

Bruce Hawkins

Dance USA - Accomplishments of a Community

Publication:

Fountainhead® Tanz Theatre

presents

XXII. Black International Cinema Berlin 2007, May 3-6

Publisher: Prof. Donald Muldrow Griffith/**Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre**, Berlin/Germany

Year: 2007, (including German Excerpt)

Keywords:

Black Choreographers, African American Dance Companies, Creative Mentors, Legends

Fountainhead[®] Tanz Theatre
presents

under the patronage of
Günter Piening
Commissioner of the Senate of Berlin
for Integration and Migration

XXII.

Black International Cinema



Generations
Generationen



Guest Lecturer
Prof. Dr. Akin Euba

berlin

nickelodeon cinema
torstraße 216



may 3-6
2007

www.black-international-cinema.com

DANCE USA

Accomplishments of a Community

Bruce Hawkins

I was lucky to have started my dance career at the end of the 70's.

This was a time when dance companies and dance concerts were funded, fashionable, and in the African-American community, you were respected, admired and revered for your physical efforts.

Dancers traveled from company to company, to Broadway shows, television commercials and off-Broadway theaters. We set the trends, influenced the fashion and attitudes of the performing arts community. Everything was done with a sense of humor, style and artistic vision. There was a magical energy that saturated the New York dance scene and everyone, performers, choreographers, dance teachers, students and the audience all felt the electricity.

I made my debut "on the tail end" of a carefree, electrically charged time for the political identity of the Black performing artist.

I considered all of the dancers of this time as creative mentors and legends in their own right. These were strong, proud, aggressive, educated performers who unselfishly shared their secrets and talents for the strengthening of our rich cultural tradition. Most of these unique artists were "dirt poor", working at a financial and political disadvantage career-wise, only because of the color of their skin.

Over the years, I have collected boxes of "stuff" – pictures, articles, brochures, papers and press kits, a virtual trunk full of hurt feelings, memories and onstage triumphs. I have signed photographs of friends who were celebrities and I have touring photos of my dance contemporaries backstage, in hotels and dressing rooms in various stages of being dressed and undressed.

I was blessed to have had these experiences. Through-

out my career, I danced with five different companies. There were many personalities, lots of egos, lots of traveling and lots of growing to be done.

My dance career had many unusual parallels and I often found myself performing free one week for the community on the streets of Harlem and the next on Broadway or another continent, dancing perhaps as a part of a command performance in the palace of the wealthiest African king.

Dance and theater showed me a fantasy world I would not have otherwise seen from my urban Baltimore neighborhood.

Then, abruptly, after a twenty-year struggle with my body, mind and soul and after a series of personal tragedies, I abruptly decided to stop dancing.

My life drastically changed.

All I had left were my pictures and memories sitting in the back of my closet.

I never claimed to be a dance historian, just an overly sentimental person who appreciated all that I was given. I was not in this memorabilia business for financial or political gain. I just

wanted to share my experiences with my family, friends and students.

As a member of the dance faculty at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, I began to realize there was quite a void to be filled, documenting the history of African American dance. Many of my students were unaware of the great performance legacy that preceded them.

One evening, while chatting on the phone with two of my closest dance friends, we came up with the idea of putting all this "stuff" somewhere where it could constructively be used by others, preserving the good times, the memories of people I worked with and the heartaches of my dance career.

I chose the Internet.

It took me a full year to make this happen.



Fred Benjamin Dance Company
from left: Alfred Gallman, Karen Geneva Burke, Thea Nerissa Barnes, Brenda Braxton, Damon Pearce



With the help of some of my closest dance friends, most of the work took place in a month, when somehow, all this “stuff” took on a life of its own and began to extract mysterious spiritual energy from unexpected places. Once I got started, I received phone calls, I ran into people I hadn’t seen in years and received letters and moral support from all over the country, almost out of nowhere.

Rather than sit on this energy, I “moved with spirit”, and began to compile all this information onto computer discs. Over the years, too many brilliant and talented friends had disappeared or died for me to selfishly hold on to this valuable history anymore. I didn’t want their memory to be lost in some textbook, sitting on a dusty library shelf. I wanted future generations of students to be able to appreciate the many contributions of this almost lost segment of American dance history.

Soon, I had enough; more than enough information to start a web site. Unfortunately, I was a total computer illiterate.

Again, somehow, the spirits of the ancestors sent me a website designer that I had never met face to face, but someone instinctively, I trusted. Through many e-mails and phone calls we were able to decipher each other’s creative languages and get the information into a concise, respectable document of triumph, of which I am very proud. This was truly a labor of love.

The information presented here is by no means complete. This is and should always be a collective project. The site will change and develop as more of the dance community becomes involved in actively telling the story of African American dance.

It sometimes amazes me that there are so many people that don’t know anything about dance, and in particular, the Black American dance experience.

Our dance community has uniquely expressed our rituals, emotion, romance and our global perspective through movement. The Black dancer has used our natural ability as an avenue of personal expression, imprinting our sensuality on the minds of the universe. We have developed images and historical pictures of our heritage that can be easily processed and enjoyed through the magic of the stage.

Many of us have been introduced to dance through television or the theater, and most of these images have been from cultures other than our own. With the advent of music video, most of our children will get their introduction to dance through its association with the music industry.

I personally spent many hours over many years, traveling, rehearsing in studios and performing. Most of these performances were videotaped and photographed yet they still have not made it into library dance archives.

Unfortunately, most of this valuable historical information is being “held hostage” by individuals who for some egocentric reason, refuse to allow others to share their information. Unfortunately, many of our dance historians have died. Their information has been lost and altered. Most of this information will sadly be forgotten if we do not take the initiative to convince existing dance company personnel to have these documents archived.

Because many of these dance pioneers have passed on, many of the stories and historical information has been lost. Thanks to modern technology and the archives of several dance collections, we can with the help of dance historians, reconstruct some of this information. However, the complete vision, true political spirit and energy of these institutions is difficult to record.

I am now presenting some of this information that I collected for my dance website.

MASTER CHOREOGRAPHERS

Born in Rogers, Texas, in January 1931, the late **Alvin Ailey** was introduced to dance by performances of the Katherine Dunham Company and the Ballet Russe. Alvin Ailey’s career in dance began with the famous modern dance choreographer, Lester Horton. His formal dance training began with an introduction to Horton’s classes by his friend, Carmen De Lavallade. After Horton’s death in 1953, he became the company’s Artistic Director and began to choreograph. In 1954, Ailey and Miss De Lavallade were invited to New York to dance in Truman Capote’s *House of Flowers*. While appearing in Broadway musicals and acting and dancing in films such as *Carmen Jones*, Mr. Ailey had a dream of a dance company of his own. In 1958, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a seven-member company, made its debut at the 92nd Street YMHA. Through the years, the Ailey Company has gone on to perform for over an estimated 18 million people in 48 States and in 67 countries on six continents. The company has earned a reputation as one of the most acclaimed international ambassadors of American culture, promoting the preservation and enrichment of the American modern dance heritage and the uniqueness of Black cultural expression. The award winning company has performed at the White House and for heads-of-state and international royalty. When Mr. Ailey began creating dance, he drew upon his “blood memories” of Texas, using the blues, spirituals and gospel as inspiration, resulting in the creation of two of his most popular signature works – *Blues Suite* and *Revelations*. Although he created 79 ballets over his lifetime, Alvin Ailey maintained that his company was not exclusively a repository for his own work. Today, the

company continues Mr. Ailey's legacy of presenting important works of the past and commissioning new ones. In all, more than 170 works by more than 63 choreographers have been performed by the Ailey company. Works by Mr. Ailey have also appeared in the repertoires of The Joffrey Ballet, The Harkness Ballet, American Ballet Theater, The Bat-Dor Company of Israel, Ballet Internacional de Caracas and the Royal Danish Ballet. The Ailey organization houses three performing units, including the second and third companies that perform experimental works and teaches standard Ailey repertory.

Talley Beatty, a contemporary American choreographer, studied with Katherine Dunham and began his career in Dunham's first small troupe in 1940. He has taught, choreographed and danced in several European countries and Israel. Among his most notable concert works are *The Road of the Phoebe Snow (1959)*, *Come and Get the Beauty of It Hot (1960)*, *Concerto for Harpsichord (1961)* and *The Stack-Up (1989)*. Mr. Beatty had his own company for three years that toured Europe, Canada, Asia and the US. He also danced with famed dance anthropologist Pearl Primus and was a featured dancer in the classic historic African American film, *Stormy Weather*. He was nominated for Tony Awards for the Broadway productions of *Your Arms Too Short To Box With God* and *Blues for Mr. Charlie*. He arranged the movement for the acclaimed off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks (1961)*. Other well known concert works include *A Rag, A Bone and a Hank of Hair*, *Pretty Is Skin Deep...Ugly Is To The Bone*, *Caravanserai* and *Such Sweet Morning Songs*. His works are in the repertoires of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Philadanco and the Fred Benjamin Dance Company, among others. The dance world still mourns the loss of this great choreographer, who died in 1995.

