

Duke Dance Program presents

November Dances

Fall Dance Concert (free and open to the public)
Reynolds Industries Theatre, Bryan Center

November 21-22, 2025 | 7:30pm



**DUKE
DANCE**

DUKE UNIVERSITY
DANCE PROGRAM

photographer: Alec Himwich

Program

Rapture

Choreographed by Iyun Ashani Harrison

Music: Arvo Pärt

Dancers: Emerson Eickholt, Emily Fong, Søren Gillette, Ben Griffin, Shelly Han, Emily Powell, Maya Srinivasan, Rachel Tang, Olly Yang, and Grace Zheng.

Rapture is a contemporary ballet set to Arvo Pärt's *Fratres*. Abstract, yet emotionally stirring, the work channels the score's intensity into dynamic and passionate choreography. A cast of stunning classicists dance with precision and vitality, showcasing their artistry in a meditation on beauty, transcendence, and the power of sound and movement.

What Remains, What Rises

Choreographed by Asili Johnson

Music: Drive by SZA and Masterpiece (Mona Lisa) by Jazmine Sullivan

Dancers: Erin Peters, Chanell Mangum, and Bianca Waters

This work traces the collective journey of healing through loss, vulnerability, and renewal. Following a group of kindred spirits as they rediscover both themselves and one another, the piece explores how love, connection, and understanding can persist even amid uncertainty. Through a blend of contemporary modern, hip-hop, and traditional West African dance forms, the dancers play inside the spaces where tension is held in their bodies—transforming strain into movement, resistance into release. Each gesture becomes an act of letting go, rising, and becoming whole again.

Let's Remember to Breathe

Choreographed by Kristin Taylor Duncan

Music: Gentle Heroics by Trevor Kowalski; Antonio Vivaldi - Concerto #4 in F minor, Op. 8, III. Allegro. (The Seasons: Winter). Odyssey Orchestra, Eric Johnson, conductor. Michelle Ross, violin soloist; Czar Donic by Kebnekaise

Acknowledgement, Music Advisor: Poah West Portillo

Dancers: Ella Cariello, Helen Pertsemidis, Olivia Rock

Let's Remember to Breathe is a work inspired by the reality of forgetting to pace yourself in the hectic and rush of life.

watch party

Choreographed by Chania Wilson in collaboration with Nine Movement Collective

Music: 15 Step by Radiohead, Solitude by Billie Holiday

Dancers: Danielle Anthony-Daye, Asha Chinflou, Andrea Dula, Joyce Gaffney, Becca Gargiulo, Jess Holloway, Stazia Ritch

watch party is a dance about perception and being perceived; the spectacle of looking and the quiet labor of being seen. The work unravels how identity shifts under observation, exploring the blurred line between performance and authenticity. The choreography examines collective and individual acts of witnessing, asking what it means to participate in the gaze: to watch, to be watched, and to resist.

Intermission

When Women Drum, the Ground Remembers

Choreographed by Ava LaVonne Vinesett

Musicians: Beverly Botsford, Richard J. Vinesett, Wesley L. Williams, Khalid

Abdul N'Faly Saleem

Musical arrangement: Ava LaVonne Vinesett and Richard J. Vinesett

Dancers: Helena Freire Haddad, Bonita Joyce, Tria Smothers, Destiny Touchine

Costumes: Aya Donna and Ava LaVonne Vinesett

When women drum, the ground remembers—
fire and skin,
heartbeat and echo.

They lift rhythm like water,
and the earth rains her answer.

Hands become thunder,
feet become root.

Memory is older than the drum.
Memory is older than the silence.

When women drum, the ground remembers.

Dreams in the Iron House

Choreographed by Jingqiu Guan

Music: Original composition by Karam Salem; Valtari by Sigur Rós

Video: Jingqiu Guan

Costumes: Jingqiu Guan

Dancers: Arely Sun and Xinyi Zhang

In 1922, Chinese revolutionary writer Lu Xun imagined an indestructible iron house without windows, where people slept soundly, unaware of their impending destruction. He asked, “If you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?” His friend replied, “But if a few awake, you can’t say there is no hope of destroying the iron house.” Inspired by Lu Xun’s writing, this dance confronts the same social and moral dilemma in our contemporary moment. It asks: How do we discern between the fantastical dreams that lull us into complacency and the conscious dreaming that moves us toward liberation? How might our collective dreaming become a form of resistance?

