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NCCAkron Hosts Dancing Conversation on June 17 to Culminate Year-Long, Virtual Residency of Black Male Dancemakers



Residency Artists (L to R): Charles O. Anderson; Jean Appolon; Kevin Lee-Y Green; Dominic Moore-Dunson

AKRON, Ohio - On Thursday, June 17, the artists of **The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron (NCCAkron)**'s Dancing Lab: BLKmenMoves, along with Satellite Residency artist **Iquail Shaheed** (Philadelphia, PA), will discuss their experiences working as Black male-identified choreographers in relatively isolated creative communities during a Dancing Conversation, presented for free on YouTube. Their conversation will address the plurality of Black, male identities; decolonized metrics of success; and embodied resistance to monolithic ideas of 'Black Dance.'

To RSVP, visit this link:

<https://www.nccakron.org/event-details/dancing-conversation-black-male-choreographers>

NCCAkron launched **Dancing Lab: BLKmenMOVES** as a residency program to center the creative development of and networking among Black-identified, male choreographers. Over the course of a year, a cohort from across the country regularly convened virtually to establish a network of collegial support and critical feedback on each other's choreographic work. Residency participants included dancemakers **Jean Appolon** (Boston, MA); **Kevin Lee-Y Green** (Wilmington, NC); and **Dominic Moore-Dunson** (Akron, OH). **Charles O. Anderson** (Austin, TX), Founder/Artistic Director of the Afro-Contemporary company, Dance Theatre X, served as the program's facilitator and artist mentor.



NCCAkron's Dancing Labs are process-oriented laboratory environments where dance artists come together to collaboratively explore shared concepts and questions. Participating artists are encouraged to use their time together to experiment with ideas and movement without a final product in mind. Dancing Labs are often described as a half-step towards whatever is next with much needed resources like time, space, and financial support to further each person's individual creative growth.

The initial idea for Dancing Lab: BLKmenMOVES emerged in 2019 through a series of conversations between NCCAkron **Executive/Artistic Director Christy Bolingbroke** and the late choreographer, director, and professor **Marcus White**. The two met while serving as panel advisors for New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project: one of the nation's largest grantmaking initiatives for dancemakers. During the panel review process, the two recognized a growing need for choreographers of color, particularly Black men.

Bolingbroke recalled, "In viewing work and submissions by artists like Jean [Appolon] and Kevin [Green], they each articulated what it is like to operate outside of densely populated dance communities like New York City or San Francisco, *and* what it is to be one of few or sometimes the only Black choreographers in their immediate community. Through NCCAkron's work with the Knight Foundation and other Knight Resident City artists (of which White called Detroit one of his homes), Marcus [White] and I were also reminded of Dominic [Moore-Dunson] in Akron and began to envision how such a cohort might connect with each other."

The original plan had been for the cohort to visit each artist's community for a couple days every couple of months over the course of a year. COVID obviously limited such travel, but the conversations and meet-ups have continued virtually. Tragically, Marcus White passed away suddenly in May 2020, just one week after first meeting with all three artists. Anderson, a friend and colleague of Mr. White, graciously stepped in to facilitate the cohort in his honor and offered these thoughts moving the initiative forward: "While there is no way to fill the shoes of Marcus, I am deeply honored and inspired to be a part of this program. One of the ways he and I deeply connected was around the commitment to create and hold space for diverse Black male voices in contemporary performance. We have the opportunity to support one another in our respective work and to collectively strategize upon ways to continue to build upon an often underserved and under-recognized legacy in concert dance."

Continuing the support for these choreographers even more urgently as the racial justice movement advances as well as in White's honor, Bolingbroke shares these questions from Marcus White in their final correspondence:



Does all of “the work” - the research, the dance, the writing, the conversations around it - always have to be bound by race? And on the flipside, how can we make something not bound by race?

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About NCCAkrON

The National Center for Choreography at The University of 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.