The late **Pepsi Bethel** began performing at age nine and organized his first ensemble, The Southland 400 in the early 1940's. In 1949, after winning second prize at the *Harvest Moon Ball* at New York's famous Roseland Ballroom, Mr. Bethel came to the attention of Herbert White, creator of the Lindy Hop. He studied jazz dance with Mr. White, ballet and modern with Alfred Brooks and Maxine Munts at Adelphi College, where he was the recipient of a Hanya Holm scholarship. On Broadway he appeared in *Kwamina*, choreographed by Agnes de Mille. Pepsi performed with Al Mim, Leon James, Norma Miller and her Jazzmen, all of Savoy Ballroom fame and, in 1969, Mr. Bethel toured nine African countries with the Mura Dehn Jazz Theater, touring with Avon Long. Mr. Bethel's off-Broadway choreographic credits include original companies of *Stagger Lee* and *One Mo Time*. He is the founder of the American Authentic Jazz

Dance Theater Foundation, which dedicates itself to the preservation of authentic jazz dance. The company received a grant for the making of a documentary film that has been included in the dance collection of the Library of Congress and Lincoln Center. Mr. Bethel was a faculty member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center for ten years and also taught at Clark Center, Peridance, New York University, Buffalo State University, Lehman College, Long Island University, Niagra University, Connecticut Community College and Sarah Lawrence College.

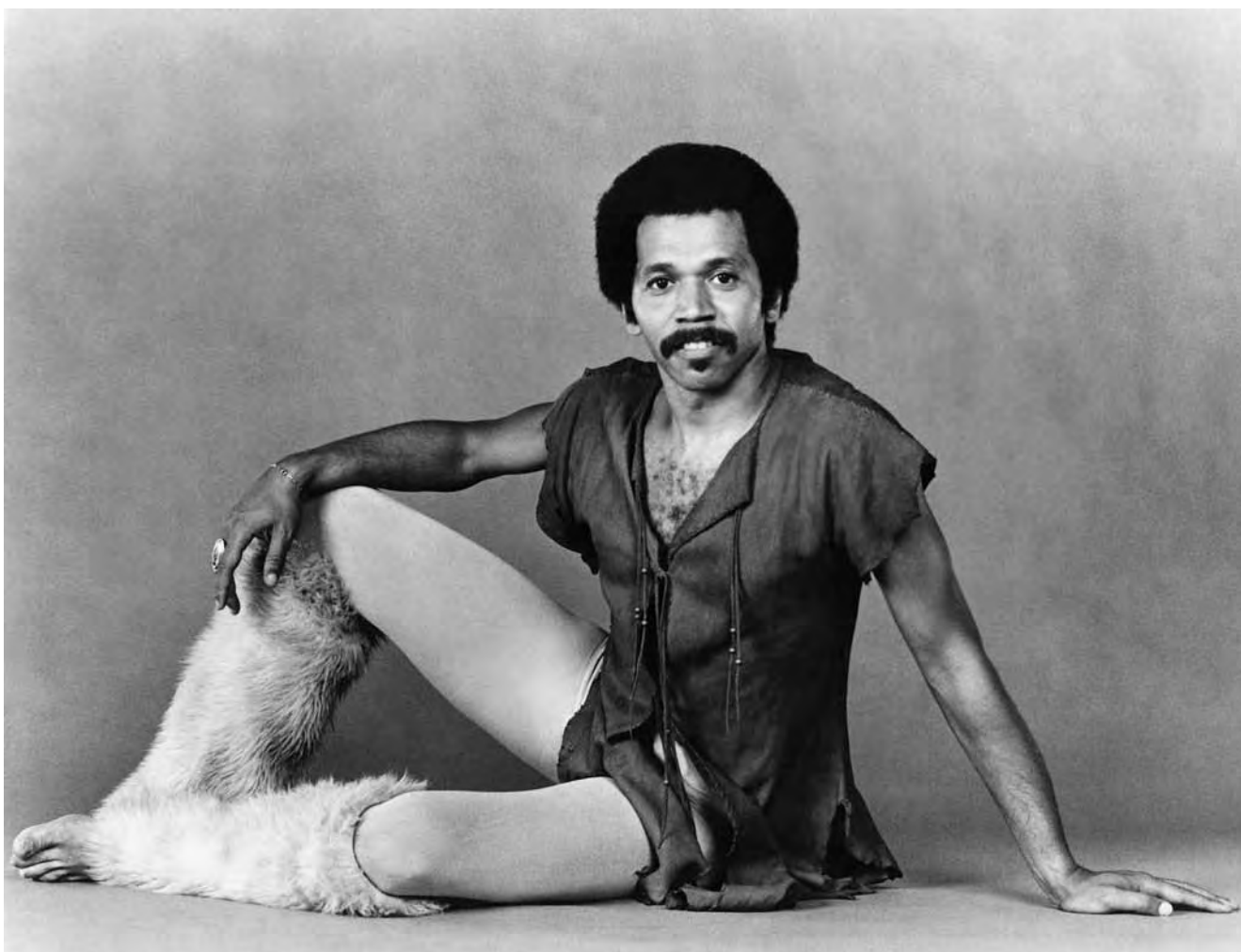
Chuck Davis, a native of North Carolina and Artistic Director and Choreographer of the Chuck Davis Dance Company, was a protégé of Owen Dodson, formerly of Howard University. Mr. Davis has studied classical dance with Emil Faustin, ethnic dance with Pearl Primus, jazz dance with Bernice Johnson, modern dance with Eleo Pomare and ethnic, jazz and modern dance with Syvilla Forte. In addition, he was awarded a residency in dance with the Royal Dancers from Burundi during their United States tour and participated in workshops with the Guinean Ballet Company during their tour of the United States. His professional experience as a dancer includes appearances as guest artist with Movements Black-Repertory Theater, lead dancer with the Olatunji Dance Troupe and soloist with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company. In addition, Mr. Davis has appeared as featured artist with the Joan Miller Dance Players and the Orchestra da Camera. He was Adjunct Professor of Dance at Jersey City State College and a member of the dance faculty at Lehman College. He was also the Director of the Dance Workshop for the Minisink branch of the New York City Mission Society. Mr. Davis is also the Founder and Executive Producer of Dance Africa and the African America Dance Ensemble. Created at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1977, Dance Africa is a popular, yearly, national touring ethnic dance festival committed to presenting African and African American dance, which has garnered extensive community support and corporate sponsorship. In 1968, he founded the Chuck Davis Dance Company. The American Dance Festival recruited Mr. Davis for the position of Artist In Residence to head its outreach program. Mr. Davis has been a panelist for several programs of the National Endowment for the Arts and is a member of the executive committee of the International Association of Blacks In Dance. He is the recipient of several awards and honors, including the AARP Certificate of Excellence, the North Carolina Dance Alliance Award, the North Carolina Artist Award for 1990 and the North Carolina Order of the Long Leaf Pine. In 1991, he was appointed by the Governor of North Carolina to serve on the board of the North Carolina Arts Council. In 1992, he received Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie



Award and was the recipient of the 1992 North Carolina Award in Fine Arts. In 1993, he received a Monarch Merit Award presented by the National Council for Culture and Art. Mr. Davis has received fellowships from the North Carolina Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts and the McKnight Fellowships of Minnesota.

The late, **Katherine Dunham**, anthropologist, author, choreographer, film star and dancer was born in Chicago, where she attended the University of Chicago, majoring in anthropology. Between 1938 and 1965, Miss Dunham cho-

Garth Fagan won the 1998 Tony Award for Best Choreography as well as the Drama Desk Award, the Astaire Award and the Outer Circle Critics Award for his work on *The Lion King*. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Mr. Fagan has toured the world with his company, Garth Fagan Dance. On television, the company has appeared on *Great Performances*, *The Tonight Show* and *The Academy Awards*. Mr. Fagan created his own dance language and style, drawing from modern dance, Afro-Caribbean dance and ballet. Mr. Fagan has choreographed for the Alvin Ailey American Dance The-



Fred Benjamin

reographed more than 150 ballets, six Broadway and European stage shows, three operas and 13 films. She used her training in anthropology and her study of primitive rituals to evolve unique dance forms. Miss Dunham formerly resided in East St. Louis, Illinois, where the community also houses her school and museum. Her achievements in dance and human rights have been lauded with 21 honorary degrees. She has received the Kennedy Center Honor for Lifetime Achievement, the National Medal of Arts, an NAACP Image Award and the American Black Achievement Award.

ater, Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Jose Limon Company, and others. He directed and choreographed Duke Ellington's *Queenie Pie* at the Kennedy Center and choreographed Joseph Papp's, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A Distinguished University professor at SUNY Brockport, he has received numerous awards and fellowships including a Dance Magazine Award, a Bessie Award, A Guggenheim Fellowship and the Fulbright 50th Anniversary Distinguished Fellow.

George Faison, choreographer, director, author, composer, won a Tony and a Drama Desk Award for *The Wiz*

and was nominated for a Tony for *Porgy and Bess* at Radio City Music Hall. He has been a driving force in the theater as well as film, video, television, concert dance and concert staging for more than twenty years. He has staged concert appearances and music videos for performers at the pinnacle of American popular music, including Ashford and Simpson,

Universal Dance Experience in 1971. Through 1975, the company performed extensively throughout the US to rave reviews and large, enthusiastic audiences. Well-known company members included Gary DeLoatch, Debbie Allen and Dyane Harvey. Faison's most popular dances are *Tilt*, *Slaves*, *Gazelle*, *Reflections of a Lady*, *Café America* and *Suite Otis*.