The Illusion of Lightness

Choreographed by Tristian Griffin

Music: Never Created, Never Destroyed by Jlin; Open by cktrl

Dancers: Alicia Ogliari, Alinia Besteman, Linzi Huang, and Alexa Lattanze

Clouds drift as if spun from air, delicate and free, yet they carry the weight of countless drops. In the same way, a dancer's body seems to float, light as breath, while muscles burn and labor beneath the surface. This dance uncovers that paradox — the hidden weight that makes grace possible.

Woven Between Worlds

Choreographer: Johanna Kepler

Music: Cool by Flamenco Guitar Café, Que No Salga La Luna by Rosalia and Them by Nils Frahm

Dancers: Jessica Harris, Ashley Greeno, Grace Lincroft, Cindy Lao, Emily Caras, Karla Espejo Rodarte

This work explores identity as a living, shifting tapestry. It unfolds in three sections, weaving together solos, duets, and ensemble moments that reflect on how our personal and collective histories intersect, diverge, and transform. Through embodied storytelling the dancers investigate belonging, resilience, and the unseen threads that connect us across time and experience. The piece invites audiences to witness identity as fluid and evolving, shaped by heritage, community, and lived experience.

Biographies

Danielle Anthony is a native of Dallas, TX. She received her BS in Biology with a double minor in Criminology and Forensic Science from Meredith College. She has been dancing for 23 years, having trained in styles such as hip hop, jazz, contemporary, and ballet. She started dancing at Amanda's Express Dance Company and then went to Grand Prairie Fine Arts Academy for high school. In college, she was part of the Meredith Dance Theater Company and the hip-hop group known as the Meredith College Dance Crew.

Alina Besteman was born in Grand Rapids, MI, where she began her training with the Grand Rapids Ballet. After moving to Miami, she continued her studies with Miami City Ballet, New World School of the Arts, and Miami Youth Ballet. She has performed works by George Balanchine and Robert Garland, and has also trained under choreographers Yusha Marie Sorzano, Yanis Pikieris, and Amy Hall Garner. Currently, a first-year undergraduate at Duke University, Alina continues to expand her artistry across ballet, contemporary, modern, and jazz while pursuing a degree in statistical science on a pre-medical track.

Beverly Botsford is a cross-cultural percussionist and educator deeply committed to building bridges with music, movement and word. Embracing drumming traditions of Africa, Cuba, Brazil and the USA, she celebrates more than four decades of professional experience. Grammy-nominated, she has toured and recorded with jazz vocalist Nnenna Freelon, performing in major venues around the world. As an educator, she has shared with more than 40,000 students in schools. Music for dance experience includes work with Chuck Davis and the African American Dance Ensemble (founding member), ADF, Duke Dance and projects with Donald McKayle, Ron Brown and Urban Bush Women.

Emily Caras is a dance artist from Hope Mills, NC. She earned her BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography from East Carolina University, where she trained and performed under choreographers and educators including Galina Panova, Jessica Teague, and John Dixon. She has also participated in training with the American Dance Festival, Henny Jurriens Studio, and Staib Dance's Italy program. She has performed with Emily Cargill & Dancers, with Black Box Dance Theatre's Extended Professional Company and has presented her professional works throughout the Southeast. She is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Physical Therapy at Duke University.

Ella Cariello is a senior studying Neuroscience with minors in Dance and Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Growing up in Yorktown Heights, NY, she trained in modern dance with Limón and Taylor and is delighted to return to the stage in a modern repertory for the first time since 2019. This past summer, Ella worked in Athens, Greece, with Professor Michael Klien's social choreography movement experiment Parliament hosted by DukeEngage. She is also a Jewish Learning Fellowship Intern at the Freeman Center for Jewish Life, a Media Chair for student group Duke Ishq, a Bollywood hip hop group, and a member of the Zucker Lab for Eating Disorders. Following graduation, Ella intends to pursue medical school and a career in pediatric neurosurgery.

Asha Chinflo is a dance artist and choreographer based in Durham, NC. Her training spans modern, jazz, ballet, hip-hop, and traditional West African dance, enriching her artistic versatility. She has performed works by Ronald K. Brown, Jordyn Santiago, Gerri Houlihan, Chris Yon and Taryn Griggs, Michelle N. Gibson, Kate Walker, Moncell E. Durden, KT Williams, Elijah Motley, and Momar Ndiaye. She has danced for SUAH African Dance Theater, The Magic of African Rhythm, Justice Theater Project, and Collage Dance Company. In 2024, Asha represented UNCG at the American College Dance Association. Her choreographic work premiered at the Mary Coleman Dance Theater; she co-choreographed and performed in Grammy-nominated artist Pierce Freelon's music video My Body. She is a three-time recipient of the Leadership Award from the American Dance Festival, the Virginia Moomaw Dance Scholarship and the David and May Roberts Scholarship.

