



About Robert Smelick (1942-2022), Founder of Ballet Sun Valley

Robert Smelick, a long-time resident of Sausalito, CA and a recent full-time resident of Ketchum, organized the predecessor of Ballet Sun Valley in 2011 for the purpose of bringing the best of world-class ballet to the Sun Valley Pavilion. Having been a parent of a San Francisco Ballet School student and having served on the Board of San Francisco Ballet, Bob had a long history in the world of ballet. Bob and his family toured with San Francisco Ballet to a performance in an open-air venue in Paris, France. After witnessing this performance, he believed that the recently completed Sun Valley Pavilion would be perfect for the ballet art form.

In 2012, he partnered with the Sun Valley Resort to secure a date in the Sun Valley Pavilion and on July 8, 2012 San Francisco Ballet performed to a sold-out audience. Smelick then brought an International Dancer Festival, curated by American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Isabella Boylston, to the Pavilion for two Festivals in 2017 and 2018.

San Francisco Ballet returned to the Pavilion in 2019 with thirty-eight dancers and two performances that brought programming to the Sun Valley area that one would expect to only see in a performing arts center in a major metropolitan area. During this 2019 Festival, Ballet Sun Valley also introduced an Education Program, taught by professional faculty from the highly acclaimed San Francisco Ballet School. Ballet Sun Valley also organized, in partnership with Boston Ballet School, an Adaptive Dance Program for children of all abilities. This program also offered two days of training for future Adaptive Dance instructors. All of these programs were offered free of charge to accepted participants.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Festival presented a digital streaming engagement with Pacific Northwest Ballet. The 2021 Season was the first to feature two Festivals – a July Independent Dancer Festival, featuring artists from New York City Ballet, Houston Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Washington Ballet and San Francisco Ballet, curated by Matthew Bledsoe of IMG Artists. The August Festival featured contemporary dance company Ballet X. The 2022 Festival featured Boston Ballet with 30 dancers and two amazing programs.

Sadly, Mr. Smelick passed away very unexpectedly not long after the 2022 Festival. His vision and legacy live on in Ballet Sun Valley.

Mr. Smelick received his BA degree from Stanford University and his MBA from Harvard University, after which he had a long career in Investment Banking and Venture Investing. He also created and taught a class titled: Leadership and Cultures of Innovation at the Darden Graduate School of Business, University of Virginia.