NEWS RELEASE

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JAY STATEN JOINS COCA AS NEW ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF DANCE

Visionary Dancer, Choreographer, & Arts Educator to Take Helm of COCA's Dance Program

ST. LOUIS (February 26, 2026)—COCA (Center of Creative Arts) is thrilled to announce Jay Staten as COCA's new Artistic Director of Dance. Staten's career spans Broadway, opera, television, and dance education, making him a dynamic leader and mentor for the next generation of artists. He brings an extraordinary wealth of experience and vision to COCA's programs. Staten has relocated to St. Louis from New York City and began his new role on February 22, 2026.

As Artistic Director of Dance, Staten will lead COCA's dance programming, including dance curriculum and training for classes, camps, and the Pre-Professional Division. He will also provide oversight of COCA's dance productions and guide the artistic vision of the Dance Program. This semester, COCA's Dance Program has more than 630 students, ages three to adult, enrolled in dance classes and 47 students enrolled in the Pre-Professional Division.

"Jay Staten is a visionary dancer, choreographer, and dance educator committed to COCA's mission. He brings a diverse professional background as a performer and choreographer in concert dance, musical theatre, opera, and television. This breadth of understanding and connections will provide COCA's dance students with an exciting lens to view their future opportunities," said Shawna Flanigan, Senior Director of Artistic Strategy & Programs at COCA.

A native of Washington, D.C., and a graduate of Marymount Manhattan College, Staten's credits include soloist in *After Midnight* on Broadway, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* at The Metropolitan Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago, principal dancer with PHILADANCO!, and dancer with Spectrum Dance Theater and Camille A. Brown & Dancers. Staten also served as Associate Choreographer for acclaimed productions such as *Toni Stone* and *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, and as Dance Captain for *Dreamgirls* and the Broadway workshop of *Super Fly*. Staten founded "Bring It to the Marley," a program providing performance opportunities and scholarships for young dancers, and co-founded D3, PHILADANCO!'s pre-professional youth company. His teaching experience spans prestigious institutions including The Juilliard School, Webster University, University of the Arts, and Chapman University.

"Leading the dance program at COCA feels like stepping into my life's work. I look forward to sharing the artistic tools and experiences I've gathered over my career with COCA's students," said Jay Staten, Artistic Director of Dance at COCA. "My vision is to not only mentor the next generation, but to learn from these talented young artists and connect deeply with the rich history and culture of the St. Louis community."

ABOUT COCA

COCA's mission is to *enrich lives and build community through the arts*. For 40 years, COCA has served as a regional hub for learning in and through the arts for all ages from all backgrounds. One of the most diverse cultural institutions in St. Louis, COCA serves more than 65,000 students, audience members, artists, and families from more than 300 zip codes every year. The fourth largest multi-disciplinary arts organization in the country, COCA is committed to supporting the vitality and creativity of more than 200 artists at the heart of their work in schools, community centers, local businesses, cultural organizations, and onsite at its campus in University City.

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