Bianca Dimailig is a first-year Biomedical Engineering Master's student. She grew up in a suburb of Chicago and went to Northeastern University in Boston for her undergraduate studies. Bianca has been dancing since a very young age and continued throughout college. She loves choreographing and dancing in all styles, although jazz and contemporary are her favorites. Dance has always been a big part of her life and a creative balance to her academic work.

Andrea Dula is a native of Raleigh, NC and graduated from Meredith College with a major in Dance Education as well as a K-12 teaching licensure. She has danced for seventeen years and is trained in modern, ballet, contemporary, hip-hop, liturgical, and jazz. She served as a full company member of both the Meredith Dance Theater Company and the Meredith Jazz and Tap Company. She was also a member of the hip hop company called the Meredith College Dance Crew.

Emerson Eickholt is a sophomore majoring in English and Philosophy and minoring in Dance. She serves as Costume Director for student group Devils En Pointe and as Executive Chair for Duke University Union. She hails from Columbus, OH, and has trained in classical and contemporary dance at Columbus DanceArts Academy for most of her adolescence and feels fortunate to continue nurturing her utmost love of the arts on Duke's campus.

Karla Elizabeth Espejo Rodarte is an international artist born in Tijuana, Mexico. Her multidisciplinary preparation led her to the University of California, San Diego, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance. She is currently in her second year of pursuing a doctorate in Physical Therapy at Duke University and aims to educate, prevent, and treat injuries to promote longevity, strength, and well-being. She continues to find people to grow her spirit with and is grateful to dance in order to honor her ancestors and pave the way for her descendants.

Emily Fong is a senior majoring in Economics and Linguistics. She is a native of Chapel Hill, NC, interested in business strategy and all forms of communication. She has taken ballet classes through the Duke Dance Program every semester and is the President of Duke's student-run ballet group, Devils en Pointe. She trained in ballet pre-professionally throughout high school and is grateful for the opportunity to continue pursuing her passion for ballet at Duke.

Joyce Gaffney is a dancer, dance educator, and movement enthusiast based in Raleigh, NC. She earned a BS in Dance from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where she had the privilege to perform works with the guest choreographer's Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Dance Company as well as with university faculty. Joyce taught and worked as a freelance dance artist in Chicago, working with Ardent Dance company, Jin-Wen Yu, and Marlene Skog, before relocating to Raleigh.

Becca Gargiulo is a dance artist based in Durham, NC. In May 2022, she graduated with her BFA in Dance and Choreography from Virginia Commonwealth University and received her teaching certification for Scott Putman's Elemental Body Alignment System shortly thereafter. She works as the Marketing and Audience Services Associate at the American Dance Festival and performs regularly with Footnotes Tap Ensemble.

Soren Gillette is a sophomore studying Economics, Political Science, and Dance. Growing up in Portland, OR, Soren began his training at six at the Oregon Ballet Theater school before switching to The Portland Ballet, where he continued to hone his skills in ballet and modern dance before coming to Duke. Soren has been a guest artist in multiple ballets, including *La Bayadère*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, among others.

Ashley Greeno is a third-year undergraduate at Duke University, majoring in Neuroscience and Chemistry with a concentration in Pharmacology and a dance minor. Outside of the classroom, Ashley is a member of the student group Dancing Devils and CAPE, and works in the Duke Center for Eating Disorders Research Lab. Following graduation, Ashley plans to pursue an MD or MD/Ph.D in clinical neuroscience, seeking to utilize her dance training as a basis for understanding how mind-body interactions inform patient care.

Ben Griffin is a first-year student at Duke and grew up in New York City. Ben has trained and performed with the School of American Ballet, the New York City Ballet, Brooklyn Ballet, and Joffrey Ballet School. Ben has performed in a variety of roles and ballets, including The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, and Scènes de Ballet with the New York City Ballet. At Duke, Ben plans to study political science and continue pursuing his love of ballet.

