

For Immediate Release  
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**PEAK PERFORMANCES PRESENTS COMPANY SBB // STEFANIE BATTEN BLAND'S  
*LOOK WHO'S COMING TO DINNER*, NOVEMBER 4-7**

**Dance-Theater Work Reimagines the Oscar-Winning 1967 Film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Starring Sidney Poitier, Katherine Hepburn, and Spencer Tracy, as a Probing Dance-Theater Work, Considering the Dinner Table as a Site of Tension and Transformation**



*Photo by Carlos Cardona*

**PEAK Performances** presents **Company SBB // Stefanie Batten Bland's** dance-theater work ***Look Who's Coming to Dinner*, November 4-7** at **Montclair State University's Alexander Kasser Theater**. Inspired by and contemporizing the themes of the 1967 Stanley Kramer film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* surrounding an interracial engagement—and reactions to it—*Look Who's Coming to Dinner* pays tribute to those who paved the way toward acceptance in love and life. In dialogue with the film's use of intimate domestic settings to evoke the vast tensions of its cultural context, *Look Who's Coming to Dinner* unfolds around a transformative dinner setting. Here, seven dance-theater artists excavate interlaced universal traumas through imagery and ritual as they seek a seat at the table.

Jerome Robbins Award-winning artist Stephanie Batten Bland creates performance at the intersection of dance-theater and installation, questioning contemporary and historical cultural symbolism and the complexities of human relationships in the context of social, political, and racial issues. For this work, Batten Bland worked with Company SBB members in workshops to build a vernacular of movement surrounding the statuses, roles, and relationships that can be situated around a table. She obtained rights to use sound clips from the film, with the iconic actors' voices distorted across her kinetic experimentation with the film's themes. "The Glory of Love," the 1936 song heard across the film, is here reconceived and unsettled by composer **Paul Damian Hogan**.

The film's titular dinner happens as the credits roll—with the symbol-rife act of sitting around a table concluding a fraught, day-long emotional journey. In Batten Band's piece, the table—and the emotional and social acrobatics sited there—are physicalized. The table becomes vehicular and transportive. It takes on new meanings and forms as dancers' relationship to it—and its impact on their relationships to one another—transform, moving and shifting in tandem with the collisions of our socially constructed perceptions and positions.

*Dance Enthusiast* called *Look Who's Coming to Dinner* "eloquent, elegant dance performance," adding that Batten Bland "artfully paints emotional tableaux with her impressive dancers" that "emphasize their struggles with contemporary relationships." Noting Batten Bland's altering of the film's title in this work—from the coy "Guess" to the imperative "Look"—*The Brooklyn Rail* writes that "without watering down history to universals, *Look Who's Coming to Dinner* is a powerful work that does not ask, but forces us to take a seat at the table, and see."

In *BOMB*, Batten Bland explained that *Look Who's Coming to Dinner* "came about because I was feeling this need for people to come together, and yet I kept seeing reasons why people weren't being invited. When I think of invitation, I think of the table and the statuses that the table can offer...At the dinner table in *Look*, we're all seated at the same level, but the idea of who is invited to that dinner table has great meaning. I was set on exploring that and really wanted to dive into Kramer's film...[which] spoke to so many different ways that we judge ourselves and consider how we should act within our own cultures...I think about the table in terms of whom we are going to let come to dinner [after the pandemic]. God, it better change. If we want to survive as a species, we'd better build a bigger table."

With *Look Who's Coming to Dinner*, which has been performed at Lincoln Center and La MaMa (as part of the Crossing the Line Festival), Batten Bland has extended the work the piece does beyond the stage, inviting people in the areas it's performed to participate in dinner-themed conversations in workshops. This fall, Batten Bland, currently an Assistant Professor of Theatre and Dance at Montclair State University, is, with MSU's College of the Arts, hosting a series of events seeking to bring to the table students in dialogue. For example, in a series of pop-up performances, student

musicians will play interpretations of “The Glory of Love,” newly commissioned from jazz composers.

Performers in *Look Who’s Coming to Dinner* include **Claire Gieringer, Mio Ishikawa, Nando Moreland, David Lee Parker, Ryan Rouland Smith, Rachel Watson-Jih,** and **Latra A. Wilson**

The production includes choreography, installation and direction by Stefanie Batten Bland; music by Paul Damian Hogan; costumes by **Shane Ballard**; and lighting by **Yuki Nakase Link**, adapted from **Clifton Taylor**.

### **Performances Times, Running Time, Tickets, and Location**

Performances of *Look Who’s Coming to Dinner* take place Thursday, November 4 and Friday, November 5 at 7:30pm; Saturday, November 6 at 8pm; and Sunday, November 7 at 3pm.

