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**NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY-AKRON RELEASES
FIFTH SEASON OF *INSIDE THE DANCER'S STUDIO* PODCAST**

– Features Interviews with Choreographers from Across the U.S. –



Left to right, top to bottom: Ruby Morales (Shaunté Glover), Brandon “Chief Manny” Calhoun and Sterling “Steelo” Lofton (Wills Glasspiegel), Angelina Ramirez (Steven Meckler Photography), Christopher Núñez (Walter Wlodarczyk), Héléne Simoneau (Whitney Browne), Jie-Hung Connie Shiao (Christopher Jones), John Heginbotham (Bud Lammers), J'Sun Howard (William Frederking), Takahiro Yamamoto (DJ Schaller), Pioneer Winter (Mitchell Zachs), Mary Verdi-Fletcher (Portraits with Pride), Alexis Diggs (courtesy of the artist), Tiffany Mills (Julie Lemberger), and Mark Tomasic (Micah Dahlberg).

AKRON, Ohio (May 9, 2024)—**The National Center for Choreography-Akron (NCCAkron)** has launched the fifth season of [*Inside the Dancer's Studio*](#), a podcast that brings listeners into the process of creating dance. Through interviews with choreographers from across the United States, *Inside the Dancer's Studio* breaks down the mystique of dance-making into engaging, fun, and deeply human conversation about what moves artists to express their truths through creation and performance.

Artists featured in Season 5 include **Ruby Morales** (Phoenix, AZ), **Brandon “Chief Manny” Calhoun** and **Sterling “Steelo” Lofton** of **The Era Footwork Crew** (Chicago, IL), **Angelina Ramirez** (Tucson, AZ), **Christopher “Unpezverde” Núñez** (New York, NY), **Héléne Simoneau** (Montreal, Québec / New York, NY) with **Jie-Hung Connie Shiao** (New York, NY), **John**

Heginbotham (Brooklyn, NY), **J'Sun Howard** (Chicago, IL), **Takahiro Yamamoto** (Portland, OR / Boston, MA), and **Pioneer Winter** (Miami, FL).

The podcast's host, NCCAkron Executive/Artistic Director **Christy Bolingbroke** (Akron, OH), poses a series of questions about craft, process, and perseverance to each interviewee, including: how do they name a piece? What do they look for in collaborators? What do they do if they find themselves stuck, creatively?

Each episode was recorded as part of a conversation series presented by NCCAkron, with support from The University of Akron. These short talks are perfect for budding dancers, dancemakers, creatives, or anyone who has ever built something from scratch.

This new season will also feature a bonus episode from the upcoming *Dancing Conversation: Allies in Action!*, a panel discussion on queerness and disability in choreography for Cleveland-based **Dancing Wheels Company's** 43rd anniversary performance in June 2024. Hear from **President/Founding Artistic Director Mary Verdi-Fletcher** (Sagamore Hills, OH) and the three guest choreographers invited to make new works for the event, **Alexis Diggs** (Dayton, OH), **Tiffany Mills** (Brooklyn, NY), and **Mark Tomasic** (Los Angeles, CA).

"I'm thrilled to share these new episodes," says Bolingbroke. "The series represents the broad expanse and possibilities of dance making. We are so pleased to share these perspectives more broadly through NCCAkron publishing platforms to highlight the artistic stories and voices of today."

Jennifer Edwards produces the podcast with editing by James Sleeman, theme music by Floco Torres, cover art by Micah Kraus, and transcription by Arushi Singh.

Inside the Dancer's Studio is supported by NCCAkron, The University of Akron, The University of Akron Foundation, the Mary Schiller Myers Lecture Series in the Arts, the GAR Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, the Akron Community Foundation, and Peg's Foundation.

New episodes are released each Friday beginning May 3, 2024, on most streaming platforms, including Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

For more information and to listen to episodes, visit nccakron.org/insidethedancersstudio.

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About NCCAkron

The National Center for Choreography-Akron supports the research and development of new work in dance by exploring the full potential of the creative process. In addition to offering studio and technical residencies to make new work, activities focus on catalyzing dialogue and experimentation; creating proximity among artists and dance thinkers; and aggregating resources around dance making. For more information, visit nccakron.org.

A discrete organization of its own, separate from the University, the establishment and general operation of NCCAkron are made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

About the Host

As the Founding Executive/Artistic Director for NCCAkron, **Christy Bolingbroke** is responsible for setting the business model and curatorial vision for all programs. She works closely with every artist to support their artistic/administrative growth and to develop engagement opportunities for the local community to interact with the visiting artists. Previously, Christy served as Deputy Director for Advancement at ODC in San Francisco, overseeing curation and performance programming as well as marketing and development organization-wide.