Tristian Griffin is a native of Kansas City, MO. He earned his undergraduate degree in Ballet with a minor in English from Texas Christian University where his choreography was selected for the American College Dance Association's regional conference and advanced as a national semi-finalist. Griffin has performed with Garth Fagan Dance Company, Wylliams-Henry Contemporary Dance Company, the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, and Springboard Danse Montreal. In 2019, Griffin founded Tristian Griffin Dance Company (TGDC) which has performed in Kansas City, Lawrence, Newport, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Kalamazoo, and San Diego. The company has presented at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Charlotte Street Foundation, Kemper Contemporary Museum, Newport Dance Festival, and the International Dance Festival. As a choreographer, Griffin has been commissioned by over 15 professional companies, universities, art galleries, and pre-professional institutions. Recent commissions include works for Kennesaw State University, Newport Contemporary Ballet, Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University, Wylliams-Henry Contemporary Dance Company, Malashock Dance Company, and the University of Kansas. He has served as a visiting professor at the University of Kansas, as a guest teaching artist at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and as artist-in-residence at the Lawrence Arts Center (2019–2023). He is a recipient of the Ann & Weston Hicks Choreography Fellowship and currently pursuing the MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis degree at Duke University.

Jingqiu Guan is a choreographer, filmmaker, scholar, and dancer. She is an Assistant Professor of the Practice of Dance at Duke University. Jingqiu makes interdisciplinary performance works and dance films that engage with social issues and cultural memories. Jingqiu has presented her dance films and documentaries worldwide and received various awards. Centering voices and expressions of women, immigrants, people of color, as well as people with disabilities, her work explores cultural identities, motherhood, and address issues of racial and disability justice. www.jingqiuguan.com

Helena Freire Haddad is a Ph.D. candidate in Biomedical Engineering at Duke University and earned her undergraduate degree in BME and Dance at Northwestern University. She is trained in ballet, modern, contemporary and African dance forms.

Shelly Han is a junior studying Statistical Science and Computational Biology. Growing up in Cary, NC, she has loved dance and performance since a young age, particularly classical ballet and classical Chinese dance styles. At Duke, she continues to pursue these passions as the Artistic Director of student group Devils en Pointe and as a choreographer with student group Duke Chinese Dance.

Jessica Harris is a professional dancer, choreographer, and artist originally from Kinston, NC. She completed her BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography from East Carolina University in 2024. She has since been indulging in travel and artistry through dance, which has taken her to new places such as Kenya and Italy. She loves seeking depth within her art for self-expression and for connecting with others through movement. Jessica has had the privilege of traveling to expand her dance career and hopes to continue to fuel her creativity and curiosity surrounding people, experiences, and art.

Iyun Ashani Harrison is an Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance at Duke University and the founder and creative director of Ballet Ashani (formerly Ashani Dances). Harrison is a graduate of The Juilliard School, received an MFA from Hollins University, and is currently a doctoral candidate in Education at Marymount University. He has danced with Dance Theatre of Harlem under the artistic direction of Arthur Mitchell, Ballet Hispanico, Seattle Dance Project, and Ailey II. Harrison's television credits include PBS' Setting the Stage2007, NBC's 20th Hispanic Heritage Awards, PBS' Who's Dancin' Now? – Arts Education in Your Community and The South Bank Show in England. Harrison's choreography has been commissioned by the Juilliard Dance Ensemble, Ailey School, Boston Conservatory at Berklee, Collage Dance Collective, Men in Dance, American Dance Festival, Boost Dance Festival, University of Florida, Henderson State University, Pomona College, Jamaica School of Dance, and University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados. Harrison has held several academic positions, including professorships with Cornish College of the Arts, Goucher College, and Webster University prior to joining Duke University. He has also taught on the faculties of the Pacific Northwest Ballet School, The Ailey School, the Peabody Conservatory, and the Maryland Youth Ballet.

Jessica Holloway is a dancer, choreographer, and public school educator with a philosophy that arts should be accessible to all. She is an East Carolina University Alumna and holds a BFA in Dance Education with a K-12 Teaching License. Jessica is passionate about all things related to dance, movement, mental health, and physical health. She combines ballet, modern, acro, contemporary, and jazz to translate feelings and emotions into a physical language.

Linzi Huang started dancing at the age of 5, starting ballet at age 10. She trained under Atlanta Professional Dance Academy, competing in various solo competitions including Prix de Lausanne, YAGP, WBC, and attended summer intensives at Master Ballet Academy and the School of American Ballet. She has taken on lead roles in productions of Swan Lake, Giselle, and Coppelia. Through choreography, teaching, and collaboration, she aims to grow and inspire both on and off stage.

