ChoreoLab 2024
SPRING DANCE CONCERT
April 19 & 20, 2024
7:30pm
Reynolds Industries Theater
Choreographed by Ife Michelle Presswood
Director & stage manager: Ife Michelle Presswood
Monologist & actor: Robyn Nelson
Music: N95 by Kendrick Lamar, Joy by The Voices of Fire ft. Pharrell, Praise God by Kanye West, Scientist and Engineers by Killer Mike
Performance mix arranged by Jon.Maestro
Video production: Jnai Boderick
Dancers: Shanise Alexander, Hiba Benjeddou, Destiny Butts, Chilisiah Hack, Tavia Huggins, Leighton Galloway, Carmen Miller, Briana K. Pitts, Seth Rendon, Aujiane’ LaBrea Stewart, Destiny Touchine

How do we acknowledge and subsequently demonstrate joy in/through our bodies? What are the expressions (individual) and gestures (communal), that communicate joy as a praxis that transcends time and space? Exploring sites of Black cultural movement (specifically Black church and social dance settings) and Hip-Hop dance venacular, “Joyful/Joyful” illustrates the possibilities of radical liberation embedded in celebratory cultural and social practices.
Shedding

Choreographed by Jingqiu Guan
Editor: Jingqiu Guan
Original music: Karam Salem
Cinematographers: Steve Milligan & Jingqiu Guan

Dancers: Michela Annamaria Arietti, Natalia Cervantes, Geo Chen, Yufei Cheng, Indigo Cook, Maria Lin, Isabella Rundell, Candice Wang, Cynthia Wang

A young man struggling with fully accepting himself goes on an unexpected journey led by a group of spirits, experiencing the process of transformation and renewal along with the spirits. This contemporary dance work draws from movement principles of Chinese classical dance while exploring boundary crossing between the screen and the stage.

Space is Only Noise if You Can See

Choreographed by Julia Piper
Music: Claus by Los Tres, Soliloquy by John Derek Bishop, Existential Crisis Hour! by Kilo Kish, Space Is Only Noise If You Can See by Nicolas Jaar

Dancers: Natalia Cervantes, Indigo Cook, Em Liptow, Amare Swierc

This piece was choreographed in collaboration with the dancers using Brian Eno’s “Oblique Strategies,” a card-based method for promoting creativity. Listen to the quiet voice.
Like Onyx Glistening in Snow

Choreographed by Iyun Ashani Harrison
Music: Kodo by Kiyari, Toki No Koe by Jang-Gwara and Shake by Isuka Mata.

Cast: Sarah Broders, Leah Esemuede, Kayla Lihardo, Eliza Miller and Emmie Urquhart

Intermission

Konakiri

Choreographed by Ava LaVonne Vinesett
Costumes: Ava LaVonne Vinesett
Music: Beverly Botsford, Khaild Saleem, Elisha Harris, Richard J. Vinesett, Wesley Williams
Dancers: Katie Duncker, Helena Freire Haddad, Bonita Joyce, Renata Garces Perez, Sierra Putney, Tria Smothers

While played under the phenomena of the full moon, Yankadi and Makru (two rhythms of the Susu) invite dancers to the circle.
Sugarlift

Choreographed by Kayla Lihardo
Music: Again, Again, Again, Again... by Chiel Meijering, Dinah’s Night Flight by Christopher Herrmann, Concerto in E Minor, TWV 52:E1: IV. Presto by Georg Philipp Telemann, Songs in Other Words: Folk Song by Kamran Ince, Candybox by Chiel Meijering (performed by Spark)

Dancers: Shelly Han, Kayla Lihardo, Sara Oberle, Isabella Rundell, Sadie Sheridan, Amare Swierc

A Renaissance Tale

Choreographed by Kristin Taylor Duncun
Music: Guy Copeland, Craft Case, Moorland Songs, Eludent and Christoffer Moe Ditlevsen

Dancers: Ella Cariello, Indigo Cook, Sasha Fasion, Aneliese Morales, Julia Piper

This work is inspired by conversation of travel and discovery and the envisioning of sculptures coming to life.

2:8

Choreographed by Nina Wheeler
Music: Summertime, Night in Baghdad, One Beautiful Evening
Composers: Patricia Barber, Laurie Anderson.