Karen Geneva Burke and Fred Benjamin
Double Solitude, Choreography: Lynn Taylor Corbitt

Natalie Cole, Earth Wind and Fire, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Roberta Flack, Stephanie Mills, Melba Moore, Dionne Warwick, Cameo, Glenn Jones, Al B. Sure, Tony Terry and Stevie Wonder, to name a few. Born in Washington, DC, Mr. Faison studied dentistry at Howard University, but was soon drawn to the theater. He studied with the American Light Opera Company, Capitol Ballet, and with Owen Dodson at Howard University. Mr. Faison joined the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1967. He was a principal dancer with the company for three years and distinguished himself as one of the company's most loved and applauded male dancers. He then founded the George Faison

Broadway credits include *Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope* and *Timon of Athens*. Off-Broadway credits include *Apollo Just Like Magic*. Regional and international credits include *Betsy Brown* and his musicals *American Jam Session* and *Golden Gate*. Other original musical theater projects are *C'mon* and *Hear, Glory Live*, a collaboration with Richard Wesley, developed in conjunction with the Kennedy Center. Mr. Faison's 1989, 30 year Anniversary Celebration of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, starring Bill Cosby, resulted in the NBC-TV special, *Cosby Salutes Ailey*, conceived, written, staged and produced by Faison. Other works he takes pride in are Roberta Flack's acclaimed video, *Oasis*; Betty Carter's video,



Movin', the opening of the Oprah Winfrey Show and his work on the HBO special, *The Josephine Baker Story*, for which he also received an Emmy Award nomination. Mr. Faison was also involved in directing and choreographing the Broadway revival of Ntosake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enough*. His ballets are in the repertory of Dallas Black Dance Theater and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. He also founded the Harlem Renaissance Festival, a producing organization, which presents theatrical, educational and entertainment events at The Harlem Victoria 5 and the Apollo Theater.

The **Dance Theatre of Harlem** was founded in 1969 by former Balanchine soloist **Arthur Mitchell**, as his personal commitment to the people of Harlem following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. With the assistance of Ballet Master Karel Shook, Dance Theatre of Harlem has grown into a world renowned, neo-classical, multicultural company with a diverse repertoire of over 85 works. Arthur Mitchell established Dance Theatre of Harlem as one of the first recognized, international classical training grounds for African American ballet performers and students. The company repertoire included *Rhythmetron*, *Holberg Suite*, *Creole Giselle*, *Concerto In F*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Douglas*, *Prodigal Son*, *Serenade*, *Four Temperaments*, *Signs and Wonders*, *The Moor's Pavane*, *Firebird*, *Forces of Rhythm*, *Concerto Barroco*, *Bugaku*, *A Song For Dead Warriors*, *South African Suite*, *Dialouges*, *Banda*, *Manifestations*, *Ginastera*, *Adrian (Angel On Earth)*, *Sansanka*, *Return*, *Every Now and Then*, *Wings*, *Agon*, *Sheherazade*, *Les Noces*, *Fete Noir*, *Stars and Stripes*, *Fall River Legend*, *John Henry*, *Troy Game*, *The Beloved*, *Mirage*, *Othello* and *Allegro Briallante*. Company staff members included Lorenzo James, Zelda Wynn, Tania Leon, Marbeth and Vernon Ross. Choreographers include Arthur Mitchell, George Balanchine, Geoffrey Holder, Louis Johnson, John Taras, Michael Smuin, Dwight Rhoden, Billy Wilson, Glen Tetley, Robert Garland, John Alleyne, Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe, Talley Beatty, Valerie Bettis, August Bournonville, John Butler, Carlos Carvajal, Jean Coralli, Ron Cunningham, Alexandra Danilova, Carmen de Lavallade, Agnes de Mille, William Dollar, Garth Fagan, Michael Folkine, Fredric Franklin, Choo-San Goh, Lester Horton, Gail Kachadurian, Loyce Houlto, Alonzo King, David Lichine, Jose Limon, Sir Kenneth MacMillian, Robert North, Royston Maldoom, John McFall, Laveen Naidu, Ruth Page, Jules Perot, Marius Pepita, Istvan Rabovsky, Domy Reiter-Soffer, Jerome Robbins, William Scott, Karel Shook, Bentley Stone, Gabriella Taub-Daevash, Augustus Van Heerden, Mike Sparembek. The first Ballet Master was William Scott and the first Ballet Mistress was Gayle McKinney.

Milton Myers received his BFA from the University of

Missouri in Kansas City. He was a founding member, performer and assistant to the director with Joyce Trisler Danscompany and has performed with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Fred Benjamin Dance Company, Walter Nicks and the Rondo Dance Company. Upon the death of Joyce Trisler in 1979, he became the Artistic Director for the Joyce Trisler Danscompany until 1986. As a choreographer, his works are performed on many companies such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, New Danish Dance Theater, Ballet Stagium in Brazil, Dayton Contemporary Dance Theater, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company, Dallas Black Dance Theater and Taylor Dance. Mr. Myers was commissioned to choreograph Duke Ellington's *A Sacred Concert* with the Duke Ellington Orchestra at the Philadelphia Academy of Music and also choreographed the Carnegie Hall performance of Jessye Norman. As an internationally known teacher, Mr. Myers is in demand all over the world and has taught for many companies including Ballet Hispanico, New Danish Dance Theater, Les Ballets Jazz De Montreal, Bat Dor, The Jamison Project, Kansas City Ballet, Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake Company, Batsheva, Ballet Stagium in San Paulo, Brazil, and throughout Johannesburg, Pretoria and various townships in South Africa. He is currently the Director of Modern Dance at Jacob's Pillow in Lee, Massachusetts.

The late **Walter Nicks** began his dance training with Eleanor Frampton at the Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio. He continued his studies with Katherine Dunham at her school in New York City, where he received his master's teacher's certificate and later became associate and acting director of the Dunham School and its performing workshop. Subsequent Broadway, concert and theatre performances and research in Haiti, Cuba, Brazil and Puerto Rico further expanded his skill and experience. Mr. Nicks has been on the faculty of the American Dance Festival, Connecticut College, the University and the Swedish Dance Theater Training College, and has been a resident guest artist at Duke University and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. At the invitation of the government of Guinea, he directed *Djoliba*, a dance theater project utilizing Guinean mask, music, dance and costumes. Mr. Nicks participated in the National Endowment of the Arts artists in the schools program for ten years. He was the co-founder of the professional dance training center in Poitiers, France; professor at Folkwang Hochschule in Germany (1990-1994) and at Howard University since 1997.

Pearl Primus was born in Trinidad and moved to New York, where she attended Hunter College, majoring in Biology and Pre-Medicine. Her first choreographed work, *African Ceremonial*, premiered in 1943. Miss Primus went on to study with some of the great modern dance teachers of the

time, including Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm and Sophie Maslow. Primus' choreography chronicled the black experience in America and the traditional dances of Africa and the Caribbean. Dances like *Strange Fruit* became classics because of her bold statement of social protest. Some of the other works choreographed by Miss Primus are *Shango*, *Naffi Tombo*, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* and *Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore*. Primus also worked on Broadway, dancing in and choreographing such shows as *Showboat*, *Caribbean Carnival* and *The Emperor Jones*. Miss Primus married Percival Borde and together they formed the Earth Dance Company in the 1970's. She taught dance and anthropology at Hunter College, SUNY Buffalo, New York University (where she received her Ph.D in dance education) and at Smith College. In 1991, she received the national Medal of Arts at the White House.

Eleo Pomare was born in Colombia, South America and arrived in New York at the age of 10. After graduating from New York City's High School of the Performing Arts, he formed his first dance company in 1958. A John Hay Whitney Fellowship took him to Europe in 1962, where he studied, danced, choreographed and formed a second company, which toured Germany, Holland, Sweden and Norway. In 1964 he returned to the United States, revived and expanded his original American dance company, which has since toured throughout the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, the West Indies, Australia and Italy. Mr. Pomare was the first artist of color to grace the cover of Dance Magazine and his company has challenged the sensitivities of sophisticated dance audiences at Broadway's ANTA Theater, Washington's Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, New York's City Center, Florence Gould Hall, the Joyce Theater, Montreal's Theatre Maisonneuve and the Adelaide Festival of the Arts in Australia. International tours included the prestigious 2nd Black and African Festival of Art and Culture in Lagos (FESTAC). In addition to maintaining his own company, Mr. Pomare has choreographed works for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Maryland Ballet, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company, Alpha Omega Dance Company, the National Ballet of Holland, Balletinstituttet (Oslo, Norway), the Australian Contemporary Dance Company, Ballet Palacio das Artes (Belo Horizonte, Brazil) and the Cincinnati Ballet.

Rod Rodgers has performed with several companies and has established himself as one of today's most provocative choreographers. In addition to his direction of the Rod Rodgers Dance Company, he staged and directed the Afro-American Singing Theater's version of *The Black Cowboys*, which was performed at City Center and at the Brooklyn

Academy of Music. He also choreographed and staged *Journey Into Blackness*, a WCBS special, featuring Voices, Incorporated. He created choreography for the off-Broadway musical *The Prodigal Sister*, and was the recipient of a John Hay Whitney Fellowship and the 1975 AUDELCO Award for audience development programs. Mr. Rodgers has received choreographic commissions from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. In his memory, the Rodgers Company maintains a year round studio/school at 8 East 12th Street where training is offered in Afro-Haitian, several styles of jazz and modern dance techniques. Special programs for young audiences are also available. This was one of the first American dance companies under the direction of a Black artist to establish a base of recognition for something other than exclusively ethnic or traditional African American styles.

