ABOUT DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

In 1969, Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook founded Dance Theatre of Harlem in New York City following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in 1968 and during a difficult period of civil rights history in America. A student of George Balanchine, Mitchell had become the first African American principal dancer at the New York City Ballet in 1955. His vision for the company was to break down racial and political barriers between performers.¹

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ABOUT DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM // Watch

Dance Theatre of Harlem

Dancing Through Harlem

A Place for All of Us
On June 11, 1920, Hazel Dorothy Scott was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Her father, R. Thomas Scott, was a West African scholar from England. Her mother, Alma Long Scott, was a classically trained pianist and saxophonist who gave lessons. Scott grew up around music and showed her own musical talents at an early age, learning to play the piano by ear and catching wrong notes from her mother’s students. She became a jazz pianist and singer and was the first African American woman to host her own television show. During her career, she argued against both the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Hollywood studio machine, but she most notably impressed audiences with “her jazzy renditions of classical works.”

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WATCH:

“Takin’ a Chance” by Hazel Scott
Hazel Scott in the Army
“Dark Eyes” by Hazel Scott

Hazel Scott: A Woman, a Piano, and a Commitment to Justice
Susan Engle

Hazel Scott was a champion for civil and women’s rights. Born in Trinidad in 1920, she moved with her family to the United States in 1924. She was a musical wonder—studying and performing on the piano from the time she was a child. She became an accomplished singer as well and appeared in Broadway musicals, films, and recorded her own albums. She also made headlines by standing up for the rights of women and African Americans, and she refused to play for segregated audiences. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the March on Washington, Hazel led a march in Paris, where she was living, in front of the American Embassy. She learned about the Bahá’í Faith from Dizzy Gillespie and became a Bahá’í on December 1, 1968. She passed away in 1981. We invite you to learn more about this “Change Maker” and the enduring impact she had on race relations through her performing arts.3

EXPLORE // Classroom Workshops

**Movement and Shadows** Grades 1st - 5th

In this workshop, students will explore movement and will design an aluminum foil dancer. Students will experiment with a light source and will learn how opaque materials react with light and create shadows.

[Click Here for Workshop]

**Columbian Hypnosis** Grades 6th - 12th

In this workshop, partners will begin with the basic mirror game. Students will practice controlled movements and then will progress to a more difficult game called Columbian Hypnosis. In Columbian Hypnosis, partners will take turns being the hypnotist and will have to carefully follow their partner’s hand as if they were hypnotized.

[Click Here for Workshop]

**Sculpture Museum** Grades K - 3rd

In this workshop, students will create poses to mimic emotions. There will be one curator who will have to walk through the museum and guess which emotion is being portrayed.

[Click Here for Workshop]
EXPLORE // Harlem Renaissance

Originally called the “New Negro Movement,” the Harlem Renaissance was an intellectual and cultural movement for African Americans that began in the 1920s. During its first decade, African American intellectuals and artists expanded their influence in music, art, literature, performance arts, and academia. Some see that the Harlem Renaissance has continued to hold influence in modern movements that include bebop, disco, soul, and hip hop.  

Music of the Harlem Renaissance

Duke Ellington was born on April 29, 1899 in Washington, DC. A leading figure of his time, Ellington composed numerous jazz scores and was a bandleader for over fifty years. His original sound helped to create big band jazz. He died on May 24, 1974.

READ MORE

LISTEN TO “TAKE THE A TRAIN” BY DUKE ELLINGTON

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Louis Armstrong was born on August 4, 1901 in New Orleans. He was an amazing leading trumpeter and singer, and he became one of the most influential jazz musicians in America during his lifetime. He died on July 6, 1971.6

Bessie Smith was thought to be born on April 15, 1894 in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She was an influential American blues vocalist. She died on September 26, 1937.7

Langston Hughes was thought to be born on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri. He was important American writer during the Harlem Renaissance, and his work centered on the African American voice and experience. A writer of diverse skills, Hughes produced a large body of work that included poems, essays, novels, and journalistic pieces. He died on May 22, 1967.

READ MORE

“YOUTH” BY LANGSTON HUGHES

The Apollo Theater

In 1913, the Apollo Theater was established in Harlem, New York; however, it did not initially allow African Americans to attend. In 1934, Leo Brecher and Frank Schiffman bought the theater and opened it up to African American audiences. They specifically marketed to Harlem’s African American community. Influential jazz artists Ella Fitzgerald and Pearl Bailey first performed at the Apollo. The Apollo’s Amateur Night was an important influence on American jazz, gospel, swing, bebop, blues, and soul.⁹
PHILADANCO!

In 1970, Joan Myers Brown established the Philadelphia Dance Company (PHILADANCO!) in an effort to create more performance opportunities for African American dancers. At the time, many local dance schools and professional companies did not allow them to participate. PHILADANCO! has become a nationally and internationally recognized professional dance company. “Established on principles of providing opportunity, inclusion, and hope, PHILADANCO! bridges cultural divides and consistently performs before sold-out audiences of people from diverse ethnicities and communities.”

READ MORE

WATCH “LATCHED” BY PHILADANCO!

Alvin Ailey Dance Theater

In 1958, choreographer Alvin Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, a multi-racial modern dance ensemble that through its numerous world tours helped to popularize modern dance. In 1988, a year before his death, Ailey received the Kennedy Center Honors. Ailey’s most well-known dance is called Revelations, described as “a celebratory study of religious spirit.”

WATCH REVELATIONS FROM THE ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

Support for this program is made possible by generous donors who have committed time and resources to the Charleston Gaillard Center’s Dance Initiative.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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The Gaillard Center would like to thank the following educational partners in their ongoing support of our Education & Community program. This program is also supported, in part, by a grant from a private foundation.

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