

## **TOP CONTEMPORARY DANCE COMPANIES COMING TOGETHER FOR SOLD OUT SUICIDE AWARENESS BENEFIT**

*Curated by Gerald Appelstein, featuring 11 dance companies/54 dancers and a performance by Phantom of the Opera Alumn Jeff Keller; all proceeds benefitting the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention*

**NEW YORK, NY – (Feb. 7, 2020)** The feeling of losing a loved one, particularly a child – regardless of how that person leaves this earth – has an everlasting impact on those who survive; the irreplaceable loss challenges survivors in ways they never thought possible.

In Gerald Appelstein’s case, it took many years of reflection for the Manhattan and Mahwah, NJ-based philanthropist to determine the optimal way of celebrating the life of his late son, Jason, who lost his mental health and drug addiction battle to suicide 12 years ago. In collaboration with the AFSP, Mr. Appelstein will host the first annual “Tribute to Jason” (and too many others lost to suicide) program, which will take place on March 14 at the New York Live Arts Theatre. The event will aim to raise suicide awareness while celebrating the beauty of life through numerous special dance performances.

“The whole point of the evening is to save a life,” says Mr. Appelstein regarding his upcoming fundraiser that has already sold out the 184-seat venue. “If we can save just one life, or if we can ease the pain of those who’ve had to endure from the loss of one, then we have accomplished all we can hope for.”

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - New York City Chapter Area Director Amy Monahan has expressed her pride in partnering with the “Tribute to Jason” benefit as it aligns with “our mission to save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide,” she says. Five to six suicide deaths occur in the United States every hour, about the same horrific rate of those we are losing in the opioid crisis. Monahan says the organization’s important work “would not be possible without events like this. We are thrilled to partner with NYC’s thriving Arts community. Together we can create a world without suicide.”

The evening of commemorate events, led by the master of ceremonies and Executive Director of the NYC Dance Alliance Joe Lanteri, will feature choreography by a myriad of renowned dance companies, including Complexions, Parsons Dance, BalletX and Buglisi Dance Theater. Rising stars Alison Cook Beatty Dance, Arch Ballet, Jody Oberfelder Projects, and Kymera Dance are also scheduled to perform. The evening also features the world premiere of up-and-coming choreographer Alison Machabee’s “If I Had One More Day.” Twenty of Montclair State University’s dance majors and Z Artists Group top cast of pre-professionals round out the program.

“Dance is such a transformational art; the form and the beauty of it and the combination of movement with music can be so spiritually captivating and emotionally engaging,” Appelstein says. “I hope that the planned poignant evening will give our audience a welcome temporary respite.”

In addition to the predominant dance aspect of the evening, Phantom of the Opera alumn Jeff Keller, the first American to be cast as the Phantom, will be singing Eric Clapton's iconic Tears in Heaven, bringing his Broadway baritone to this evening's thematically connected ballad.

"When you have someone who's lost to suicide, the damage is persistent and pervasive," Appelstein says. "We do not solve big societal problems like suicide prevention in quiet dimly lit basement halls, awash in shameful whispers. No, we must walk together out of the darkness. The Tribute to Jason is the first of hopefully many new 'dance' steps forward."

According to the AFSP, Appelstein has understated his evening's impact.

"Due in part to the successful, brave idea by a man who lost his son to suicide, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention will be able to continue its lifesaving works in NYC," Monahan says.

For those interested in donating to the AFSP, visit [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org).

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