The late **Billy Wilson** was the world-renowned choreographer of *Eubie*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Bubblin' Brown Sugar*, *Odyssey* and the award winning children's TV show, *Zoom*. Mr. Wilson received his early dance training in Philadelphia. At age 19, he studied ballet with Anthony Tudor and Karel Shook and made his City Center debut in a production of *Carmen Jones*. He appeared on Broadway in *Bells Are Ringing*, *Jamaica*, and the original London production of *West Side Story*. He was then engaged as a soloist with the National Ballet of Holland. Mr. Wilson has ballets in the repertoires of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company. He was on the faculty of Carnegie-Mellon University and headed dance departments at Brandeis University and the National Center for African American Artists. He received several awards for his work, including two Emmy Awards and three Tony Award nominations. His ballets include *I Told Jesus*, *Ritual*, *Valdosa/Valdesta*, *Apres-midi*, *de la Faun* and *Rosa*. Mr. Wilson also directed the original musical, *A Night at the Cotton Club*, which was produced in Holland and was a smash hit throughout Europe.

Thelma Hill was a teacher, dancer and mother figure to several generations of dancers. There is hardly a person in the African American dance world, who has not in some way been touched by her. She was an inspirational, strong and encouraging person, who conveyed a unique, meaningful spirit of dance, especially to young dancers and choreographers. If there was anybody who believed in the power of dance to move and elevate people, it was Thelma Hill. As a dancer she had a rare gift for humor and expressing herself through others choreography. She was an artist and a genius of a teacher. Filmmaker Kathe Sandler documented the life of Thelma Hill as a tribute to her giving spirit.

Dyane Harvey, originally from Schenectady, New



York, has danced with Eleo Pomare, the Chuck Davis Dance Company, George Faison's Universal Dance Experience, Otis Sallid's New Art Ensemble, Fred Benjamin, Jelon Viera's Dance Brazil and the Forces of Nature Dance Company. Her Broadway credits include *The Great Mc Daddy*, *The Wiz*, *Timbuktu*, the original company of *Spell Number 7*, and the Paris company of *Your Arms Too Short To Box With God*. Her film and television credits include, *Ailey Celebrates Ellington*, *Black Expressions*, *Story of a People*, *Syvilla*, *They Dance To Her Drum*.

of Philadanco, she also assists the Rehearsal Director. A 1992 Bessie award recipient, Kim visited Xian/Beijing, China in 1994 to perform at the 5th International Arts and Cultural Festival. Kim received the 1997 Camerata Award of Excellence from the William Penn High School and appeared in the feature film *Beloved*. She is the Director of the Danco Dance camp in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Carmen De Lavallade is recognized as an international dance star and beauty. The wife of dancer/choreog-



Rick Odums and Arlena Rolant (seated)

As a choreographer, she has reconstructed *The Wiz*, *Spell Number 7* and *Runaways*; original productions include *Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery*, *She Who Weeps* and *Combination Skin*. She has received the AUDELCO Award, the Monarch Merit Award and the Second Annual Black Theater Festival Ira Aldridge Award. She has taught as artist in residence through City Center's Project Dance, The New York Foundation for the Arts and as a professor at Borough of Manhattan Community College, Princeton University, Hofstra University and Lehman College for the Performing Arts.

Kim Y. Bears is a Bachelor of Fine Arts graduate of The University of the Arts. Kim joined Philadanco in 1981. Currently Assistant Artistic Director and Costume Mistress

rapher Geoffrey Holder, Miss De Lavallade has juggled a career as mother, educator and performer, while teaching in prestigious colleges and universities throughout the United States. Credited with being the person who discovered Alvin Ailey, Miss DeLavallade was an original member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and was featured as a dancer in the classic film, *Carmen Jones*. Currently Miss DeLavallade is a founding member of Paradigm.

Marilyn Banks, former soloist with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, is a graduate of the Dance Department of the Juilliard School. Ms. Banks made her professional debut with the Fred Benjamin Dance Company in 1974. A native of Brooklyn, New York, she became inter-

ested in dance at the John. F. Kennedy Community Center. Throughout her dance career, she has also performed with the companies of Chuck Davis, Morse Donaldson and Glen Brooks. She continues to work internationally as a guest artist and teacher.

Sarita Allen, for years a popular member of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, began her dance training in her hometown of Seattle, Washington. She toured the Northwest with the Fisher Ballet and the Mary Staton Theater Ensemble.

BALTIMORE DANCE THEATER

The original Baltimore Dance Theater was officially started in 1975 by Maria Broom, a local dance enthusiast and television news anchor.

This company was an offshoot of the Orville Johnson Dance Theater, a popular company of dancers and actors originally formed through the dance training program of the local Model Cities Cultural Arts Program. The company began performing local television and concert performances



Donald Muldrow Griffith and Mark Rubin
Ceremony

She was a scholarship student with both the Dance Theatre of Harlem and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center. As a member of the Alvin Ailey Repertory Workshop, she appeared on the historic CBS-TV special, *Ailey Salutes Ellington*. Miss Allen now teaches and performs with Complexions.

I was fortunate to have danced with several interesting dance companies throughout the 70's and well into the 90's. These companies are listed according to my affiliation in chronological order.

throughout the Baltimore/Washington area. Eventually, the direction of the company was assumed by Graham-based modern dance choreographer, Eva Anderson.

Company members included Roxanne Mann, Carl Pitts, Debby Newby, Deborah Mackey, Jackie Mark, Rae Ross, Maria Broom, Orville Johnson, Danita Ridueux, Bruce Hawkins, Pam "Imani" Payne, Joyce Handy, Miata, Vanessa Thornton, Paul Eaddy, Kathy Thomas, Phillip Ross, Michael Pretlow, Melvin Cooper, Shay Griffin, Branch Morgan, Neil Whitehead, Pat Ross and Pat Tinsley. Company manager was Lamont Thompson.



DC BLACK REPERTORY DANCE COMPANY AND WORKSHOP

Founded by Negro Ensemble Company alumnus Robert Hooks, the DC Black Repertory Company created a theater and dance training ground in Washington, DC. At the time, the Black DC theater community was experiencing a time of great artistic and cultural exploration. The repertory company, which was the combination of several of the dance and acting forces, also housed an apprentice workshop company, which was to serve as a new, professional training ground for the parent company. Among the local choreographers hired to train the dancers and the company included Mike Malone and Tony nominated choreographer, Louis Johnson. The company was composed of dancers from a number of different local companies. Many of these dance and acting students were also college students attending Howard University and other local colleges. The major local dance forces at the time were the Jones-Hayward School of Dance, which housed the Capitol Ballet; Melvin Deal, the brother of New York's Chuck Davis, and his African Dance Ensemble, choreographer Mike Malone's Dance Company and Diane Conway Pettite's Inner City Ballet.

The **Jones-Hayward School** turned out the talented brother and sister dancers, Hinton and Lettie Battle, Rodney Green, Broadway dancer Renee Rose, famed choreographer George Faison, ballet teacher Charles Auggins and Ailey dancer and choreographer, Ulysses Dove. From the CAPITOL BALLET came the astonishing Sylvester Campbell, nicknamed "the Black Nureyev", and his favorite partner, the lovely ballerina, Sandra Fortune.

The late **Mike Malone** had a company of dancers including Debbie Allen and Felicia Ayers Allen Rashad, Clyde Barrett, Ed Love, Bernie Gibson, David Cameron and Lee Dobson.

Diane Conway Pettite, a former soloist with New York's Fred Benjamin Dance Company, founded the **INNER CITY BALLET**. The dance ensemble was comprised of Lee Dobson, Eddie Smith, Keiko Dorham, Edna Long, Audra Wilson, John Beam and Gary Miller.

From this electric climate of dance and theater, rose a new dance company. The company was founded by Mike Malone and professionally trained as a performing unit with Louis Johnson.

The original **DC BLACK REPERTORY DANCE COMPANY** made it's formal debut at the company home in the old Howard Theater in February, 1972. Company members included Vicki Baltimore, Clyde Barrett, Meachie Jones, Charles Addams, Kiki Sheppard, Lisa Sneed, Robert Pittman, Laverne Howell Reed, David Cameron, Bernie Gibson and Ed Love.

Repertory included the popular *When Malindy Sings, Balls*, choreographed by Louis Johnson and *Sweet Bitter Love*, choreographed by Mike Malone.

I was a member of the DC Black Repertory Workshop Company.

Company dance teachers were Charles Auggins and Ronald "Smokey" Stevens.

Once the company disbanded, the dance leadership was assumed by Laverne Howell Reed and later by Jason Taylor.

THE FRED BENJAMIN DANCE COMPANY

I first began dancing professionally with Fred Benjamin in the late 70's.

I was introduced to Fred through his assistant, Karen Burke. Karen and I had met while traveling on the road in two different Broadway shows.

The Benjamin Company was a renegade pick-up company of professional dancers that enjoyed the many political and sexual statements Fred Benjamin incorporated in his choreography. Most of the members of this "invitation only" company knew each other through professional dance circles dating back to the early 60's.

I actually give Fred Benjamin the credit for allowing me to develop and become a full-fledged dance professional. When I first attended Fred's classes, I was more actor than dancer and it was at his studio where my career actually changed focus. As one of his regular students, I learned so much and was afforded many professional opportunities that allowed my career to grow and blossom. I will be forever grateful for this association.