Dancers: Maya Alexander, Imani Hall, Eliza Miller, Kelly Padalino, Helen Pertsemlidis, Isa Rundell

The end of the divine beginning
Biographies

Maya Alexander, a junior originally from Atlanta, GA is currently studying Public Policy and Computer Science at Duke. Having danced since she was a toddler, Maya has trained primarily in classical ballet at Atlanta Ballet, Ballet Institute of Atlanta and Terminus Ballet Theatre where she also took supplementary classes in modern dance and contemporary. In her time at Duke, Maya has continued exploring new styles, growing her skills in contemporary dance, improvisation and jazz. Apart from taking classes each semester with the Duke Dance Program, Maya has danced and performed with Devils en Pointe and Embodiment Contemporary Dance, where she currently serves as the group’s president.

Shanise Alexander is a sophomore interinstitutional student from Nashville, North Carolina, pursuing a media and journalism major and minoring in entrepreneurship at UNC Chapel Hill. Shanise has always had this passion for choreography and further pursues dance as the current artistic director of UNC Kamikazi. “My joy is found through isolation and self-expression.”

Michela Annamaria Arietti is a sophomore in Program II, majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies in Movement Practices, Nutrition and Neuroscience. She is from Milan, Italy, where she studied at La Scala Theater’s Ballet School and later at the Bolshoi Ballet Academy in Moscow. In her time at Duke, she has been performing in works within the Dance Program. As a first-year student, she received the Benenson Award for the Arts for her summer at the 2023 American Dance Festival.

Hiba Benjeddou, a junior from Morocco, is currently studying Mathematics and Cinematic Arts. Her passions extend to writing poetry, crafting experimental films and indulging in late-night freestyle dance sessions at the Edens dance studio. Alongside her artistic pursuits, she actively conducts research in analytic number theory and geometric measure theory. She serves as the artistic director of Pureun, Duke’s premier K-pop dance group, while also teaching at Dia Dance Studio. “My joy is unyielding and filling.”

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 U.S., 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.
Sarah Broders is a senior from Phoenix, Arizona, majoring in Biomedical Engineering. She has trained in classical ballet since she was a child and is the current president of the student group Devils En Pointe. She is also a member of the Bursac lab, where she works on cardiac regeneration research.

Destiny Butts is a Nursing major with a Psychology minor at Fayetteville State University. She has been dancing for more than 10 years and enjoys choreographing modern dances. Though she will still have dancing in her heart, her career goal is become a travel nurse one day. “My joy is the joy of others.”

Natalia Cervantes is a proud Latina artist from Manhattan Beach, California. She is a first-year graduate student pursuing an MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis at Duke University. She earned a B.A. in Psychology and Dance with a minor in Latina/o/x Studies from The American University in Washington, D.C. She is passionate about uplifting Latinx communities and investigating how the personal and cultural memories held in the body transform generationally.

Geo Chen is a sophomore studying Psychology and was born in the U.S. and raised in China. Geo has trained in street dance for the past four years and is currently a part of two dance teams at Duke: Defining Movement and Pureun. Geo is excited to explore new dance styles and be in his first ChoreoLab piece, and he hopes you all enjoy the show!

Yufei Cheng is from Chengdu in China, a beautiful city well known for pandas and hotpots. She is currently a first-year Master’s student in Economics and has been dancing since the age of 3. She was mainly trained in Chinese classical dance and Chinese folk dance, but has also studied tap dance, ballet and modern pop dance. No matter what form, dancing can always help her relax and be reborn.
Indigo Cook is a first-year student pursuing an MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis. They work within the intersection of movement, music and contemporary performance practices of experimental and avant-garde art. They relish any opportunity to listen deeply, move wildly and remain every in flux.

Kristin Taylor Duncan is a Durham native with a B.F.A. from the UNC School of the Arts. She has trained at Jacob's Pillow, Lou Conte Dance Studios, Dance Arts Unlimited and Collage African Dance Company. Duncan is a recipient of the Ella Fountain Pratt Emerging Artist Grant and the Artist Support Grant. She is the Dance Educator at Riverside High School, teaches at the Ballet School of Chapel Hill and is honored to work with the dancers of Duke University.

Katie Duncker is a Biomedical Engineering Ph.D. student at Duke. She grew up dancing at a studio for 15 years near Chicago and then was a cheerleader for 3 years at Northwestern University. She’s been taking dance classes in Durham for the past few years and is excited to perform alongside Duke’s incredible dancers again this spring!

Leah Esemuede is a senior from Maryland who is pursuing degrees in Dance and Psychology with a minor in Spanish. Throughout her university journey, Leah has been an active member of Duke’s Dance Program and community, performing works by Juel D. Lane, Andrea Woods Valdés and Iyun Ashani Harrison as a member of Ballet Ashani.

Sasha Faison is a junior majoring in Philosophy and minoring in Neuroscience. She has taken dance every semester at Duke and is social chair for her dance group Devils en Pointe. Sasha is the editorial director of Duke’s arts and culture magazine FORM, works for The Chronicle and conducts research with her Bass Connections team on how language and music impact neurodegenerative diseases.

