EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Dance Theatre of Harlem

All Ages

Photo by Nir Arieli

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

CHARLESTON GAILLARD CENTER
gaillardcenter.org
(843) 242-3099

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]
READ MORE

Dance Theatre of Harlem performs Concerto Barocco, choreographed by George Balanchine. The company premiered this ballet, its first Balanchine piece, in 1970.

WATCH

Dance Theatre of Harlem

About the DTH Signature Classic, Firebird

A Place for All of Us

[1] "Our History," Dance Theatre of Harlem, accessed June 2, 2022, https://www.dancetheatreofharlem.org/our-history/.

WHAT IS A LECTURE DEMONSTRATION?

When you come to the Charleston Gaillard Center you will see a Dance Theatre of Harlem lecture demonstration.

A lecture demonstration (often called a “lec-dem”) is a special kind of performance where dancers and staff combine spoken explanation with live dance. Instead of just watching a finished show, students will get to see *how* professional ballet works, up close and explained in real time.

What students will see:

1. Introduction to the Company

A host or company member will explain the history of Dance Theatre of Harlem, founded in 1969 by Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook, it was groundbreaking as one of the first major ballet companies built to showcase Black dancers and diversify classical ballet.

2. Warm-Up and Technique Basics

Dancers will demonstrate:
- Basic ballet positions (first through fifth position)
- Barre exercises
- Explanations of ballet vocabulary (French terms used in classical dance)

3. Choreography

The dancers will show a short piece of movement first at full speed, then break it down step-by-step so students can see how complex choreography is built piece by piece.

CONNECT

CLASSROOM WORKSHOPS

BALLET TECHNIQUE: CREATE YOUR OWN CHOREOGRAPHY

Grades 2–12

In this workshop, students will learn ballet technique, culminating in creating their own choreography. Students will learn about the history of ballet, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and the Great Migration.

Click here for the workshop

DANCE INSPIRED VISUAL ARTS

Grades 2–6

Students will explore Dance Theatre of Harlem's piece, *Firebird*. Students will reflect on the feelings inspired by dance and the colors that reflect that inspiration. Students will use those colors to create an original piece of art.

Click here for the workshop

MONOLOGUE WRITING: ARTHUR MITCHELL HISTORY

Grades 4–12

In this workshop, students will learn about Arthur Mitchell's history and his path towards creating Dance Theatre of Harlem. Students will write a monologue based on an event in Arthur Mitchell's life.

Click here for the workshop

MUSIC LISTENING ARTS

Grades 2–5

In this workshop, students will learn about Arthur Mitchell's history and his path towards creating Dance Theatre of Harlem. Students will listen to music from *Firebird* and draw a scene on stage that corresponds to the musical elements.

Click here for the workshop

EXPLORE

DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM'S WORK — A COMBINATION OF CLASSICAL AND NEOCLASSICAL BALLET

Classical Ballet

- Tells a story—like a fairy tale come to life, with clear characters (princes, swans, villains)
- Follows a formal structure —built on the five positions of ballet
- Features elaborate production—tutus, painted backdrops, and music written to match the story

Neoclassical Ballet

- Has no story—it's just movement and music
- Moves fast—with quick footwork, off-center balances, and extreme extensions
- Keeps it simple—dancers wear plain leotards and tights, and the stage is often bare

How Does Dance Theatre of Harlem Fit Between the Two?

Dance Theatre of Harlem dances both classical and neoclassical ballet, and does each one beautifully. Classical ballet tells a story, like a fairy tale come to life, with fancy costumes and dancers playing princes and swans. Neoclassical ballet doesn't tell a story, it just lets the dancers move fast and beautifully to the music, wearing simple, plain costumes. Dance Theatre of Harlem does both kinds of ballet, and it is extraordinary because it was one of the first major ballet companies to show the world that Black dancers could shine as ballet stars too.

CONNECT

AFRICAN AMERICAN LED DANCE THEATERS

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] **READ MORE**

PHILADANCO!

PHILADELPHIA DANCE COMPANY

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."[10]
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."[11]
WATCH *REVELATIONS* FROM THE ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

This work is made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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

9 "About the Apollo," Apollo Theater, accessed June 2, 2022, https://www.apollotheater.org/about/.
10 "Our History," Philadelphia Dance Company, accessed June 2, 2022, https://philadanco.org/history/
11 Biography.com Editors, "Alvin Ailey Biography," A&E Television Network, April 2, 2014, https://www.biography.com/performer/alvin-ailey#comments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apollo Theater. “About the Apollo.” Accessed June 2, 2022. https://www.apollotheater.org/about/.

Biography.com Editors. “Alvin Ailey Biography.” A&E Television Network. April 2, 2014. https://www.biography.com/performer/alvin-ailey#comments.

Brockington, Derek and Alexandra Hutchinson. “Dancing Through Harlem.” Dance Theatre of Harlem. August 14, 2020. YouTube video, 5:53. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1Ybm6ToJBI&t=15s.

Charleston Gaillard Center. “Dance Theatre of Harlem Sizzle Reel.” May 6, 2022. YouTube video, 0:51. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xmGOEvfEEw.

Dance Theatre of Harlem. “A Place for All of Us.” November 1, 2022. YouTube video, 1:43. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5siU5X1_dY.

The Kennedy Center. “Revelations - Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.” January 22, 2018. YouTube video, 2:48. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG1lg9GV9WY.

Philadelphia Dance Company. “Our History.” Accessed June 2, 2022. https://philadanco.org/history/.

Philadanco. “Latched.” Tedx Talks. July 18, 2017. YouTube video, 8:48. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCpjPWWQB3s.

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

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

Charleston Gaillard Center Partners

Institutional Support

Corporate Supporters

Small Business Members

Community Partners

Annex Dance Company
Anson Street African Burial Ground Project
Anson Street African Burial Memorial
Blue Bicycle Books
Buxton Books
Charleston County Public Library
Charleston Jazz
Charleston Symphony
College of Charleston
Cuisine Rescue
Dance Conservatory of Charleston
Engaging Creative Minds
Free Verse Festival
HEART
International African American Museum
KultureCity
Lowcountry Jazz Festival/Closing the Gap in Health Care
MOJA Arts Festival
Southeastern Wildlife Exposition
Spoleto Festival USA
We Are Family