Asili Johnson is a choreographer and manifestor, working at the intersections of performance, authenticity, and business. A Brooklyn native, she began training at age three in Black-owned dance conservatories, studying ballet, jazz, tap, hip-hop, modern, and contemporary styles. Deeply rooted in her lineage, she also trained in Traditional West African Dance and Drum within her family and community. She is currently pursuing the MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis at Duke University, alongside a certification in Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Duke's Fuqua School of Business. Nationally and internationally, Johnson's performances weave traditional West African movement with contemporary forms. Her research explores storytelling, cultural connection, and creative leadership through dance. Beyond choreography, she has held roles with A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, Harlem Stage, the Alliance Theatre, Bates Dance Festival, and the Rubenstein Arts Center. Whether in rehearsal or collaboration, Johnson centers community, curiosity, and the radical potential of performance as a transformative, world-building practice.

Bonita Joyce resides in the culturally rich community of Durham, NC where she has had the opportunity to learn from teachers deeply rooted in African dance, music and history. She has performed with the Duke African Repertory Ensemble with Professor Ava LaVonne Vinesett and SUAH African Dance Theater with Wesley Williams. There will always be heart-space for her teachers at the Hayti Community Center and the CAARE Healing Center.

Johanna Kepler is a choreographer, educator, and visual artist from Boston, MA, currently pursuing her MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis at Duke University. Her interdisciplinary choreographic projects reflect on identity, hybridity, and cultural memory as lived and evolving experiences, weaving together movement, visual art, and storytelling to examine the body as a living archive and a site of resilience. Johanna earned her BFA in Dance and a minor in Latino Studies from the University of Michigan, where she was named a UMS 21st Century Artist Intern (2018) with Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. She has presented her choreography at Duke University (November Dances, 2024), the Boston Center for the Arts (2022), and represented University of Michigan at the American College Dance Festival (2019). Most recently, she served as Associate Producer for Jazz Island, choreographed by Maija Garcia for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's 2025 City Center season. She worked for American Ballet Theatre from 2020 to 2023 in Marketing and Communications, and is the co-founder of Digital Drip Fashion House, a forward-thinking company bridging digital fashion, performance, and sustainability, featured in Bloomberg and Nasdaq. She is also the founder of Power of Performing Arts (2020), a global storytelling project amplifying the voices of over 300 artists during the pandemic.

Cindy Lao is a first-year student with the doctorate program in Physical Therapy at Duke. Originally from Seattle, she graduated from the University of Washington with a BA in Dance and a BS in Public Health. Cindy trains primarily in the styles of contemporary, modern, and ballet. After the pandemic, she returned to the stage during her junior and senior years, performing contemporary and jazz works in the UW MFA Concert and UW Dance Presents Concert. She also completed the Dance Summer Program at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London.

Alexa Lattanze is a freshman at Duke University. As a native of Cary, NC, she trained at Cary Ballet Conservatory and attended summer programs at the Royal Danish Ballet, Boston Ballet, and Carolina Ballet. With Cary Ballet, Alexa performed in The Nutcracker yearly and rotating spring shows, dancing roles such as Sugarplum, Dew Drop, and Dark Angel. Last year, she spent a gap year in Ballet Idaho's Trainee Program, performing corps roles in The Nutcracker and Sleeping Beauty, and a soloist role in the trainee production of Paquita.

Grace Lincroft is a student with the doctorate program in Physical Therapy at Duke University. Born and raised in NC, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2023 from North Carolina State University, where she was a member of the State Dance Company. Grace is passionate about the intersection of movement and expression and looks forward to continuing her creative exploration and growth within the Duke community.

Chanell Mangum is a second year Ph.D. student in Genetics at Duke University. She believes in the idea that movement, big or small, should be a part of everyone's daily lives, and the best way to do that is through the expression of dance. As a Durham native, she spent many years training in modern, contemporary, and jazz. Continuing with her philosophy of movement that was developed in her training, she takes time out to dance and move with others.

Alicia Ogliari is a Biomedical Engineering student at Duke University and former professional ballerina with the Romanian National Opera (Timișoara), where her repertoire includes Giselle, La Bayadère, The Nutcracker, and Creatures of Prometheus. A 2-time Gap Year Program Scholar, she interned with Ballett Dortmund and the English National Ballet Trainee Program and performed alongside principals of The Royal Ballet and Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro. Alícia studied at Ballet Vera Bnublitz (Brazil), completed exchange programs with The Royal Ballet School, Boston Ballet School, and European School of Ballet, and was a finalist at Youth American Grand Prix and Algarve Dançarte.