Leighton Galloway (they/them he/his) is a senior at Fayetteville State University and has been a soldier in the Army for eight years. Leighton has been dancing for 11 years, professionally for eight and choreographing for five. “My joy is unbounding expression.”
Chilisiah Hack is a sophomore at Fayetteville State University majoring in Business and Marketing. She enjoys being involved on her campus, spreading positivity and making a difference through one organization at a time! “My joy is bright and continuously jubilant.”

Jingqiu Guan, originally from Chengdu, China, is a choreographer, filmmaker, dancer and scholar. She currently teaches at Duke University as an assistant professor of the practice of dance. Jingqiu makes multimedia performance works and dance films that engage with social issues and cultural memories. She has presented her dance films and documentaries at film festivals worldwide and won many awards. Her current project explores the intersection of live performance and motion capture technology in creating an interactive space for encountering the histories and stories of Asian immigrants in the U.S.

Through the lens of physics, Renata Garces (biophysicist) aims to understand the mechanisms life uses to adapt and proliferate. With dance, she explores the connections between emotions and body movement and inquires about body technologies that lie beyond the margins of the current economic paradigm. She approached African dance drawn by the mystery of a practice that extends over a vast territory and a long history. Prof. Ava Vinesset introduced Renata to the rich complexity of rhythms proper to these traditions. She is fascinated by how rhythm is transmitted through the human body and is willing to pursue that exploration.

Helena Freire Haddad is a Ph.D. candidate in Biomedical Engineering. Outside of her time in the lab, she nurtures a passion for dance, and has been very fortunate to engage in it during her time in graduate school. She was first trained in ballet and modern techniques, but since coming to Duke, she has discovered an interest in the practice of African dances thanks to Professor Ava and her mentorship. She is very excited and grateful for this opportunity to perform again!
Iyun Ashani Harrison is a dance maker, educator and executive director of Ballet Ashani. Born in Saint Andrew, Jamaica, Harrison trained in acting, classical ballet, modern technique and Jamaican folk dance. He graduated from the Juilliard School (BFA) and Hollins University (MFA). Harrison danced with the Dance Theatre of Harlem under the artistic direction of Arthur Mitchell. At the Dance Theatre of Harlem, he developed a love for neo-classical ballet and dancing choreography by George Balanchine, Glen Tetley, Michael Smuin and Billy Wilson. This experience profoundly influenced Harrison’s movement aesthetic and laid Ballet Ashani’s foundation. Harrison’s professional credits also include Ballet Hispanico, Buglisi Dance Theatre, Aliley II, National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica and guest appearances with Connecticut Ballet, Flint Institute of Music, Collage Dance Collective, Seattle Dance Project and St. Louis Black Repertory Theater. With these companies, he danced in choreography by Jirí Kylián, José Limón, Paul Taylor, Alvin Ailey, Lar Lubovitch, Donald Byrd, Edward Liang, Talley Beatty and George Faison. Harrison’s television credits include PBS’ “Setting the Stage” 2007, 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, Aliley 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, Goucher College, Webster University, Cornish College of the Arts, 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, Webster University and Pomona College. In addition, he has taught on the faculties of Pacific Northwest Ballet, Peabody Conservatory, The Aliley School and Maryland Youth Ballet. Harrison is the co-editor and a co-author of the anthology “Antiracist Ballet Teaching” (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), and Harrison is presenting his newest work, “Giovanni’s Room,” a ballet adaptation of James Baldwin’s novel, at Goucher College in April.

Shelly Han, from Cary, NC, is a first-year undergraduate student studying Statistics. Before coming to Duke, she trained in classical ballet under Miguel Campaneria at the Campaneria Ballet School and also served as the president of the Ruby Slippers Chinese Dance Club of NC. At Duke, she continues to pursue her passions in both dance styles and more as a member of Devils en Pointe and Duke Chinese Dance.

Imani Hall is a senior from Martha’s Vineyard, MA. She is majoring in Neuroscience with a minor in Psychology and a certificate in Child Policy Research. She has been dancing since the age of 5 and has been very grateful to be able to continue that journey at Duke. She is also the co-president of Defining Movement, Duke’s premier multicultural dance group. Outside of dance, she works at Duke’s Center for Autism and Brain Development, volunteers at an afterschool program and works in a neurobiology lab where she studies the rabies virus and cortical circuits.
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 L. 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.

Kayla Lihardo is a junior from California pursuing a Program II degree in Neuroaesthetics. She has studied ballet all her life and continues to explore this passion with the Duke Dance Program and as the artistic director of Devils en Pointe.