Fred Benjamin is an international dance teacher and choreographer. He was born in Boston and received his early dance training at the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts. He came to New York to continue his dance studies under scholarship at the American Ballet Theater School. Mr. Benjamin's early nightclub experience was performing with Larry Steel's *Smart Affairs*. A former dance soloist with the Talley Beatty Dance Company, Mr. Benjamin's first theater job was in the off-Broadway show, *We're Civilized?*, featuring Karen Black. He performed for three seasons at the Jones Beach Marine Theater, where he did *Mardi Gras*, choreographed by the renowned television choreographer, June Taylor. He went on to appear on Broadway in *Hello Dolly* with Pearl Bailey and in the Broadway company of *Promises, Promises*. He was also a featured guest dance artist on the celebrated CBS special, *Ailey Salutes Ellington* with Gladys Knight. Fred has choreographed numerous ballets for his company and has been commissioned to choreograph and

re-stage his ballets for many other dance companies, including the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Philadanco, Forces of Nature Dance Company, Gallman's Newark Dance Theater, Impulse Dance Theater and Alpha Omega Theater Dance Company. Theatrically, he choreographed the original workshop productions of *Bubblin' Brown Sugar* and *It's So Nice to be Civilized*, both for the Amas Repertory Theater. Also among his choreographic credits is the rock opera *Soon*, which featured Peter Allen, Nell Carter and Richard Gere. His early nightclub performing experience with Larry Steel's *Smart Affairs* has helped in the staging and direction of *Feathers and Fantasy*, a popular Latin nightclub revue and nightclub acts for Gloria Gaynor, Ernestine Jackson, Cheryl Lynn and Winston Hemsley.

Mr. Benjamin, the founder of the Fred Benjamin Dance Center also founded the Fred Benjamin Dance Company in 1968. He has also taught at Clark Center for the Performing Arts, Steps, Ballet Arts, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and as a guest artist internationally in France, Norway, Germany, Amsterdam, Belgium, Finland, Spain and Japan. Mr. Benjamin's ballets are also featured in the repertoire of the Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, Philadanco, Gallman's Newark Dance Theater, Nannette Bearden's Contemporary Chamber Dance Group, Boston's Impulse Dance Company, Dimensions Dance Theater of California, Tokyo's Watanabe Dance Company, Jazz Extensions of Holland and the Joyce Ballet of Brazil. Mr. Benjamin is now a member of the jazz dance department at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center.

Former company members include Fred Benjamin, Carl Bailey, Marilyn Banks, Thea Nerissa Barnes, Cheryl Bell, Milton Bowser, Brenda Braxton, Lisa Cave, Ralph Farrington, Gina Ellis, Adrienne Frimet, Carl Fields, Alfred Gallman, Donald Griffith, Stanley Harrison, Chiquita Ross-Glover, Dyane Harvey-Salaam, Bruce Hawkins, Cheryl Norvell, Arlena Rolant, Winston DeWitt Hemsley, Gregory Hinton, Christopher Huggins, Linda James, Marlon Lewis, Terrin Miles, J. Jamal Hardeman, Charles "Malik" Lewis, Clayton Palmer, Olon Godare, Damon Pearce, Mark Rubin, Cheryl Scott, Glen Simms, Pam Jones, Aisha Coley, Warren Spears, Kathy Thomas, Andy Torres, Juanita Grace Tyler, Kay Uchishiba, Diane Conway, Freda Vanterpool, Jorge Vasquez, Lisa Larsen, Dina Wright, Leni Wylliams, Amy Ragsdale, Amparo Chigui Santiago, Rosa Curry, Gary Flannery, Rovon Hill, Sharon Brooks, Cheryl Brooks, Ralph Paul Haze, Kim Jones, Ben Harney, Juan Henderson, Mercie Hinton, Cornell Ivey, Carolyn Campbell, Milton Myers, Michelle Simmons, Shirley Black-Brown, Glen Brooks, George Faison, Michael Peters, Alan Weeks, Bryant Baker, Henny Kammerman, Ronald McKay, Traci Cloyd, Chet Tames,

LaVerne Washington, Judy Dearing, Pat Estwick Heaven, Renee Rose, Reginald Jackson, Lonnie McNeill, Michelle Murray, Thomas Oakman, Shirin Stave, Cherylynn Ross, Brian "Bomani" Bennis, Michael Sampson, Michael Vermy, Israel Valle, Gregory Wright, Edmee Cherdieu Dana Foglia, Catherine Foster, Seiko Fujita, Amy Henry, Gwynenn Jones, Wendy Mejia, Tyrone Monroe, Jason Mulloy, Terrence Popular, Eddie Stockton, Christiana Tober, Christian Von Howard, Matthew Williams, Tetsuo Yoshida and Karen Geneva Burke.

Fred Benjamin Dance Center Faculty included Karen Burke, Terrin Miles, Donald Griffith, Adrienne Frimet and Bruce Hawkins.

Mr. Benjamin's assistants included Karen Geneva Burke, Terrin Miles, Gina Ellis, Bruce Hawkins, Charles Malik Lewis and Seiko Fujita.

Company stage managers included Karen DeFrancis, Sandra Ross, Marvin Watkins, Melody Beal, Richard Gant and Steve Jones.

Company wardrobe was designed and maintained by Blythe Colombo, Chickie Byers, Sixto Delgado and Drag N' Things.

The company repertoire included *Magic Journey* (1977), *Metamorphosis* (1977), *Ember* (1971), *Pretty Is Skin Deep*, *Ugly Is To the Bone* (1976), *Echoes Of An Era* (1978), *Merry Christmas*, *Anna* (1978), *Come Into My Life* (1977), *Icerefire* (1982), *902 Albany Street* (1969), *Our Thing* (1970), *Prey* (1972), *Parallel Lines* (1971), *One In Doubt* (1983), *Ceremony* (1974), *Cauldron* (1984), *Illuminations* (1985), *From the Mountain of the Moon* (1975), *Dealing With the Facts and the Pain*, *Mountain High* (1971), *Cauldron* (1984), *Break-Out* (1979), *Crossroads* (1978), *Feeling Old Feelings* (1979).

For many years Fred operated his own dance studio and school on West 55th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenues. With the ever-changing Manhattan skyline and the escalating prices for real estate, Fred was forced to leave his studio during the 80's and he found a new home as a resident dance company at the Clark Center for the Performing Arts.

Clark Center for the Performing Arts was immediately successful as the setting within which a balanced curriculum of dance ranging from classical ballet to ethnic dance was taught. At the same time, Clark Center began to produce the work of evolving dance companies to support their development and to present new, emerging choreographers. Until 1974, Clark Center was located at the YWCA on Eighth Avenue. With the closing of the Y, the center, under the direction of Louise Roberts, moved its teaching activity into affordable, basic quarters on Eighth Avenue. Clark Center developed a well-known reputation in the dance community



for quality dance instruction at affordable prices. Production activities continued at the Mall of the City University Graduate Center on 42nd Street until 1978. The use of the Mall became a highly regarded City summer event and growth in class attendance heightened production activity.

Nanette Bearden's CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER DANCE GROUP

I was originally introduced to Nanette Bearden during the late 70's in a ballet class at the Igor Youskevich school, taught by Larry Stevens. I would regularly attend this class on Sunday mornings with my friend Arlena Rolant, a former Broadway and nightclub dancer.

I was dancing with Otis Sallid's New Art Ensemble and I was already a new member of the Fred Benjamin Dance Company, based out of Clark Center. I was also studying modern dance with Gary De Loatch and Milton Myers at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center; ballet with Finis Jhung and jazz dance with Frank Hatchett at the Broadway studio of master tap choreographer, Henry Le Tang, which was later to become the Broadway Dance Center.

Frank's assistant, Rick Odums, had a large following and he would often invite us to take free classes at the studio. Many of us were already acquainted with his choreographic work when we were invited to audition for the Chamber Dance Group.

At the time, Gary De Loatch was already directing the Chamber Dance Company and was now leaving to start his new dance career affiliation as a soloist with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The company had already made a popular name for itself presenting concerts and appearances

within the New York dance scene.

When Gary left to join the Ailey Company, the second incarnation of the Chamber Dance Group evolved. Most of these new dancers were taken from other companies such as Dance Theatre of Harlem and Rod Rodgers or were regular students of Fred Benjamin at Clark Center or Frank Hatchett at Henry Le Tang.

I auditioned for this new, "invitation only" company with my dance classmates Gina Ellis, Cheryl Norvell, Chiquita Ross, Kay Wright, Michael Franks and Khandi Alexander. Occasionally, when her schedule permitted, ballerina Sheila Rohan would work with us as a guest artist. Our new studio home was rented space at the New York Conservatory of Dance.

Many of the dancers had odd working schedules and were obligated to rehearse and perform with other companies in order to earn a living. The company hours were flexible and there were company classes offered.

Our first studio home was a rented, wood paneled, front, third floor studio at the New York Conservatory of Dance on 56th Street and Broadway.



FRED BENJAMIN DANCE COMPANY

Mark Rubin (seated), Damon Pearce, Alfred Gallman (back) Thea Nerissa Barnes, Karen Geneva Burke (above), Cheryl Norvell, Fred Benjamin (seated), Marilyn Banks, Gregory Hinton, Brenda Braxton (kneeling), Linda James, Bruce Hawkins

The second incarnation of the performing company also included Arlena Rolant, Vendetta Matthea, Lisa Niemi, Nancy Suzanne, Reginald Browne, Ruthanna Graves, Steven Fant, Marcea James, Stanley Harrison, Cynthia Lane, Loris Beckles, John Young, Ralf Hamilton, Aisha Coley, Avon Testamark and Sharon Wong.

We began to perform small concerts that were produced in conjunction with our funding from the Romare Bearden Foundation. Eventually our popularity grew and we were invited to perform in the Dancemobile series and then we began to appear regularly at the Riverside Dance Festival.