Helen Pertsemlidis is a senior at Duke majoring in Mathematics and Computer Science with a minor in Dance. They grew up in New Jersey and trained at Studio Allegro School of Ballet in ballet, jazz, modern, and musical theater jazz. Since coming to Duke, Helen has performed work by choreographers Juel D. Lane, Nina Wheeler, and Avery Lythcott-Haims 2023 in November Dances and Choreo Lab. As a member of the Duke Swing Dance student team they perform, choreograph, and teach swing lessons.

Erin Peters is a second-year Civil Engineering and Pre-Law student at Duke University. Originally from Columbia, SC, she has been dancing since a very young age and trained at Ms. Jenkins Dance Academy. Her favorite styles are acro and contemporary, where she enjoys combining athleticism with expressive movement. She hopes to continue exploring the intersection of technical precision and artistic expression, both in her studies and through performance.

Emily Powell is a first year student planning on majoring in Biomedical Engineering. She hails from Wilmington, NC where she danced for the past 13 years, 11 of which were spent training in classical ballet at City Ballet of Wilmington. To supplement her training, she has attended summer intensive programs at Carolina Ballet and Cincinnati Ballet, where she has had the opportunity to experiment in a variety of other dance styles as well. Emily is excited to continue pursuing her passion for Dance at Duke and is incredibly grateful for this opportunity to perform!

Stazia Ritch was raised in Apex, NC, and trained pre-professionally in contemporary dance at the Academy for the Performing Arts. Since 2020, she has been a company member with the OM Grown Dancers under the direction of Courtney OM. She is currently mentoring and training dancers of all ages within the company program at APA and the TRAIN program at Threehouse Studios. She encourages using tools like improvisation and yoga to develop body awareness and individualized artistry in her students. Stazia is creatively driven through her personal exploration of intuitive and sensation-based movement and choreography and is influenced by Emily Greenwell, Nancy Andrews Roque, Marcos Roque, Ashley Lindsay, Brooke Averette, and many more.

Olivia Rock grew up in Greensboro, NC. She trained and performed in ballet, modern, contemporary, jazz, and hip hop, and fell in love with being on stage. She had the opportunity to attend the Bolshoi Ballet Academy's Summer Intensive and intern with FINI Dance in Italy. Olivia is currently pursuing a degree in Psychology at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a member of the Blank Canvas Dance Company and had the opportunity to teach ballet to other college students at UNC.

Khalid Abdul N'Faly Saleem is an internationally acclaimed African music specialist, composer, and percussionist. He serves on the faculty of Appalachian State University's Department of Theatre and Dance, where he teaches African Drumming for Dance and is the Music Director of the Diyé African Dance and Drum Ensemble alongside Dance Director Sherone Price, and on the faculty of the American Dance Festival as well. A founding Music Director of the Chuck Davis Dance Company and the African American Dance Ensemble, Khalid has performed and taught throughout the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. His collaborations include The E. Gwynn Dancers, The Big Drum Dance Company of Granada, and Les Guidivoir of Côte D'Ivoire. He has composed, arranged, and performed for presidents, ambassadors, and distinguished choreographers such as Donald McKayle, Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Tally Beatty, Molissa Fenley, Cleo Parker Robinson, and members of the Limón and Alvin Ailey American Dance Companies, among many others.

Tria Smothers is a Duke graduate (2014), who started her formal dance journey in college under the tutelage of Professors Barbara Dickinson, Ava LaVonne Vinesett, and Andrea Woods Valdés. She continues to dance with the Duke African Repertory Ensemble, Indigo Yard Gals, and Calabasa Calabasa. As a licensed therapist, she incorporates movement into her mental health practice and assists others with getting in touch with their bodies and helping them live fulfilling lives.

Maya Srinivasan is a sophomore studying Neuroscience at Duke University. Having trained in California primarily in jazz and lyrical for 11 years, she switched to pre-professional training in ballet. In high school, she trained at The New Ballet School, an American Ballet Theatre-certified institution. She has performed in The Nutcracker, Sleeping Beauty, Don Quixote, and Cinderella and has competed at ADCIBC and YAGP. She performed in November Dances in 2024 in Bach Cello Suite, The Nutcracker in the fall with student group Devils en Pointe, and DEP Showcase in the spring.