The establishment of NCCAkrON is made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Artist Biographies

Charles O. Anderson (Austin, TX)

Charles O. Anderson is artistic director of Charles O. Anderson/dance theatre X, an afro-contemporary dance theatre company, which he founded in Philadelphia in 2003. Born and raised in Richmond, VA, Charles earned his BA in Choreography and Performance from Cornell University and his MFA in Dance from Temple University. He has performed in the companies of Ronald K. Brown, Sean Curran, Mark Dendy and Miguel Gutierrez among others. His work has been presented nationally and internationally and has earned recognition by numerous grants and organizations such as the Pew Fellowship in the Arts, one of “25 to Watch” by Dance Magazine, and one of ‘12 Rising Stars in the Academy” by Diverse: Issues In Higher Education Magazine. Anderson is currently based in Austin, Texas where he is Head of the Dance Program and an associate professor of African Diaspora Dance Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. Anderson also serves on faculty of the American Dance Festival six week school in Durham, NC. <http://www.charlesoanderson.me/>

Jean Appolon (Boston, MA)

In addition to being the Co-founder and Artistic Director of Jean Appolon Expressions (JAE), Jean Appolon is a successful choreographer and master teacher based in Boston and Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Appolon received his earliest training and performance opportunities in Port-au-Prince with the Viviane Gauthier Dance Company and the Folkloric Ballet of Haiti.



Appolon continued his dance education in the U.S. at the Harvard and Radcliffe Dance Program (1995-1996, Boston, MA), Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (1996-1998, New York, NY) and the Joffrey American Ballet School (1998-2003, New York, NY), where he graduated with a B.A. from a joint degree program offered by The New School. <https://jeanappolonexpressions.org/>

Kevin Lee-Y Green (Wilmington, NC)

Kevin Lee-Y Green is a native of Bolivia, North Carolina (population 143) and a graduate of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts where he studied contemporary dance and ballet. Over a 15-year career, he has worked with acclaimed dance artists including: Rosie Herrera, Sidra Bell, Camille A. Brown, David Parsons, Clay Taliafero, Sean Sullivan (Limon), Dianne Markham (Louis & Nikolai), and Brenda Daniels (Cunningham). He is the founder of Techmoja Dance and Theater Company—an inclusive and diverse dance company created in partnership with his mother, community leader, and culture bearer Donna Joyner Green. <https://www.kevinleeygreen.com/>

Dominic Moore-Dunson (Akron, OH)

A 2019 Cleveland Arts Prize Recipient, choreographer Dominic Moore-Dunson has been recognized as an emerging artist and arts leader. His recognitions and fellowships include MOCA Cleveland's "New Agent" award, Jacob's Pillow Ann & Weston Hicks Choreography Fellowship, the Devil Strip Magazine's 2018 Breakout Artist, National Arts Strategies (NAS) Creative Community Fellowship, and others. Dominic is an inaugural member of Leadership Akron's Diversity on Board Program and recently completed the National Arts Strategies Executive Program in Arts & Culture Strategies's certificate program. His large-scale community-based dance theatre project called The 'Black Card' Project premiered in September 2018 and is currently in its second iteration. Moore-Dunson currently serves on the board of ArtsNow and the Akron Cultural Plan Steering Committee. <https://www.instagram.com/dmooredun/>

Iquail Shaheed (Philadelphia, PA)

Iquail Shaheed is the founder and executive artistic director of DANCE IQUAIL!. As a native of Philadelphia, Shaheed trained at Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts and PHILADANCO before becoming a senior member of Danco II under Donald T. Lunsford II. Shaheed received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Ballet Performance from the University of the Arts, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Purchase College – SUNY. As a professional dancer, Shaheed has worked with companies such as Compagnie Thor (Brussels), The Sean Curran Company, Ronald K Brown/ Evidence, and The Fred Benjamin Dance Company and has appeared in various Broadway productions. He is on faculty at The Ailey School, Steps on Broadway, and Harlem School for the Arts. Shaheed has received Lower Manhattan Cultural



Council grant awards, The Caroline H. Newhouse Award, The Suzanne and Larry Engman Award, The Philadelphia Dance Award (Rocky), The Marion D. Cuyjet Award, NAACP ACT-SO National Silver Medal, and The Promising Artist Award. <http://danceiquail.org>