The company was an odd mix of dance professionals that came together between assignments to create new dance for a love of the art. From season to season and sometimes from performance to performance, our casting personnel would change abruptly. Many of the company members were already established and had lucrative careers outside of the Bearden Studios. Many of us were there and made the commitment to dance with the company because we wanted the opportunity to work together and we wanted the chance to

A few years later, the company was also invited to tour the west coast of Africa as part of a larger performing contingent from Atlanta, where we presented a command performance in the royal palace of Gabon for the family of African king, Omar Bongo.

Through the years we eventually developed our own production design team, which included Donald Moss, Sandra Ross, Marvin Watkins, Steve Jones, and our wardrobe supervisor, Sajda Mussawir Ladner.



Juanita Grace Tyler, Mark Rubin, Israel, Marilyn Banks, center: Fred Benjamin, Sharon Brooks
Facts and the Pain, choreography: Fred Benjamin

develop new works of choreography in a supportive environment. The dancers were always encouraged to exploit all of their performing talents, which made the programming likeable and unique.

Nanette then found a floor through loft space on 46th Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenues, where the company would have its permanent offices and rehearsal studio.

The company also received the opportunity to perform in Haiti and the Caribbean as part of a touring program, which featured the touring artwork of Romare Bearden. Other tours included dance programs in Baltimore and Atlanta, traveling as a part of the touring art exhibition, a tour of Saint Marten, the home of the Bearden art studio and a tour as a performing unit to Club Med resorts as featured entertainment.

Roumel Reaux eventually took over the direction of the company once Rick Odums left to pursue a choreographic career in Europe. Gina Ellis and Bruce Hawkins acted as Rehearsal Directors. At this point, the name of the company officially changed to the Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre.

From **Dance Theatre of Harlem** came Karen Henry, Carol Straker, Derek Williams, Cisco Brutton and Miriam Bacot; Broadway gypsies and dancers Stanley Dalton, Eartha Robinson, John Young, Audrey Jones, Jim Boone, Vanessa Bell, Stephanie Pope, Alfred Dove, Carl Hardy, Rae Ross, Clayton Strange, Michelle Saranne, Kim Snow, Ronnell Seay, Eddie Jordan, Gary Gibbs, Neal Whitehead and Broderick Wilson also joined the company at this junction.



Politically and socially this was a very important time in the history of African American dance. The companies that existed at this time were encouraged to make social and political commentary about the current events of the day. The company included works from master choreographers Talley Beatty, Louis Johnson, Frank Hatchett, Fred Benjamin, Otis Sallid and John Jones.

Nanette also encouraged new works from young choreographers such as Rick Odums, Gary De Loatch, Elbert Watson, Bill Scott, Bill Chaison, Vendetta Matthea, Kabby Mitchell, Chiquita Ross, Eddie Jordan, Abdel Salaam, Alfred Dove, Marla Bingham, and Roumel Reaux.

The company school was run by Nanette Bearden and the dance faculty included Sheila Rohan, Rick Odums, Philip Filiato, Bruce Hawkins and Roumel Reaux. The school started with two students and grew to classes of close to thirty students. Eventually, due to space restrictions, the growing school moved from the 46th Street loft studio and rented professional studio space from Lynn Simonson's Dance Space studios on Broadway and Houston Streets. The company also did occasional dance outreach and lecture demonstrations in the New York City public school system and through New York University, the Saint Marten Council of the Arts and the College of Staten Island.

Interestingly enough, we as dancers were always encouraged to have a say in the casting, production and programming of the company. Because of this involvement, our popularity grew and our programs became interesting and entertaining to all types of audiences.

The **Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre** was a select collective of dance artists brought together during the late 1970's by the late Nannette Rohan Bearden, arts philanthropist and wife of internationally acclaimed, Harlem Renaissance collage artist, Romare Bearden. The company was incorporated as a not for profit organization designed to create an outlet for talented dancers, choreographers and theater artists, while bringing the art of dance closer to the experiences and sensitivities of the general viewing public. The company's programs included a dance concert series; the company school; college tour lecture series; elementary and junior high school lecture demonstration series; dance residencies, the after school dance workshops for high school students and special annual dance tours.

Miss Bearden funded the training of many dance artists of color and the experimental works of many acclaimed choreographers of color, including Louis Johnson, Talley Beatty, George Faison, John Jones, Gary DeLoatch, Rick Odums, Fred Benjamin, Otis Sallid, Roumel Reaux, Bill Chaison, Dianne McIntyre, Walter Raines, Marla Bingham, Keith Lee,

Bill Scott, Alfred Dove, Walter Rutledge, Chiquita Ross-Glover, Kabby Mitchell, Elbert Watson, Abdel Salaam, Frank Hatchett and Vendetta Matthea.

Company tours included the United States, Africa (Command Performance), Haiti, Europe and the Caribbean.

The company repertory included *A and S*, *Clown's Carnival*, *Shells*, *Ritual*, *Moses*, *the Law Giver*, *Star Struck*, *Desert Hush*, *Olympiad*, *Last Dance*, *For Stan*, *Bachianus*, *Song For My Love*, *On Thelma Hill-The Place*, *Mourner's Bench*, *Suite Otis*, *Good Morning Heartache*, *Every Now and Then*, *Lobo*, *Free Falling*, *Passage*, *Sweet Bitter Love*, *Moon Zoon*, *Home*, *Connotation Brazil*, *Monk In Wonderland*, *My Old Piano*, *Takin' It To the Streets*, *Madman*, *Threshold of Hope*, *Spheres*, *Bitter Cup Heals*, *PSD*, *Black Coffee*, *Conquistador*, *Hour Of Power*, *Galactica*, *He's So Shy*.

Former company members include Sheila Rohan, Gary DeLoatch, Marlena Bernoui, Donna Ingram, Derek Williams, Steven Fant, Brenda Garrett, Nancy Suzanne, Lisa Niemi, Cheryl Norvell, Rick Odums, Roumel Reaux, Stanley Harrison, Gina Ellis, Chiquita Ross, Sharon Wong, Vendetta Matthea, Avon Testamark, Khandi Alexander, Ruthanna Graves, Cheryl Scott, Kay Wright, Aisha Coley, Marcia James, Marla Bingham, Rae Ross, April Berry, Siri Sat Nam Singh, Cynthia Lane, Arlena Rolant, Reginald Browne, Audrey Jones, Vernon Bulluck, Kevin Kelly, Nina Clare, Allysia Sneed, John Young, Stephanie Pope, Alfred Dove, Ricky Davenport, Cisco Brutton, Sam Smalls, Eddie Jordan, Karen Henry, Vanessa Bell, Michael Franks, Broderick Wilson, Bruce Hawkins, Carolyn King, Abdel Salaam, Lisa Dockery, Michelle Saranne, Kim Snow, Stanley Dalton, Alfred Gallman, Gregory Hinton, Danita Rideout, Karen Joy Mobley, Quincella Swinigan, Eugene Niles, Carol Straker, Gary Gibbs, Clayton Strange, Carl Hardy, Miriam Bacot, Karen Thornton, John Jones, Jim Boone, Ronnell Seay, Sharon Wong, Eartha Robinson, Ralf Hamilton, Neal Whitehead, Lynnard Williams, Robin Williams, Lucretia Williams, Cedric Mickles, Enrique DeJesus, Karen Joy Mobley, Adrienne Armstrong, Brian Barnes, D'Juan Dinzey, Deanna Dinzey, Jocelyn Diaz, El Tahara Ibrahim, Althea Canada, Desiree Pina, Greta Martin, Lisa Schrempp, Howard Perry, Tina Feaster, Todd Hunter, Keith Henderson, Christopher Hemmans and Lamont Greene.

The company was directed artistically by Gary De Loatch, Rick Odums, Bruce Hawkins, Roumel Reaux and Walter Rutledge.

The company rehearsal directors were Gina Ellis, Sheila Rohan and Bruce Hawkins.

Company stage managers included Sandra Ross, Marvin Watkins, Steve Jones and Donald Moss.

The company Wardrobe Mistress is Sajda Mussawir Ladner.

School faculty included Philip Filiato, Gary De Loatch, Rick Odums, Roumel Reaux, Sheila Rohan, Bruce Hawkins and Christopher Hemmans.

Company Management Assistance provided by Bess Pruitt and Robert H. La Prince.

Featured singers and performers included Gary Gibbs and Brother John Sellers.

For a short time, I was a member of a small, Black-owned, **Chamber Ballet Dance Company** that headquartered from Jersey City, New Jersey.

HUDSON REPERTORY DANCE THEATER

Hudson Repertory Dance Theater, a multi-ethnic ballet company was founded in 1983 by its Artistic Director, the late Joel Harrison and the Executive Director, N. Beatrice Worthy. Based in Jersey City, New Jersey, in the historic Barrow Mansion, HRDT was both a professional ballet company and school. In addition to bringing concerts of classical and modern ballet to audiences in New Jersey's Hudson and neighboring counties, HRDT offered courses in classical ballet for children and adults.

Joel Harrison, HRDT Artistic Director and Founder, trained with Alwin Nikolais, Murray Louis, Merce Cunningham and the American Ballet Theater School, the Juilliard School and the San Francisco Dance Spectrum. He performed with the National Ballet of Venezuela, the Sacramento Ballet, the New York City Opera Ballet, the San Francisco Opera Ballet and James Cunningham's "Acme Dancers".

Company members included Joel Harrison, Melonie Matthews, Mari Higashikowa, Nancy Schwartz, Marcea James, Bruce Hawkins, Sharon Williams, Valerie Dardour, Jai Ji Guan, Antonio Lopez, Bernard Garrett and Michael Sincus.

