

## The Willett Family: *Happiest Here*

By Nicole Hardina  
Photos by Jamison Johnson

Even the most adventurous and well-traveled people seem to agree it's the simple things that make life lovely. For poet and educator Mischa Willett, walking to work was a "long-held dream," says his wife, Pacific Northwest Ballet faculty member Amber Willett.

Their titles may tell you something about the expansive scope of their experiences. Mischa and Amber say they have spent "a good bit of time abroad" as working artists and academics. The two met at a Queen Anne community meeting in 2008; three years later, they married at the Seattle Church of Christ in Queen Anne. Shortly after, they left for Germany, where Mischa had accepted a year-long lectureship. While there, they traveled a lot and enjoyed taking the easy public transit to Berlin and Munich. "A highlight was seeing the world-famous Stuttgart Ballet," Mischa says. While in Germany, Amber got a gig as a visiting choreographer and performed a show in the local museum, and Mischa gave a poetry reading in the house the German Romantic poet Holderlin once lived in. From Germany, they also traveled to Paris and the South of France, had Christmas in London, and had a very special experience when Mischa got to show Amber around Rome. "She had

*Amber, Mischa, Sebastian, and Lucca*





*Grocery store shenanigans*

*The poet and the dancer*

never been,” he says, “but it was like a second home for me. The first time she saw the Pantheon was under moonlight; she cried at its beauty, which is exactly the right response.”

Once Mischa’s lectureship ended, the two moved back to Seattle and soon welcomed daughter Lucca, now four years old, to the family. Mischa’s job took them to London for another year after that, where he worked from the library at the Victoria and Albert Museum researching a book on a subset of Victorian poets known as the Spasmodics. “We loved taking Lucca around the city,” Mischa says, “and especially showing her Oxford, another place dear to us. It was strange, though. Even in such a culturally rich place, we missed Seattle all the time. I read the local section of the Seattle Times every day while there.” Mischa still travels often for work, co-leading a study abroad experience to Rome every other year, during which Amber says Mischa “entertains thoughts about expatriating.”

“We’ve learned our lesson, though,” she says. “We’re never happier anywhere than here.”

“Here” is atop Queen Anne hill. Mischa can finally walk to work at Seattle Pacific University, where he is a teacher of English specializing in 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature. Mischa and Amber miss the scent of the sea from their previous place near Kinnear Park, but, Amber says, “Our current neighborhood is the best community we’ve ever experienced. We know everyone on the street, and they all know our kids. If we walk outside with some chalk, soon a horde of neighbors will come by, someone will bring out a bottle of wine, and we’ll have an impromptu party.” In addition to these spontaneous celebrations, the Willetts hold a summer block party in their driveway, and there’s an annual Halloween party at the end of the street. “We love it here,” they say.

Recently, the three became four with the arrival of baby Sebastian, now one year old. Lucca and Sebastian keep them quite busy, and Amber and Mischa are very active in the cultural life of the city, as well.

Amber is a faculty member at the Pacific Northwest Ballet. She was recruited to join the Professional Division of the PNB school straight out of high school in Colorado, and has since danced with Sonia Dawkins Prism, Whim W’him, and Drybones Dance Collective, and she’s choreographed several pieces, including for Seattle International Dance Festival. Her *Romeo and Juliet* debuted in 2016 at City Opera Ballet in Bellevue. This summer, she is choreographing a piece about the social lives of killer whales for Convergence Ballet in Phoenix, AZ. In addition to making and performing dances, Amber attends everything at PNB and much else, besides.

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Mischa holds several degrees. He earned a BA from Wheaton College, an MA from Northern Arizona University, and an MFA and PhD from the University of Washington. He has taught English Literature at NAU, UW, the University of Tübingen in Germany, and Northwest University in addition to his current position at SPU. His first book of poetry, *Phases*, was published last year by Cascade Books. When Mischa is not giving poetry readings around town, he attends them at our many lovely bookstores and arts venues.

Mischa and Amber attend a lot of theater, especially shows at Book-it, Seattle Rep, and Washington Ensemble Theatre. They frequently attended performances at New Century Theater before its closure, as well as at Intiman Theatre Playhouse, now the Cornish Playhouse. They are also involved at All Saints church in Queen Anne and are in the early stages of a Queen Anne-based Anglican church plant, which will launch later this summer.

For the Willett family, the adventure never stops. Still, they are essentially a place-based family. To their neighbors, they'd like to say, "We appreciate you so dearly."

You can learn more about Amber and Mischa and check out their work at their websites, [www.amberwillett.com](http://www.amberwillett.com) and [www.mischawillett.com](http://www.mischawillett.com).



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