Arely Sun is a senior majoring in Computer Science with minors in Visual Media Studies and English. In the California Bay Area, she trained in ballet for most of her life and has transitioned to exploring other forms of dance since coming to Duke. On campus, she's involved with the student groups Defining Movement as co-president and Embodiment Contemporary Dance.

Kristin Taylor Duncan is a native of Durham, NC. She has worked with choreographers Nathan Trice, Bridget Moore, Christal Brown, Shani Collins, Ayo Jackson, Sidra Bell, Jasmine Powell, Dr. Kariamu Welsh, Nnenna Freelon, cellist and vocalist Shana Tucker, Dr. Andrea E. Woods Valdés, Mexico City-based Tania Perez-Salas Compañía de Danza, Juel Lane, Gaspard Louis, and nosi DANCE theatre. She participated with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company's "What Problem," with Yuxtadanza Compañía de Danza of Venezuela and with Helen Simoneau Danse for the DANCE X Tour to Montreal, Tokyo and Busan. She is invited to lead a residency with North Carolina Dance Project, Rite of Spring. Kristin is a proud recipient of the Ella Fountain Pratt Emerging Artist Grant and the Artists Support Grant. Her company KT COLLECTIVE Dance Company, has been commissioned to create works by Helen Simoneau, American Dance Festival, NC Museum of Art, the Nasher Museum, NC Museum of History, Myra Weiss of Proxemic Media and NC Central University. KT COLLECTIVE has performed at the Dumbo Dance Festival, the NC Dance Festival and the Richmond Dance Festival. Kristin is the Dance Director at Riverside High School as well as the High School Dance District Lead and teaches at the Ballet School of Chapel Hill and the Duke Dance Department.

Destiny Touchine is Diné (Navajo) from Window Rock, AZ. She is Water's Edge Clan, born for the Red Cheeks People. Her maternal grandfather is Zuni People Clan and her paternal grandfather is Red Running Into the Water Clan. She is a Psychology and Dance major, dancing many styles growing up. Dance has been her lifelong passion, and she plans to integrate it into her mental health career, combining her love for movement with her commitment to mental well-being.

Ava LaVonne Vinesett is a choreographer, dancer, and scholar whose work bridges performance, cultural memory, and ritual practice. A Professor of Dance and Faculty Director of the Baldwin Scholars Program at Duke University, she co-founded (with Jessica Almy-Pagán) Indigo Yard Gals (IYG), a collective dedicated to dance, healing, and site-responsive storytelling. A founding member and former Assistant Director of the Chuck Davis African American Dance Ensemble, Vinesett investigates the body as a vessel of history, identity, and ancestral memory. Her research spans Africana-based healing traditions in Senegal, The Gambia, Côte D'Ivoire, Togo, Amurakuc (Morocco), the Czech Republic, the Congo, Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador, and the Caribbean, informing IYG's performances such as Go To Water, Indigo Tent: Caroline and Jim, More than a Silhouette, and Ancestors in My Feet. Drawing inspiration from biomythography, critical fabulation, and Black feminist theory, she centers erased narratives and reclaims public space through embodied practice. Her writing appears in The Oxford Handbook of Black Dance (forthcoming) and the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, expanding the possibilities of dance as scholarship and social intervention.

Richard J. Vinesett has studied African percussion, specifically the instrumentation of the jembe orchestration, under the guidance of Khalid Saleem. He was a performing artist with the Chuck Davis African-American Dance Ensemble, Rhythms of Life under the direction of Khalid Saleem, Cultural Journey under the direction of Bradley Simmons, and Kambankaflo Dance & Drum Ensemble under the direction of Mohammad Da Costa. Under the tutelage of Bira Santos, Richard added Candomblé drumming to his performance roster, and with David Font-Navarrette and Eluaye, Lucumí batá. Richard is a musical accompanist for the Duke Dance Program and Musical Director of the Duke African Repertory Ensemble.

Wesley L. Williams Jr. is a Baltimore, MD, native raised in Durham, NC. He is a dancer, teacher, coach, and choreographer, inspired through the works of Professor Ava Vinesett, Sherone Price, Thaddeus Bennet, Nancy Pinckney, Melinda Waegerle, Dr. Chuck Davis, Mabel Robinson, and Richard Vinesett. Wesley is currently a adjunct faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of The Arts based in Winston Salem, NC. He is Founder & Director of SUAH School of Music & Dance based in Greensboro, NC. He loves the balance of teaching and spending time in nature.