Maria Lin is an English major with a minor in Education. She began her dance journey at the age of 14 in a ballet studio. Her favorite dance style is contemporary, but she also enjoys exploring styles such as hip-hop, Bharatanatyam and waacking.

em liptow is a dancer and performing artist, facilitator and creative producer currently pursuing an MFA in Dance: Embodied Interdisciplinary Praxis. Her practice is shaped by contact improvisation, capoeira, circle singing and devised theatre. Her creative research swirls around ritual, tactility, thresholds and intergenerational community. em has devised and performed original work at Borderlight Fringe Festival, Maelstrom Collaborative Arts and Cleveland Public Theatre. While dancing with people is one of her most favorite things, dancing with trees comes in as a close second.

Carmen Miller is a junior from the Bay Area, California, studying Biology and minoring in Computer Science. She danced ballet up until Covid and is excited about exploring other styles in college. In her free time, Carmen enjoys painting, listening to music and going on nature walks. “My joy is energetic and free; open like the sky.”
Eliza Miller is a junior majoring in Physics and minoring in Philosophy. She is a Durham native trained in ballet, contemporary, jazz and hip-hop at Barriskill Dance Theatre School. She is furthering her dance education, mainly in ballet, through Duke's Dance Program and as a member of Devils en Pointe. Eliza is also on the boards for Duke's Devils en Pointe and the Body Empowerment Project chapter and is an active member of Duke's Astronomy Club.

Robyn Nelson was born and raised in Montgomery, AL. She was an active-duty member in the Air Force before leaving the service to pursue her writing career. She loves all things theatre and is a senior at Fayetteville State University. “My joy is spreading entertainment and love throughout the world.”

Sara Oberle is a sophomore from Louisiana studying Neuroscience on the pre-med track. She has danced since age three and stays engaged with this passion at Duke through involvement in Sabrosura, Devils en Pointe and dance classes. While her dance experience ranges from Horton to tap, her love for ballet and pointe ground her practice.

Kelly Padalino is from Potomac, Maryland. She is a junior double majoring in Public Policy and Dance with a minor in Inequality Studies. She was trained primarily in ballet, modern and jazz and is grateful for the opportunity to keep dancing through her dance group Momentum and the Duke Dance Program.

Helen Pertsemlidis is in their second year at Duke and intends to major in Mathematics 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 performed in November Dances 2023 in Obsessed With You, choreographed by Avery Lythcott-Haims and attended American Dance College Association’s 2023 conference, where they performed Obsessed With You for adjudication. Helen also danced in Lythcott-Haims's senior capstone, This Way Out. As a member of the Duke Swing Dance team they perform, choreograph and teach swing lessons.
Julia M. Piper, MFA Dance Candidate ’24, is an artist-scholar researching dance and ecology. Julia has trained in a range of styles and has an affinity for theatre dance. At Duke, she is a Climate Communications Fellow and a member of two laboratories: Social Choreography and Climate Change Decolonization and Global Blackness. Julia has taught performing arts to all ages and is the director of dance at Baltimore Actor’s Theatre Conservatory.

Briana K. Pitts is a sophomore at Fayetteville State University, majoring in Business Administration. She is one of the captains for the band auxiliary dance team: Queens of the MBX. She has had at least 11 years of dance starting with praise dance, jazz and majorette. She also has a small business within cake decorating. “My Joy is leading, learning and moving slowly

Ife Michelle Presswood is a choreographer and artist-educator, engaging dance praxis as a means of exploring individual, communal and cultural identity and expression. She is currently an adjunct professor at Duke University and Fayetteville State University. “My joy is the vibration of community.”

With a passion for medicine and a strong interest in neuroscience research, Sierra Putney (class of 2025) aspires to become a neurologist and contribute to the development of restorative treatments for neurodegenerative diseases. Sierra is a certified Mental Health First Aider, reflecting her commitment to mental health advocacy and her hope to combine her future medical and research career with mental health initiatives.

Seth Rendon is a junior from Cleveland, Ohio, studying Math and Chemistry. He is new to dance, but his first love for the arts was jazz music and the saxophone, which he has now been playing for over a decade. “My joy is energetic and expansive.”
Isabella Rundell is a senior majoring in Computer Science. Having a passion for medicine, Isabella will enter a certified anesthesiology assistant program after graduation. From a young age, Isabella has been training in classical and concert dance with a focus on ballet and modern styles, among others. For the past four years, Isabella has been involved in the Dance Program as well as student-run dance groups, serving as the former president of Embodiment Contemporary Dance and currently the vice-president of Devils en Pointe.

