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This year's *Behind the Barre* collaboration is meant to convey joy, strength and beauty.

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Hometown moves

The Capital Dance Project's *Behind the Barre* honors its Sacramento roots

BY TESSA MARGUERITE OUTLAND

Capital Dance Project's *Behind the Barre*: Made in Sacramento returns to the Crest Theatre this weekend for its fifth annual collaborative art and dance production. The performance will feature 10 world premiere works incorporating multi-disciplined artists, a pop-up makers fest in the lobby and local brews.

The show aims to pay homage to its hometown. "We strive to make *Behind the Barre* a very Sacramento production, highlighting our art scene," said Alexandra Cunningham, a Capital Dance Project founding member and Sacramento Ballet company artist.

The dance company's mission is to uplift the spirit of the community by conveying joy, strength and beauty using a variety of artistic media. It was founded in 2015 when the dancers at Sacramento Ballet were without employment for a month due to a budget shortfall, according to Cunningham.

It's common, of course, for dancers to have off seasons just like other performers and athletes. So in the wake of the temporary unemployment, several Ballet dancers decided to create an independent collective. It was an immediate hit: on opening night of their debut performance, almost every seat in the theater was filled.

"We were just hoping at least our parents and friends would come see it," said Cunningham with a laugh. "We never imagined that we could make it to year five."

Behind the Barre is about innovation and collaboration, its founders say. It's a platform for dancers to create with artists working in all mediums, as well as a way to make dance more accessible.

Alexander Biber, another founding member of Capital Dance Project and a Sacramento Ballet artist, is choreographing a piece with seven dancers this year, in addition to performing in several other works.

Biber's piece is a joyful compilation of three Celtic jigs, with music played live by the local band Stepping Stone.

Christopher Nachtrab, a founding member and former Sacramento Ballet company artist, says the project's artistic evolution over the years inspires him. "I am constantly impressed by the ingenuity, the creativity and the perseverance of everyone involved," he said.

Nachtrab choreographed a piece this year in collaboration with graphic designer Karina Johnson, another former Sacramento Ballet dancer and founding Capital Dance Project member. For the performance, Johnson and her husband, Iver, crafted custom ramps.

Nachtrab's choreography focuses on the fear individuals may feel with life's inevitable changes, and the challenge of embracing new possibilities. The piece was influenced by the iconic choreographer Martha Graham.

"[She] once said, 'A dancer dies twice ... once when they stop dancing, and this first death is the more painful,'" Nachtrab said. "Although this quote rings true, I was inspired to try and negate this concept, and challenge that as artists we should try to live without regret or remorse of the past but rather with conviction and hope for what is to come."

Nachtrab said he is hopeful for the future of Capital Dance Project as it continues to grow and expand.

"By working together we, as artists, can create something more beautiful than ever imagined and hopefully inspire the next generation to achieve their dreams," he said.

Catch *Behind the Barre: Made in Sacramento* 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday, Aug. 16 and 17 at the Crest Theatre, 1013 K St.; \$15-\$30; capitaldanceproject.org.