Chania Wilson is a Raleigh, NC based choreographer, educator, and performer committed to creating movement spaces rooted in memory, collaboration, and embodied knowledge. She holds an MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis from Duke University. Chania is the founder and Artistic Director of Nine Movement Collective, a professional modern dance company focused on community-based collaboration, and the creator of Ignite Dance Intensive, the first county-wide intensive of its kind, which received the United Arts Community Spotlight Award in 2024. Her choreography has been featured in Duke's November Dances (2023, 2025), the NC Dance Festival, and Tobacco Road Dance Productions, and premiered on the NCDF Mainstage in October 2025. Her dance films have been screened in ADF's Movies by Movers and the Greensboro Dance Film Festival, where she was also invited to participate as a panelist. She was selected as a 2025 mentee in the Camille A. Brown Mentorship Program and is a recipient of both the Snapdragon Fund Grant and the Duke Dean's Research Award. Currently, Chania serves as the Director of Dance at St. Mary's School, an adjunct professor at North Carolina Central University, a dance instructor at Arts Together, and a company choreographer and instructor for The Dance Attic, while continuing to build choreographic and interdisciplinary work through Nine Movement Collective.

Olly Yang is a sophomore at Duke University, majoring in Physics. He trained at the Youth Ballet of the Guangzhou Opera House and currently serves as the treasurer of the student group Devils en Pointe (DEP). He is actively involved in DEP's annual production of The Nutcracker as well as showcases in the Spring.

Xinyi Zhang is currently pursuing the MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis at Duke University. She holds a BA degree with a double major in Performance Theater and Dance, and Education with a minor in Mathematics from Colby College. She is a performer, choreographer, and certified math teacher. Because of her own experiences of living in China and the US, her work explores relationships, community, and the diaspora. She is interested in the metaphorical study of how plants form connections underground and build ecological networks. Her movement research embodies plants and reimagines human relationships and community formation from an ecological anthropological perspective.

Grace Zheng is a first-year student hoping to major in Electrical and Computer Engineering, and Computer Science. Raised in Cary, NC, she trained in ballet and contemporary with Cary Ballet Conservatory. There, she had the honor of working with Suzanne Farrell and Jenifer Ringer on Balanchine's Serenade and Who Cares? respectively. At Duke, she continues to take dance classes and is a part of the student-run ballet group, Devils En Pointe.

Duke University Dance Program

Faculty

Andrea E. Woods Valdés: Chair of the Dance Program; Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance

Sarah Wilbur: Director of Graduate Studies; Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance

Jingqiu Guan: Director of Undergraduate Studies; Assistant Professor of the Practice of Dance

Iyun Ashani Harrison: Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance

Michael Kliën: Professor of the Practice of Dance

Purnima Shah: Professor of the Practice of Dance

Ava LaVonne Vinesett: Professor of the Practice of Dance

Emeritus

Barbara Dickinson: Professor of the Practice Emerita of Dance

M'Liss Dorrance: Associate Professor of the Practice Emerita of Dance

Keval Kaur Khalsa: Professor of the Practice Emerita of Dance

Clay Taliaferro: Professor of the Practice Emeritus of Dance

Julie Janus Walters: Assistant Professor of the Practice Emerita of Dance

Tyler Walters: Associate Professor of the Practice Emeritus of Dance

Instructional Faculty

Kristin Clotfelter

Ife Michelle Presswood (Duke Dance MFA '21)

James Strong

Nicole Thomas

Nina Wheeler

Kristin Taylor Duncan

Ray Schwartz

Tania Ibis Suarez

Katya Wesolowski

Staff Musicians

Beverly Botsford

Natalie Gilbert

John Hanks

Westin Portillo

Richard J. Vinesett

Mark Wells

Staff

Jenise Taylor: Business Manager

Adrienne Brandon retired from Duke University on July 25, 2025 after 23 years of service. We wish her well.

Dierdre Shipman: Assistant to the Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies

Production staff

Bill Webb: Lighting Designer and Production Stage Manager

Celeste Brace: Production Assistant

Duke Theater Operations Staff

Alec Himwich: Photography and Cover Photo

Cammel Hursel: Photography

Wil Wheldon: Videography

Purnima Shah: Faculty Concert Director

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