



ANNOUNCING THE EQUITY PROJECT: INCREASING THE PRESENCE OF BLACKS IN BALLET

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Dance Theatre of Harlem, The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD), and Dance/USA are pleased to announce The Equity Project: Increasing the Presence of Blacks in Ballet, a three-year partnership program to support the advancement of racial equity in professional ballet companies. The Equity Project: Increasing the Presence of Blacks in Ballet brings together a cohort of artistic and executive leaders from 21 large budget, professional ballet organizations for in-person meetings and coaching, with the purpose of increasing the presence of blacks in ballet in all areas of the industry.

The ballet organizations confirmed to participate in the three-year program are: American Ballet Theatre, Atlanta Ballet, Ballet Austin, Ballet Memphis, Boston Ballet, Charlotte Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Miami City Ballet, Nashville Ballet, National Ballet of Canada, New York City Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Richmond Ballet, San Francisco Ballet, School of American Ballet, Texas Ballet Theater, and The Joffrey Ballet.

The Equity Project: Increasing the Presence of Blacks in Ballet held its first cohort meeting at the Dance/USA national conference in Los Angeles, CA in June 2018. The program participants will reconvene at the IABD Conference and Festival in Dayton, OH in January 2019. Dance Theatre of Harlem will host the final cohort meeting in Harlem, NY in 2020.

Supporting The Equity Project: Increasing the Presence of Blacks in Ballet is a highly skilled team of consultants that bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise in classical ballet, undoing racism, and education. This holistic approach is designed to engage participants at the intersection of the history of ballet; broader systems of power and privilege; and practical tools for change.

The consultant team members are: Tammy Bormann, Principal with The TLB Collective; Joselli Audain Deans, Ed. D, Dancer, Educator and Independent Dance Scholar; Theresa Ruth Howard, Dancer, Dance Educator, Journalist, and Founder of MoBBallet.org (Memoirs of Blacks in Ballet); and P. Kimberleigh Jordan, PhD, Educator, Former Dancer, and Assistant Professor at Drew University.

“Our Founder and Artistic Director Emeritus, Arthur Mitchell, created Dance Theatre of Harlem 50 years ago with the intention of dispelling the myth that Black people did not have the ability to succeed in the artform of classical ballet. In the years since its founding, Dance Theatre of Harlem has become a beacon

of opportunity for Black dancers to not only succeed in classical ballet, but to excel,” commented Virginia Johnson, Artistic Director of Dance Theatre of Harlem. “With the recent passing of Arthur Mitchell, we are especially proud to partner with The International Association of Blacks in Dance and Dance/USA on The Equity Project in the work of increasing the presence of Black people throughout our field – work that Mr. Mitchell began in 1968.”

Denise Saunders Thompson, CEO and President of The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD), stated that, “the significance of The Equity Project is to highlight and uplift the longstanding contributions of Black men and women in Ballet and to assist and provide this learning community of companies with resources and methodologies to begin the process of both institutional and organizational change; change that reflects diversity, in all of its fullness, and truthfully represents America both on stage and behind the scenes. The history of Blacks in Ballet is documented from the beginning of the 20th century and IABD continues to champion and herald the dance schools, institutions and individuals that have trained many of ‘our firsts’ in the Ballet world. Their stories should be known and it is through this process of direct engagement, reflection, and action that these companies have committed to challenging the existing barriers for Black and Brown Ballet dancers within the field. The continued health and vitality of Ballet has come to the forefront and these organizations are dedicated to the process of opening more doors and creating even greater opportunity for all.”

“Dance/USA is thrilled to be in partnership with Dance Theatre of Harlem and The International Association of Blacks in Dance to administer The Equity Project, a program that aligns with Dance/USA’s new vision and refreshed mission,” noted Amy Fitterer, executive director of Dance/USA. “We are encouraged by the program’s cohort of 21 ballet organizations and the commitment by ballet leadership to initiate systemic change within their organizations and across the field.”

The Equity Project: Increasing the Presence of Blacks in Ballet is made possible with the generous support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

About Dance Theatre of Harlem

For 50 years, Dance Theatre of Harlem has provided access to the art of ballet for all. By way of its international touring company, training school and celebrated arts education and community engagement program, Dancing Through Barriers[®], DTH has grown into a leading dance institution of unparalleled global acclaim.

Compelled by the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the legendary Arthur Mitchell started a school with his teacher, Karel Shook. Mitchell’s idea was to offer children in the Harlem neighborhood where he grew up the opportunity to challenge themselves to build better futures for themselves through the study of a classical artform. Incorporated in 1969, DTH soon became known as “one of ballet’s most exciting undertakings” (*The New York Times*, 1971). Now in its fifth decade, DTH has established an extraordinary legacy based on thrilling performances and artistic excellence predicated on the power of access to art that can transform lives and providing opportunity where none had existed before. Through performance, training and education, the impact of Dance Theatre of Harlem continues to be felt across the globe. www.dancetheatreofharlem.org

About The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD)

The International Association of Blacks in Dance preserves and promotes dance by people of African ancestry or origin, and assists and increases opportunities for artists in advocacy, audience development, education, funding, networking, performance, philosophical dialogue, and touring. IABD

has become the Mecca for Blacks in Dance such as administrators, artists, choreographers, dance companies, directors, educators, researchers, scholars, and those interested in artistry, Black dance issues, and performance presentations.

The Association, founded in 1991, provides a network, formal newsletters, choreographers directory, published papers and is the *raison d'être* for the annual conference and festival. The Association also responds to and initiates dialogue around issues that impact the Black Dance Community as well as the Dance community at large. www.iabdassociation.org

About Dance/USA

Propelled by our belief that dance can inspire a more just and humane world, Dance/USA will amplify the power of dance to inform and inspire a nation where creativity and the field thrive. Dance/USA champions an inclusive and equitable dance field by leading, convening, advocating, and supporting individuals and organizations. Dance/USA's core programs are focused in the areas of engagement, advocacy, research, and preservation.

Since 1982, Dance/USA has served as the national service organization for the professional dance field, leading national projects, programs, and initiatives that have a positive impact on the field. Dance/USA has united hundreds of members including aerial, ballet, contemporary, modern, jazz, and tap dance companies; dance presenters, agents, service organizations, and educators; and dancers, independent artists, students, and other individuals together to secure a future for dance—maintaining the profession and advancing the art form. www.danceusa.org