

 JACOB BURNS
FILM CENTER **20**
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS TOGETHER

JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER NAMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mary Jo Ziesel, Distinguished Educator in Arts Programming, Chosen to Lead the Country's Premier Film and Media Education Center

Pleasantville, NY – July 16, 2021 – The Jacob Burns Film Center (JBFC), a nonprofit educational and cultural institution dedicated to presenting the best of independent, documentary and world cinema; promoting visual literacy; and making film a vibrant part of the community, has named Mary Jo Ziesel as its new Executive Director. She assumes the role on September 7.



Mary Jo Ziesel

“We are thrilled to welcome Mary Jo Ziesel as we celebrate our 20th Anniversary,” JBFC Board Chair Lynn Sobel said. “We are extremely fortunate to have someone of Mary Jo’s caliber at the helm as we launch our third decade. She is an accomplished, passionate arts and culture executive with a long tenure of successful leadership within premier arts organizations and higher education institutions. Her proven success in building and executing innovative programming at the international, national, and regional level is exactly what is needed at this moment in time as we recover from the impact of the pandemic and stand poised to usher in the JBFC’s fabulous future. The Board and I look forward to an exciting journey with Mary Jo leading this storied institution.”

Over two decades of leadership at American Ballet Theatre, Mary Jo Ziesel developed a thriving \$7M center of innovation serving more than 20,000 students, ultimately launching summer intensive programs, the ABT National Training Curriculum, the ABT Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and William J. Gillespie Schools, a national network of ABT Certified Schools, and an ABT/NYU master’s degree. During the pandemic, she pivoted ABT’s programming toward online initiatives that reached thousands of students and teachers in 49 states and 46 countries. Additionally, she led ABT’s efforts to ensure a continuing online presence with its public and private school partners and expanded its community engagement offerings to include the Fresh Air Fund, Rockefeller Center, and Lincoln Center Accessibility. She has been instrumental in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at ABT.

Ms. Ziesel holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin, as well as a Master of Arts in Performing Arts Administration/Nonprofit Management from New York University. She is a doctoral candidate in Organization Leadership/Arts Education & Evaluation at Teachers College at Columbia University.

Early priorities will include engaging with the JBFC board, staff, members, and the wider community, as well as launching special programs and events during our year-long 20th anniversary celebration. Looking forward, Ms. Ziesel will oversee the refurbishment of the JBFC's three original theaters, an initiative made possible thanks to generous support from many donors and a grant from New York State.

"After more than 25 years in the field of nonprofit arts, I continue to stand in awe of the transformational power of the arts to ignite curiosity and empower audiences to think critically, discover and learn new cultures, and nurture empathy and tolerance," Ms. Ziesel said. "As a passionate film lover who was new to the area, my pre-pandemic visits to the JBFC left me feeling grateful to have discovered this artistic wellspring in the Hudson Valley. From the moment I first entered the doors of the JBFC, I was imbued with and inspired by the organization's sense of purpose. Rarely have I encountered an artistic venue that felt so authentically alive with its mission. I am deeply motivated by JBFC's commitment to artists and organizations that celebrate and further the art of filmmaking. It will be an absolute honor and privilege to lead and steward the vital work of this cultural cornerstone into its bright future."

Kara Medoff Barnett, Executive Director of ABT, speaking of Ms. Ziesel's departure, shared: "Mary Jo's leadership has been transformational, and her impact on ABT will live on in the extraordinary staff she has mentored and in the talent pipeline she has helped to cultivate: 90% of the dancers in today's ABT company are ABT Education alumni! We are cheering for our beloved colleague as she brings her positive energy and innovative spirit to the Jacob Burns Film Center."

The [Jacob Burns Film Center](#) is a nonprofit arts and education hub located on a three-building campus in the New York Metro area. The JBFC brings the transformative power of film to the surrounding community through unique programming and discussion, shared experiences, and educational initiatives. Since opening in 2001, millions of people have enjoyed the best of current American and foreign cinema, unique film series, and special events at the five-screen theater complex. A pioneer in visual literacy, the JBFC offers educational experiences for students of all ages at our state-of-the-art Media Arts Lab, including curricula for public schools and a fellowship and residency program for professional filmmakers.

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Contact: Denise Treco 914.773.7663, ext. 415 / dtreco@burnsfilmcenter.org