Prior to ODC, she was Director of Marketing at the Mark Morris Dance Group. She is currently a member of the Akron Civic Commons core team and a mentor in the South Arts MOMENTUM initiative. In the past, she has also served as a consulting advisor for the Bloomberg Philanthropies Arts Innovation Management initiative and on the New England Foundation for the Arts National Dance Project Advisory Panel. In 2017, *Dance Magazine* named Bolingbroke among the national list of most influential people in dance today.

About the Guests

Episode 1 – Ruby Morales (Phoenix, AZ)

Ruby Morales is committed to equity, facilitating life-affirming spaces, and cultivating community relationships rooted in reciprocity, trust, and love through her artmaking. She's a dance activist investigating culturally informed teaching methods, circular leadership models, and her relationship with movement as a bgirl and Mexican-style cumbia. After receiving a BFA from Arizona State University, she began touring with CONTRA-TIEMPO Activist Dance Theater and Tucson, AZ-based choreographer Yvonne Montoya. She recently toured with internationally renowned creative Liz Lerman, performing *Wicked Bodies*. In partnership with the city of Tempe (AZ), she also toured her own evening-length show, *Breaking Pachanga*. She's CONTRA-TIEMPO's Resource Director and co-founder of The Pachanga Collective. In recognition of her leadership, Ruby is the inaugural recipient of The Association of Performing Arts Professionals Spark for Change award and the 2023 Performing Artist Mayor's Arts award (AZ). She continues to learn and lead as a previous B.A.C. Fellowship Mentor, a 2021 National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC) Advocacy Leadership Fellow, a 2021 Intercultural Leadership Institute Fellow, a 2023 NALAC Leadership Institute Fellow, and a 2023 Critical Response Process Certification Program participant. Ruby has been awarded a Research and Development and Professional Development Grant from the AZ Commission on the Arts, The Artist Forward Fund from Artlink, a Phoenix Project Support Grant and Stabilization Grant, and others. rubymorales.com

Episode 2 – Brandon “Chief Manny” Calhoun and Sterling “Steelo” Lofton (Chicago, IL)

Brandon K. Calhoun, aka “Chief Manny” (director, writer, editor, animator), is a Chicago footwork dancer, dance educator, and filmmaker. As a filmmaker, Brandon's direction and hand-drawn animations accentuate footwork's rhythms and phrases, revealing dance as a visual language.

His animations drive the recent projection, Footnotes, a video made for large-scale display on the facade of the Merchandise Mart (the Mart) in Chicago. As a dance filmmaker, Brandon has produced and edited dozens of short videos for Chicago Dancemakers Forum, beginning in 2017. His dance films and videos have been screened at the Chicago Cultural Center, University of Chicago, Theaster Gates's Stony Island Arts Bank, and other respected venues. A cultural organizer and multidisciplinary artist, Brandon also performs poetry and footwork in an award-winning new multimedia footwork performance by The Era, In the Wurkz, touring to Wesleyan University in Connecticut and the Walker Art Center Minneapolis in 2021. theerafootworkcrew.com

Sterling "Steelo" Lofton is among the world's top footwork dancers. In 2014, Steelo co-founded The Era Footwork Crew and began to tour internationally. He has danced at festivals such as Pitchfork and Lollapalooza. Steelo was recognized as a choreographer of the year (New City Magazine) and cultural organizer of the year (FADER Magazine) alongside The Era. Steelo is focused on the fashion side of dancing, helping to design merchandise and visual art to represent footwork and The Era. He created "Footwork Saves Lives," a campaign to help bring awareness to footwork as a positive outlet for youth in Chicago. theerafootworkcrew.com

Episode 3 – Angelina Ramirez (Tucson, AZ)

Angelina Ramirez is a flamenco movement artist and teaching artist. Ramirez's artistic work explores what it means to be a queer, latinx flamenca, practicing in a traditional Roma/gitano form of dance. As a teaching artist, she is interested in the intersections of arts and healing, focusing on work with elders of all abilities and integrated flamenco for neurodivergent participants. Ramirez is a 2022 Dance/USA Artist Fellow and a 2017 National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures fellow. In 2021, Ramirez received the Master-Apprentice Artist Award through the Southwest Folklife Alliance for her dedication to flamenco arts. In 2018, she received the Arizona Commission on the Arts' Artist Research and Development Grant to support the development of her evening-length work /SER/. Ramirez is an original member of Yjastros, the American Flamenco Repertory Company, and has toured with world-renowned, New York-based company Noche Flamenca. Along with teaching and performing, Ramirez produces events and festivals throughout Arizona. arflamenco.com