The company repertory, choreographed by Joel Harrison, Carlos Carvajal and Zulay Camino, included *Balm In Gilead*, *Tidescapes*, *Ain't No Thing*, *Penelope*, *Memories of Green*.

School faculty included Joel Harrison, Leland Fuller, Melonie Matthews, Mariane Bresnard and Cynthia Ellis.

I first encountered Louis Johnson as a student at the DC Black Repertory Company and later worked for him in the award winning off Broadway production of Melvin Van Peebles's *The Champen'*, starring Ruth Brown and Sandra Reeves Phillips. For my performance I, along with Ruth Brown and Sandra Reaves Philips, won the AUDELCO Black Theater Achievement Award. This was to be the beginning of several projects and a working relationship that would span the next twenty years.

LOUIS JOHNSON DANCE THEATER ENSEMBLE

Distinguished as one of the first African American men to be recognized internationally as a professional ballet dancer, Louis Johnson began his professional career as a dancer with the New York City Ballet, under the tutelage of George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins.

As a Tony Award nominated choreographer, Louis Johnson created ballets for two Metropolitan Opera productions: *Aida*, starring Leontyne Price and *Giaconda* starring Martina Arroyo. Louis also did the original choreography for the Broadway company of *Purlie*, and the Houston Grand Opera Broadway production of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*. Mr. Johnson is also widely known as the choreographer of the motion picture *The Wiz*, starring Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, Lena Horne, Richard Pryor and Quincy Jones. He has choreographed for the Ed Sullivan Show and Radio City Music Hall.

Mr. Johnson collaborated in award winning Off-Broadway productions of *The Champen'* and *The Waltz of the Stork Boogie* with famed Black filmmaker and playwright, Melvin Van Peebles. Off-Broadway, Mr. Johnson also staged the African American revival of *Golden Boy*. Mr. Johnson also was the resident staff choreographer of New York's Negro Ensemble Company and was a member of the faculty of Yale University and Howard University. He has also worked and choreographed nightclub acts for musical luminaries as Aretha Franklin, Diana Sands, Peter Allen and the recent Father and Son tour of Gerald and Eddy Lavert with the O'Jays.

His ballet works are now featured in the repertories of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Joffrey Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alpha Omega Dance Company. Also an accomplished classical pianist and costume designer, Mr. Johnson is currently the Director of Dance at the Henry Street Settlement Playhouse, where he is the Director of the Dance Department and his company is in residence.

His lively and whimsical dance and theater company repertory includes *Balls*, *When Malindy Sings*, *Forces of Rhythm*, *Niggers*, *No Outlet*, *Fontessa* and *Friends*.

Among the many dancers and theater performers to pass through this company were Meache Jones, Clyde Frazier, David Cameron, Bernie Gibson, Skip Dricscoll, Harold Pierson, Don Martin, Emma Mosley, Kiki Sheppard, LaVerne Reid, Kashka, Adrienne Armstrong, George Faison, Pearl Reynolds, Georgia Collins, Luc Camacho, Claude Thompson, Arthur Mitchell, Charles Moore and Ella Thompson Moore, Cynthia Shipley, Gerard Alexander, Aubrey Lynch, Sheila Rohan, Broderick Wilson, Charles



Wallace, Chiquita Ross-Glover, Bruce Hawkins, Michael Goring, Serena Irving, Mabel Robinson, Cleo Quitman, Barbara Wright, Ami Stewart, Jimmy Randolph, Roslyn Burrows, Vicki Baltimore, Charles Auggins, Pheobe Redmond, Adriene Thorne, Nicole Smith, Eyan Williams, Gayle McKinney, Pepper, Sandy Alvarez, Anthony Adams, Warren P. Miller, D'Juan McCrary, Tyrone Monroe, Beverly Prentice, Rhonda McLean-Nur, Karen Eubanks, Don Bellamy, Mary Vivian, Bill Davenport, Eleanor Mc Coy, Phillip Wright, Tammy Gibson, Ivson "Scooter" Polk, Mark Mack, Sara Swenson, Kyme Hersi, Sarita Allen, Hope Clark, Lawrence Hamilton, Vivian Reed, Clarence Hunter, Aubrey J. Lynch II, Lowell Smith, Cynthia Shipley Willis, Luther Fontaine, Seiko Fujita, Alycia Perrin.

I have made many life long friends during my thirty years in the New York Dance Community and credit my growth and maturity as a performer and as a human being to the valuable lessons I learned as a member of this exciting family.

If you have more archival dance information or links to share, I encourage you to contact me BruceHawkins@Prodigy.net



Nanette Bearden Contemporary Dance Theatre Company
Cynthia Lane, Kay Wright, Michael Franks (back), Cheryl Norvell (front), Bruce Hawkins (center), Stanley Harrison (back), Aisha Coley, Avon Testamark

TANZ USA

Errungenschaften einer Gemeinschaft

Bruce Hawkins

Ich hatte Glück, meine Tanzkarriere am Ende der 1970er begonnen zu haben.

Das war eine Zeit, als Tanzensemble und Tanzaufführungen finanziert wurden, sie waren modern und in der afrikanisch-amerikanischen Gemeinschaft wurdest du respektiert, bewundert und verehrt für deine physische Leistung.

Tänzer reisten von Ensemble zu Ensemble, zu Broadway-Shows, machten Fernsehwerbung und waren in Off-Broadway Theatern. Wir setzten die Trends, beeinflussten die Mode und die Haltung in der Gemeinschaft der Darstellenden Künste. Alles wurde mit Sinn für Humor getan, mit Stil und künstlerischer Vision. Da war diese magische Energie, die die New Yorker Tanzszenen erfüllte, und jeder – Künstler, Choreographen, Tanzlehrer, Schüler und das Publikum – sie alle fühlten diese Elektrizität.

Ich machte mein Debüt "im Schlusslicht" einer sorgenfreien, elektrisch aufgeladenen Zeit für die politische Identität des schwarzen darstellenden Künstlers.

Ich betrachtete alle Tänzer dieser Zeit als kreative Mentoren und Legenden in ihrem eigenen Sinne. Sie waren starke, stolze,

aggressive, ausgebildete Künstler, die uneigennützig ihre Geheimnisse und ihr Talent teilten zur Stärkung unserer reichen kulturellen Tradition. Die meisten dieser einzigartigen Künstler waren "bettelarm", sie arbeiteten an einer Karriere mit finanziellen und politischen Nachteilen, nur wegen der Farbe ihrer Haut.

Im Verlauf der Jahre habe ich Kisten mit "Kram" gesammelt – Bilder, Artikel, Broschüren, Papiere und Pressemappen, praktisch einen Kofferraum voll mit verletzten Gefühlen, Erinnerungen und Triumphen auf der Bühne. Ich besitze signierte Fotografien von Freunden, die Berühmtheiten

waren, und ich habe Tourfotos meiner Tanz-Zeitgenossen, die hinter den Kulissen aufgenommen wurden, im Hotel und in Umkleieräumen in verschiedenen Phasen, mal angekleidet, mal nicht angekleidet.

Es war ein Segen für mich, diese Erfahrungen gemacht zu haben. Während meiner Karriere tanzte ich in fünf unterschiedlichen Ensembles. Es gab dort viele Persönlichkeiten, viele Egos, viele Reisen und viele Entwicklungsschritte zu machen.



Prof. Gayle McKinney Griffith, Co-Founder/Director: Fountainhead © Tanz Theatre, Black International Cinema, The Collegium - Forum & Television Program Berlin, Cultural Zephyr e.V. Wings, Choreography: Louis Johnson, Photo: Martha Swope

Meine Tanzkarriere hatte viele ungewöhnliche Parallelen und so fand ich mich in einer Woche kostenlos für die Gemeinde auf der Straße in Harlem tanzend und in der nächsten am Broadway oder auf einem anderen Kontinent, vielleicht als Teil einer Galavorstellung im Palast des wohlhabendsten afrikanischen Königs. Tanz und Theater zeigten mir eine Fantasiewelt, die ich sonst in meiner städtischen Nachbarschaft in Baltimore nicht gesehen hätte.

Dann, abrupt, nach einem zwanzigjährigen Kampf mit meinem Körper, meinem Geist und meiner Seele und nach einer Reihe persönlicher Tragödien,

entschied ich mich plötzlich, mit dem Tanzen aufzuhören.

Mein Leben änderte sich drastisch.

Alles, was mir geblieben war, waren meine Bilder und meine Erinnerungen, die sich hinten in meinem Schrank befanden.

Ich habe nie behauptet, ein Tanzhistoriker zu sein, nur ein übermäßig sentimentaler Mensch, der all das zu schätzen weiß, was ihm gegeben wurde. Ich war nicht in diesem Andenkengeschäft für den finanziellen oder politischen Gewinn. Ich wollte nur meine Erfahrungen mit meiner Familie, meinen Freunden und meinen Schülern teilen.



Als Mitglied der Tanzfakultät am Alvin Ailey American Dance Center begann ich zu erkennen, dass es eine Lücke gab, die es zu füllen galt, indem man die Geschichte des afrikanisch-amerikanischen Tanzes dokumentiert. Viele meiner Schüler waren sich des großartigen Vermächtnisses der Künstler, das ihnen vorausging, nicht bewusst.

Eines Abends, als ich mit zwei von meinen engsten Tanzfreunden am Telefon plauderte, kam uns die Idee, all diesen "Kram" irgendwohin zu bringen, wo er konstruktiv von anderen genutzt werden könnte, um die guten Zeiten zu bewahren, die Erinnerungen von Menschen, mit denen ich gearbeitet habe, und den Herzenskummer meiner Tanzkariere.

