for us as much as it is for the audience,” Khambatta said.

Beyond the 2024 Winter Mini Fest, the next step for the ACEND network is developing an online marketplace where artists can connect with potential partners.

“It seems like a very simplistic thing to say the website is the next thing,” Khambatta said, but it’s more like developing a dating app than designing a simple homepage.

“How are they going to make a meaningful connection that will be useful for the dancers?” Khambatta asked rhetorically. “You’re talking about artists that are working with other artists, so they have to feel like they have a connection to it.”

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### **SIDF Winter Mini Fest**

March 29-April 7; Erickson Theatre, 1524 Harvard Ave., Seattle; \$25 single performance, \$45 festival pass; Erickson Theatre is ADA accessible; runtimes vary; 206-329-1050, [seattleidf.org](http://seattleidf.org)

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