Episode 4 – Christopher "Unpezverde" Núñez (New York, NY)

Christopher "Unpezverde" Núñez is a Visually Impaired choreographer based in NYC. Núñez is a Princeton University Arts Fellow 22', a Jerome Hill Fellow 22', a Dance/USA Fellow 22', and a Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art Fellow 18'. His performances have been presented by The Joyce Theater, The Brooklyn Museum, The Kitchen, Danspace Project, Movement Research at The Judson Church, and the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, among others. His work has been featured in The New York Times, Art In America, The Brooklyn Rail, and The Dance Enthusiast. He's been an Artist In Residence at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), The Kitchen, Danspace Project, Abrons Arts Center, Movement Research, and Center for Performance Research. In 2023, Unpezverde was selected by the magazine Art In America as one of the New Talent artists and was nominated for a Bessie, The New York Dance and Performance Awards. In 2020, Núñez was invited by the NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to share his story as disabled and formally undocumented during Immigrant Heritage Week. He received his

American Citizenship in 2023 but continues to be an advocate for the rights of undocumented disabled immigrants. unpezverde.com

Episode 5 – Hélène Simoneau (Montreal, Québec / New York, NY) and **Jie-Hung Connie Shiau** (New York, NY)

Hélène Simoneau is a French-Canadian choreographer exploring themes of intimacy, agency, identity, sexuality, and power. Her choreography has been commissioned by Oregon Ballet Theatre, The Juilliard School, Charlotte Ballet, PARA.MAR Dance Theatre, Vitacca Ballet, Amy Seiwert's Imagery, BalletX, the Ailey School, Dimensions Dance Theatre, and the American Dance Festival. She was recently a Choreography Fellow at New York City Center and received a 2021 Guggenheim Fellowship. She has also been a resident artist at Baryshnikov Arts Center, NYU/Tisch, NCCAkrón, and a fellow of The NYU Center for Ballet and the Arts, Ailey's New Directions Choreography Lab, the Bogliasco Foundation, and the Swiss International Coaching Project for Choreographers (SiWiC) in Zurich. Simoneau was awarded first place for Choreography at the 13th Internationales Solo-Tanz-Theater Festival in Stuttgart, Germany, for her solo "the gentleness was in her hands." hsdanse.org

Jie-Hung Connie Shiau was born in Gainesville, Florida, and raised in Tainan, Taiwan. Graduated from The High School Division For Dance of Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), and the Dance Conservatory of SUNY Purchase College. Shiau is a dancer, choreographer, and educator. Shiau has worked as a collaborator with an array of companies, including Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, AIM by Kyle Abraham, Gallim Dance, Helen Simoneau Danse, MeenMoves, Adam Barruch/Anatomiae Occultii, and Kevin Wynn Works. She has performed works by Crystal Pite, Ohad Naharin, Lou Conte, Kyle Abraham, Brian Brooks, Peter Chu, Robyn Mineko Williams, Alejandro Cerrudo, Helen Simoneau, Sameena Mitta, Rena Butler, Alice Klock, Hanna Kiel, Osnel Delgado, Adam Barruch, and Kevin Wynn. Shiau is currently freelancing in New York City and is an Artistic Associate with Gibney Company. jiehungconnieshiau.com

Episode 6 – John Heginbotham (Brooklyn, NY)

Originally from Anchorage, Alaska, John Heginbotham graduated from The Juilliard School in 1993, and was a member of Mark Morris Dance Group (1998-2012). In 2011, he founded Dance Heginbotham, a New York-based contemporary dance company that has toured nationally and internationally. John received a 2018 Guggenheim Fellowship and the 2014 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award. Other awards and fellowships include Research Fellow at the National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron-NCCAkrón (2018-2020), 2017/18 New York City Center Choreography Fellowship, 2016 Fellow at NYU's Center for Ballet and the Arts, and Jerome Robbins Foundation New Essential Works (NEW) Fellowship (2010, 2012). Sought after as a freelance choreographer, John's independent projects include the Tony Award and Olivier Award-winning revival of Oklahoma!, directed by Daniel Fish (Bard Summerscape, 2015; St. Ann's Warehouse, 2018; Broadway, 2019; National Tour, 2021/22; Young Vic London, 2022, West End 2023); "Meet The Family", Season 3, Episode 1 of Umbrella Academy on Netflix; RACECAR for The Washington Ballet (2019); and John Adams' Girls of the Golden West, directed by Peter Sellars (San Francisco Opera, 2017; Dutch National Opera, 2019). John is the Director of the Dartmouth Dance Ensemble, and is a founding teacher of Dance for PD®, an

ongoing collaboration between the Mark Morris Dance Group and the Brooklyn Parkinson Group. danceheginbotham.org