Running time is approximately 60 minutes.

Tickets are \$40 and can be purchased by visiting [peakperfs.org](http://peakperfs.org) or calling 973.655.5112.

The Alexander Kasser Theater is located at 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ, on the Montclair State University campus.

### **PEAK Performances’ Commitment to Health and Safety**

To help protect the health and safety of audiences, artists, staff, and PEAK’s greater community, patrons are required to wear masks—at all times—for all performances. Additionally, all performances will require proof of full vaccination to attend. Audience members will be asked to show proof of vaccination before entering the theater. These guidelines may evolve depending on health and safety recommendations.

### **About Stefanie Batten Bland**

Child of a jazz composer/producer father and writer mother, and raised in Soho when it was still led by artists, Stefanie Batten Bland was clearly destined for a future in the arts. She situates her work at the intersection of dance-theatre, film, and installation, with a focus on the interrogation of contemporary and historical culture.

Jerome Robbins Awardee Batten Bland has been featured in *The New York Times*, *T Magazine*, *Dance Europe*, *Marie Claire*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *TV 5 Monde*, and *Dance Teacher Magazine*. She is a 2021 commissioned artist by Baryshnikov Arts Center and Duke Performances, 2021 Toulmin

Creator Fellow for the Center for Ballet Arts at NYU, and choreographer for American Ballet Theatre's inaugural Women's Movement Initiative.

Known for her unique visual and movement aesthetic, she served as movement director for *Eve's Song* at the Public Theater (*Forbes* 2018 Best Theatre), *European Union* at the United Nations, NY, and is currently Casting and Movement Director for Emursive Productions (producers of *Sleep No More*). She has created for fashion and lifestyle partners Louis Vuitton, VanCleeef & Arpels, Hermés, and Guerlain. Her choreography is currently in active repertory at American Ballet Theater, Alvin Ailey II, Transitions Dance Company in Greenwich, UK, and Frontier Danceland in Singapore. Her work has been seen internationally at the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Danse à Lille, in France, and Tanz Tendenzen in Germany.

SBB's 2021 dance film *Kolonial*, produced by Baryshnikov Arts Center, has been nominated for three Bessie Awards including outstanding production, visual design, and costumes. She has created 14 other dance cinema films that have been shown in international festivals from South Africa to Buenos Aires and Greece to Germany.

A global artist, Batten Bland established her own company, Company SBB, in France in 2008 while positioned as head choreographer at the Paris Opéra Comique. Upon returning to New York City in 2011, she received the support of Mikhail Baryshnikov as a part of the esteemed residency program at Baryshnikov Arts Center, where she has continued to present work. The company just reopened live performances at Martha's Vineyard with a partnership between The Yard, Martha's Vineyard Museum, and the MV African American Heritage Trail.

SBB received her MFA in interdisciplinary arts from Goddard College, is Assistant Professor at Montclair State University's Department of Theatre and Dance, and lives in SoHo with her family.

### **About Company SBB**

Company SBB // Stefanie Batten Bland is an interdisciplinary dance theatre company performing original works by artistic director and founder Stefanie Batten Bland. Based in New York since 2011, Company SBB was founded in 2008 in France, where it quickly caught the attention of presenters, fellow artists and audiences with its award-winning choreographic installations, riveting performers and intellectually ambitious creations.

### **About PEAK Performances**

PEAK Performances, a program of Arts + Cultural Programming (ACP), at Montclair State University, produces and presents dance, music, theater, opera, and circus performances in the Alexander Kasser Theater, on the MSU campus, for students and the general public. Through PEAK

Performances, an internationally acclaimed live performing arts series, ACP defies convention by supporting new performance ideas without compromise. ACP believes that for the performing arts to be sustainable, audiences must evolve, and that the way to achieve this goal is to empower the best artists of our time to achieve new heights of imagination. With its newly launched PEAK Plus video-capture program, ACP makes live performances accessible worldwide, drastically expanding audiences for new work.

Through its Creative Thinking course, ACP engages artists to participate in a groundbreaking research laboratory, illustrating for students of all fields of study that art and science are symbiotic. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core values manifested in ACP's long-standing embrace of work by artists not yet supported by other major institutions in the region. Because ACP provides the highest-quality production values, audiences have an opportunity to engage with creative viewpoints that are bold and insightful and fully realized. PEAK Performances is credited with 57 world premieres, 54 U.S. premieres, and 66 commissions. For five successive years the New Jersey Council on the Arts awarded ACP a Citation of Excellence in performance programming. ACP Executive Director Jedediah Wheeler received from the national Association of Performing Arts Professionals the William Dawson Award for Programmatic Excellence and sustained Achievement in Programming.

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