

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, 25 September 2026

EMBARGOED: Monday, 28 September 2026

Dancenorth Australia announces Felix Sampson and Michael Smith as next Co-Artistic Directors

Dancenorth Australia's next creative evolution will be led by newly appointed co-Artistic Directors Felix Sampson and Michael Smith.

Both long-standing Ensemble members at Dancenorth, Sampson and Smith's artistic leadership will imbue the dynamic North Queensland-based dance company with fresh ideas while providing a continuous thread of adventurous creativity, connection to the community, and strong Company culture.

Dancenorth Australia's Chair Dr Judith McLean said Sampson and Smith's appointment is a wonderful example of succession planning in action - talked about but rarely executed.

"Felix and Michael have flourished as artists and leaders at Dancenorth under the leadership of outgoing Artistic Directors Kyle Page and Amber Haines," said McLean.

"Felix and Michael emerged from an exceptionally competitive field of applicants and impressed the interviewing panel with their vibrancy, vision and love for the Company.

"The Board and Executive Director Hillary Coyne are genuinely excited to see them build on Dancenorth's contemporary dance virtuosity, forging even deeper connections with audiences locally, nationally and internationally.

"Michael and Felix's longstanding relationships with Wulgurukaba people and local artists will continue to shape Dancenorth's work and create new opportunities for collaboration across Gurambilbarra (Townsville)."

Sampson and Smith said they are thrilled to be leading Dancenorth into its next generation.

"Simply put, being appointed Co-Artistic Directors of Dancenorth means the world to us," said Sampson.

"The weight of responsibility, heart-centred leadership and care is not lost on us, particularly in having lived and experienced Dancenorth's culture as Ensemble dancers."

Smith added that Gurambilbarra has become their home during their respective tenures with the Company.

"We are committed to this place; to our communities, our people, and the many dances and stories that are inherent to regional North Queensland," said Smith.

“What has been cultivated at Dancenorth over Kyle and Amber’s tenure is alive in our bodies, in our cells, and we are so excited by the possibilities of growing, shifting, challenging and moving from this place. So much is possible because of the care that has come before us.”

Sampson and Smith’s Artistic Vision

Sampson and Smith will commence their new roles in March 2027, with a vision to uphold Dancenorth’s human-centred approach to making work, while finding new ways to distil heart and humour into everything the Company does.

“People are at the core of what we do. We have experienced first-hand the profound realities of a human-first approach to leadership, art-making and operations; where prioritising care for people results in the creation of high-quality, world-class art,” said Smith.

“We create exhilarating, highly physical, theatrical works that often use humour as a calibrating force towards compassion and heart-based perception. Our audience has big hearts. The heart thrives on laughs. Humour is therefore a huge part of our personal and professional relationship. It gives permission; to open the door to feeling the complexity of emotions and experiences at the core of our works.”

On sharing the Artistic compass

Sampson and Smith are intent on placing collaboration at the centre of their approach, both artistic and operational.

“Our leadership style reflects our artistic values, recognising that compelling art is often made from collaborative partnerships,” said Sampson.

“Our differences in experience, perspective, artistic preferences and abilities both challenge and balance the other - ensuring as a team we are moving into this next chapter with shared, intentional values supported by our differences in skills and experience.”

A passion for making dance in regional North Queensland

Sampson and Smith have each been associated with Dancenorth for a decade; and have found regional North Queensland alive with inspiration and opportunity for artists.

Sampson joined Dancenorth’s Ensemble in 2017 at 22 years old.

“I honestly didn’t expect to stay here this long,” said Sampson. “But there’s a special energy about Guambilbarra and this Company that is very dear to my heart. It’s become my home.

“I fell in love with the local arts scene, which to me, feels like one of the most special things about this beautiful place. I loved the generosity I was shown by the local community when I first moved here, and I want to give back to a place that has been a huge support of my artistic and personal growth.

Smith also came to the Company in 2017, first on a series of secondments, then as an independent artist in residency in 2020, before being invited to join the Ensemble full-time in 2021.

“I have always gravitated towards Gurambilbarra (Townsville), having grown up in Gladstone (Central Queensland),” Smith said.

“I feel at home in regional Queensland; in the heat and the intensity of this place. It’s a sense of home that keeps me here.”

“Felix and I know firsthand the important role Dancenorth plays for people living in Gurambilbarra; the rich, reciprocal connection and safety that positions the company as a significant hub for genuine, life-affirming experiences. This matters in a regional city.”

Dancenorth Executive Director and Co-CEO Hillary Coyne said: “What an extraordinary testament to Dancenorth’s company culture to be able to offer the creative leadership to two people who have been so deeply embedded and invested in the company for so many years.

“Michael and Felix are two exceptional people - artists, thinkers, movers and community makers - and I cannot wait to see where this company will go under their Co-Artistic Directorship.”

Sampson and Smith will succeed Dancenorth’s current co-Artistic Directors Kyle Page and Amber Haines, who have provided creative leadership since 2016. Sampson and Smith will take the reins in March 2027, following the World Premiere of *Galaxia*, Haines and Page’s final work as Dancenorth’s Co-ADs.

Acknowledgement of Funding:

Dancenorth Australia is assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, and the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland, and by Townsville City Council. Dancenorth is supported by the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation and receives funding from Creative Australia through the Australian Cultural Fund.

MEDIA CONTACT

Sarah Mathiesen
Dancenorth Australia, Marketing + Development Manager
P: 0400 712 861
E: sarah@dancenorth.com.au

MEDIA MATERIALS:

Artist bios and a high-resolution image will be available here by 27 September:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/rbpbrcuwn8n36ybp72v4o/ACCIQqDtNHCc7_uyB5xrdNM?rlkey=lfxrhu3oa0dbq8p9kiw1aq6n2&st=k979ivbd&dl=0