Episode 7 – J'Sun Howard (Chicago, IL)

J'Sun Howard is a Chicago-based dancemaker and the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the National Endowment for the Arts, National Performance Network Creation Fund and Development Fund Awards, a 3Arts Award, and the inaugural City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events' Esteemed Artist Award. Additionally, he is recognized as an Asian Cultural Council Fellow. His works have been showcased at prominent venues such as Links Hall, Ruth Page Center for the Arts, Steppenwolf Theater Company, Defibrillator Performance Gallery, Patrick's Cabaret (Minneapolis, MN), Candy Box Festival (Minneapolis, MN), Danspace Project (NYC), Center for Performance Research (NYC), Detroit Dance City Festival (Detroit, MI), New Dance Festival (Daejeon, South Korea), where he won Best Dance Choreographer, and the World Dance Alliance's International Young Choreographers' Project (Kaohsiung, Taiwan). He has received commissions from Northwestern University, Columbia College Chicago, World Dance Alliance, and The Art Institute of Chicago. He holds an MFA in Dance and a graduate certificate in World Performance Studies from the University of Michigan.

Episode 8 – Takahiro Yamamoto (Portland, OR / Boston, MA)

Takahiro Yamamoto is a multidisciplinary artist and choreographer. His current conceptual investigations revolve around the phenomenological effects of time, the embodied approach to the presence of nothingness, and the social/emotional implications of visibility. He has received support from New England Foundation for the Arts, Bogliasco Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, MacDowell, NCCAkron, National Performance Network, Japan Foundation, Regional Arts & Culture Council, Africa Contemporary Arts Consortium, and others. His performance and visual art works have been presented at Portland Art Museum, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Diverseworks, Contemporary Arts Center Cincinnati, The Henry Art Gallery, and GoDown Arts Centre Nairobi, among other venues. Yamamoto holds an MFA in Visual Studies from Pacific Northwest College of Art. He is part of the Portland-based support group Physical Education with Allie Hankins, keyon gaskin, and Lu Yim. Yamamoto is currently a visiting professor at Studio for Interrelated Media department at Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston, MA. takahiroyamamoto.com

Episode 9 – Pioneer Winter (Miami, FL)

Pioneer Winter is a Miami-based choreographer and dancer, recognized in Dance Magazine's 2019 "25 to Watch". He directs Pioneer Winter Collective, a contemporary dance and physical theater company of allied bodies, who democratize performance in public spaces, museums/galleries, stage, and film. Pioneer develops his work through local engagement practices, like Werqshop for emerging LGBT+ artists, intergenerational labs and social activities with Lambda Living, a service program for LGBT elders, and weekly workshops at Lotus House, a women's shelter that includes youth. Winter has curated and directed ScreenDance Miami Festival since 2016, presented first by Tigertail Productions and now by Miami Light Project; his own films screen internationally. He holds an MPH Public Health and Epidemiology from Florida International University and MFA Choreography from Jacksonville University/White Oak, as the first artist recipient of the Dennis R. Washington Achievement Scholarship. Outside of his

company, Pioneer teaches in areas of social justice and art, epistemology, and dance at FIU, where he has been a faculty fellow in the Honors College since 2014, dance minor coordinator, and adjunct faculty in the Theatre Department since 2018. pioneerwinter.com

Episode 10 – Dancing Conversation: Allies in Action!

Mary Verdi-Fletcher (Sagamore Hills, OH) is the President/Founding Artistic Director of Dancing Wheels Company & School. Ms. Verdi-Fletcher has been the world's first and foremost professional wheelchair dancers, she has worked and studied with such esteemed artists a pioneering force in the development and success of physically integrated dance for nearly 4 decades. She has performed for audiences of more than 5 million since the inception of the Company and is responsible for the commission of over 65 works in the Company's current repertory. Ms. Verdi-Fletcher created the multi-arts Dancing Wheels School in 1990. Attracting students from around the globe, the school is considered the worldwide center for physically integrated dance & arts access. As an educator, Mary has conducted master classes and lectures and has consulted with notable arts institutions across several continents. Also a tireless arts administrator and advocate, Mary has helped develop state and national programs for arts and disability service organizations and has worked to help to pass significant pieces of legislation. Her efforts have paved the way for others in their quest for full and equal access. Mary is a recipient of the Cleveland Arts Prize, OhioDance Award for contribution to dance in Ohio, Governor's Award for Arts Education in Ohio and the Trustee Award for contributions to dance from DanceUSA. She has served on the Executive Board of Directors of DanceUSA for 6 years and is a member of the ADA Cleveland committee. dancingwheels.org