Ich entschied mich für das Internet.

Ich brauchte ein ganzes Jahr, um dies zu bewerkstelligen.

Mit der Hilfe einiger meiner besten Tanzfreunde dauerte der Großteil der Arbeit einen Monat, wobei all dieser "Kram" sein Eigenleben entwickelte und begann, mysteriöse, spirituelle Energie an unerwarteten Orten freizusetzen. Kaum hatte ich begonnen, erhielt ich Telefonanrufe, ich traf Leute, die ich seit Jahren nicht gesehen hatte, und ich empfing Briefe und moralische Unterstützung aus dem ganzen Land, fast aus dem Nirgendwo.

Anstatt auf dieser Energie zu sitzen, "bewegte ich mich mit diesem Geist" und begann all diese Informationen auf Computerdisketten zusammenzustellen. Im Laufe der Jahre waren zu viele brillante und talentierte Freunde verschwunden oder gestorben, um diese wertvolle Geschichte weiterhin eigennützig für mich selbst zu behalten. Ich wollte nicht, dass ihr Andenken in irgendeinem Textbuch verloren geht, das auf einem staubigen Bibliotheksregal liegt. Ich wollte, dass zukünftige Generationen von Schülern in der Lage sein können, die vielen Beiträge zu würdigen, die aus diesem fast verloren gegangenen Segment amerikanischer Tanzgeschichte hervorgegangen sind.

Bald hatte ich genug, mehr als genug, um eine Internetseite zu beginnen. Unglücklicherweise war ich in Sachen Computer völlig ungebildet.

Und wieder, irgendwie sandten mir die Geister unserer Vorfahren einen Webdesigner, den ich noch nie Angesicht zu Angesicht getroffen hatte, dem ich jedoch instinktiv vertraute. Durch viele E-Mails und Telefonate gelang es uns, des anderen Kreativsprache zu entschlüsseln und die Informationen zu einem präzisen, triumphalen Dokument zu bündeln, auf das ich sehr stolz bin. Dies war wahrhaftig eine Arbeit der Liebe.

Die Information, die hier präsentiert wird, hat nicht den Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit. Dies ist und sollte immer ein kollektives Projekt sein. Die Seite wird sich verändern und entwickeln, je mehr aus der Gemeinschaft der Tänzer

sich aktiv durch das Erzählen der afrikanisch-amerikanischen Tanzgeschichte beteiligen.

Es erstaunt mich manchmal, dass es so viele Menschen gibt, die gar nichts über den Tanz wissen, und besonders über die Erfahrungen der schwarzen Amerikaner im Tanz.

Unsere Tanzgemeinschaft hat auf einmalige Weise durch Bewegung unsere Rituale zum Ausdruck gebracht, Emotionen, Romantik und unsere globale Sichtweise. Der schwarze Tänzer hat unsere natürliche Fähigkeit als einen Weg zum Ausdruck genutzt, unsere Sinnlichkeit hat sich in den Geist des Universums eingepreßt. Wir haben Bilder und historische Abbildungen unseres Erbes entwickelt, die leicht umzusetzen und durch die Magie der Bühne genossen werden können.

Viele von uns kamen über das Fernsehen oder Theater mit dem Tanz in Kontakt und viele dieser Bilder waren aus anderen Kulturen als der unseren. Mit dem Aufkommen des Musikvideos werden die meisten unserer Kinder mit dem Tanz durch seine Verbindung zur Musikindustrie in Berührung kommen.

Ich persönlich verbrachte viele Stunden über viele Jahre damit, zu reisen, in Studios zu proben und aufzutreten. Die meisten dieser Auftritte wurden auf Video aufgezeichnet und fotografiert, dennoch haben sie es noch nicht bis in die Tanzarchive der Bibliotheken gebracht.

Leider werden die meisten dieser wertvollen Informationen von einzelnen Personen, die sich aus egozentrischen Gründen weigern, ihr Wissen mit anderen zu teilen, wie "Geiseln gehalten". Unglücklicherweise sind viele unserer Tanzhistoriker gestorben. Ihre Informationen gingen verloren und wurden verändert. Das Meiste dieser Informationen wird traurigerweise vergessen werden, wenn wir nicht die Initiative ergreifen, um das vorhandene Personal der Tanzensemble davon zu überzeugen, diese Dokumente zu archivieren.

Weil viele dieser Tanzpioniere von uns gegangen sind, sind viele der Geschichten und historischen Informationen verloren gegangen. Dank moderner Technologie und Archiven verschiedener Tanzsammlungen können mit der Hilfe von Tanzhistorikern einige dieser Informationen rekonstruiert werden. Dennoch ist es schwierig, die vollständige Vision und den wahren politischen Geist und die Energie dieser Einrichtungen aufzuzeichnen.

(Auszug aus dem Englischen)

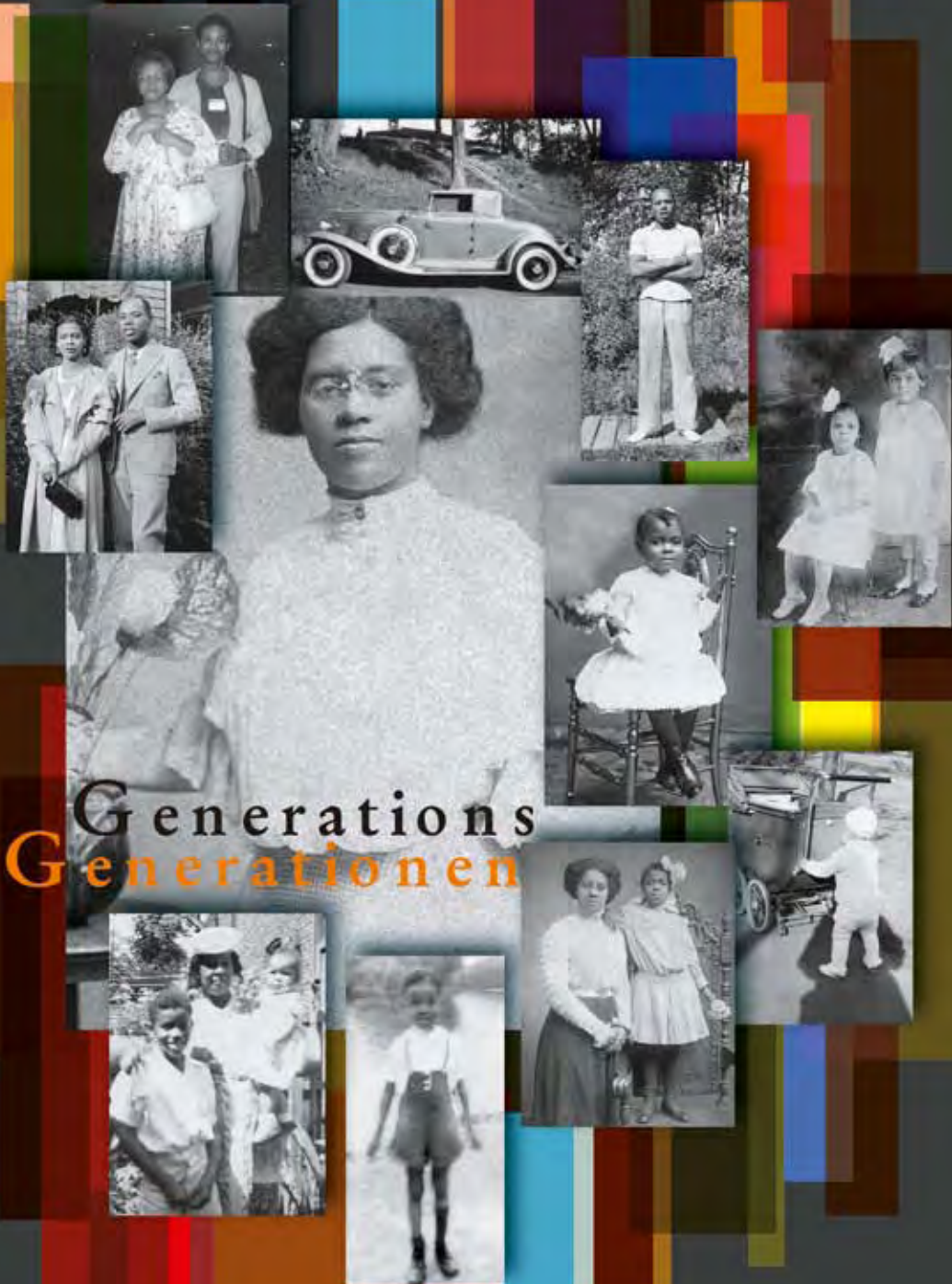


“I may not make it if I try,
but I damn sure won't if I don't...”

Oscar Brown Jr.

“Mankind will either
find a way or make one.”

C.P. Snow



Generations Generationen

“Whatever you do..., be cool!”

Joseph Louis Turner

“Yes, I can...!”

Sammy Davis Jr.

Bruce Hawkins

November 14, 1952 - December 2, 2016

Prof. Donald Muldrow Griffith

founder/producer/director/publisher/curator/moderator/author/choreographer

Fountainhead® Tanz Théâtre

Black International Cinema Berlin

THE COLLEGIUM - Forum & Television Program Berlin

"Footprints in the Sand?" Exhibition Berlin

Cultural Zephyr e.V.

www.fountainhead-tanz-theatre.de

www.blackinternationalcinema.de

Celebrating the Life of Bruce Hawkins

Clark Center NYC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kJ9TTsgDCA>