Alexis Diggs (Dayton, OH) is a 24-year-old independent artist from Dayton, Ohio. She is a 2023 Black Midwest Initiative fellow, a Culture Works Artist Opportunity Grantee, and an Allegro Grant recipient. A former Doug Varone Devices choreographer and Sarasota Contemporary Dance Company Rising Choreographer, Lex has created and presented works in Cleveland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York City, Florida, and the greater Dayton area. She is a part of the Jacob's Pillow 2023-2024 Curriculum In Motion Institute Cohort. She has been on the teaching faculty for Ohio University Summer Dance, Ohio Dance Festival, Miami Valley Ballet Theater, and Jeraldyn's School of Dance, as well as a classroom instructor for Dayton Contemporary Dance Company's Education Outreach program. Her central artistic mission is to create and be a part of work that provokes thought, feeds the soul, and ignites a desire to learn, love, and share with the collective.

Tiffany Mills (Brooklyn, NY) is the artistic director, choreographer, and founder of the NYC-based Tiffany Mills Company (2000-present). Joining Lewis & Clark College as the Director of Dance in 2024, Mills returns to her Oregon roots and embraces a bi-costal presence. As a creator of dance-theater, Mills' work centers on human relationships, is grounded in partnering/improvisation, and is fueled by collaboration across mediums. She collaborates with artists from various disciplines and backgrounds to viscerally, aesthetically, and intellectually stimulate a wide-ranging audience. Her company's recent works have been presented at: National Sawdust, LaMaMa, The Flea, and BAM Fisher. National highlights: PICA's TBA Festival (OR), Wexner Center (OH), ENT Center (CO), Contemporary Dance Theater/NPN

(OH), Jacob's Pillow (MA), Dance Place (DC), and Austin Dance Festival (TX). NYC highlights: Guggenheim Museum/Works & Process, Duke on 42 Street, Symphony Space, Lincoln Center/Out-of-Doors, Dancing in the Streets, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Danspace Project City/Dans, Dance Theater Workshop, PS 122, Joyce SoHo, and Movement Research. International highlights: Russia, Italy, Mexico and Canada. Select residencies: Artpark (NY), NYU's Tisch Summer Dance Festival (NY), National Center for Choreography (OH), CUNY Dance Initiative (NY), BAM/PDP, Baryshnikov Arts Center (NY), Jacob's Pillow (MA), Joyce (NY), LMCC Swing Space (NY), Bogliasco/Jerome Robbins Foundation (Italy). Funding highlights: Harkness Foundation, NYC DCA, NYSCA, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, NET/TEN, O'Donnell Green Foundation, Doris Duke Foundation, Dance/NYC Coronavirus Dance Relief Fund, New Music USA, Mertz Gilmore Foundation. Commissioning highlights: Artpark (NY), Dancing Wheels (OH), Ormao Dance Company (CO), and 10 Hairy Legs (NJ). Mills has taught extensively at universities and festivals nationally and internationally. Her company also conducts summer partnering and improvisation intensive and pop-up workshops. Mills recent endeavor is filmmaking. Her first dance film was selected for screenings in the USA, Turkey, India, Italy, and France. Mills received her MFA in Dance (Choreography) at Ohio State University and her BA in Dance at the University of Oregon Honors College.
tiffanymillscompany.org

Mark Tomasic (Los Angeles, CA) has danced principal and featured roles in the masterworks of such notable choreographers as Martha Graham, Donald McKayle, Paul Taylor, David Parsons, Sean Curran, May O'Donnell, George Balanchine, Antony Tudor, Mauricio Wainrot, Flemming Flindt, Talley Beatty, and Agnes de Mille throughout his performing career of over 20 years. As a choreographer, Mark has created works for numerous dance companies, colleges, and universities. Mark has worked extensively in the field of physically integrated dance with the Dancing Wheels Company & School, one of the premier arts and disability organizations in the United States. Serving as Artistic Advisor to the Company, Mark travels nationally and internationally to teach physically integrated dance to students and professionals alike and is the author of the inclusive dance training manual, "Physically Integrated Dance: The Dancing Wheels Comprehensive Guide for Teachers, Choreographers, and Students of Mixed Abilities." Mark's choreographic work for Dancing Wheels has been presented across the United States and internationally. Mark is currently Chair of the Dance Department of Santa Monica College. At SMC, he has been awarded recognition as "Equity Champion" and "Outstanding Faculty Member of the Year" (2018-19). Mark holds an MFA in Dance from the University of California, Irvine. marktomatic.com