Khalid Abdul N’Faly Saleem is an internationally renowned African music specialist. He joined the faculty of Appalachian State University’s Department of Theatre and Dance where he serves as an instructor of African drumming for Dance, and as Music Director of Diyé African Dance and Drum Ensemble with Sherone Price, Dance Director. Previously, Khalid served as musical director of Sankofa African Dance and Drum Ensemble at the State University of New York College at Brockport. He continues on the faculty of the American Dance Festival where he also performs and is a dance musician for both African and modern dance classes each summer. He has traveled internationally to the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, Africa and South America with the well-known Chuck Davis Dance Company (where he was the founding music director), as well as with The Egwen Dancers, The Big Drum Dance Company of Granada and Les Guidivoir (Côte D’Ivoire). Khalid was a featured performer in the “Dance Black America” concert film shown nationally on PBS and on multiple commercial recordings of African music. He has had the honor to compose, arrange, direct or perform for presidents, bishops, ambassadors and great choreographers such as Donald McKale, Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Tally Beaty, Molissa Fenley, Betty Jones, Lavina Williams, Cleo Parker Robinson, members of the Limon Company and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Company, Papa Ladji Camara, Baba Djimo Kouyate and Chief Bey to name a few. Khalid’s latest international cultural exchange travels have taken him to South Korea with the Korea American Dance Festival (KADF) program and to Brazil to work with Mestre Ramos, Mestre Toni Vargas and Mestre Peixinho of the popular Senzala Capoiera School located in Rio De Janeiro. As part of a cultural exchange with Cuba, Khalid taught West African rhythms and studied Afro-Cuban folklore in Santiago. In 2004, Khalid accepted an invitation to perform with the Chuck Davis African American Dance Ensemble at their 21st anniversary gala performance and to be a part of a film documentary on the life of Dr. Chuck Davis.

Sadie Shiridan is a junior from near Chicago, IL majoring in Public Policy and History. Her dance training consists of ballet, contemporary and jazz. On campus, she’s involved in Devils en Pointe, Embodiment Contemporary Dance and Duke Chorale.
Emmie Urquhart is a first-year student from Vail, Colorado, who grew up studying ballet at Vail Valley Academy of Dance, where she was a company member of Vail Youth Ballet Company. Emmie has had the opportunity to attend summer intensives at Colorado Ballet, Saratoga Springs, Ballet Austin, Los Angeles Ballet, State Street Ballet, Burklyn Ballet Theater and Alonzo King LINES Ballet. She spent the 2022-2023 season as a trainee at State Street Ballet in Santa Barbara. Emmie has yet to decide on her major and is taking advantage of the Duke Dance Program and Devils en Pointe offerings.

Destiny Touchine is Diné (Navajo) from Window Rock, Arizona. 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 since a little girl. “My joy is living my ancestors’ wildest dreams: fearless and passionate.”

Amare Swierc, a Duke University undergraduate (‘27), from Missoula, Montana, and has 11 years of dance experience at Rocky Mountain Ballet Theatre. She’s trained in ballet, contemporary and cultural dance, attending summer intensives at Opus One Ballet Firenze, Ballet Beyond Borders, California Dance Theatre, etc. Active in Devils en Pointe, Borderless Magazine and Chronicle photography, she aims to double major in International Comparative Studies and Public Policy, aspiring to blend international relations with cultural connectivity through the arts.

Aujiane’ LaBrea Stewart is a freshman at Fayetteville State University, pursuing a major in Criminal Justice and minors in Pre-law/Paralegal Studies and Dance. “My joy is empathic, outspoken, unique and to dance like no one is watching.”

Tria Smothers T’14 is a Duke graduate who continues to dance with the Duke African Repertory Ensemble. She incorporates movement into her mental health practice and assists others with getting in touch with their bodies and helping them live fulfilling lives.

Emmie Urquhart is a first-year student from Vail, Colorado, who grew up studying ballet at Vail Valley Academy of Dance, where she was a company member of Vail Youth Ballet Company. Emmie has had the opportunity to attend summer intensives at Colorado Ballet, Saratoga Springs, Ballet Austin, Los Angeles Ballet, State Street Ballet, Burklyn Ballet Theater and Alonzo King LINES Ballet. She spent the 2022-2023 season as a trainee at State Street Ballet in Santa Barbara. Emmie has yet to decide on her major and is taking advantage of the Duke Dance Program and Devils en Pointe offerings.
Ava LaVonne Vinesett—dancer, choreographer, scholar. Professor Dance/Faculty Director/Baldwin Scholars Program, Duke University. She is the co-founder (with Jessica Almy Pagán) of Indigo Yard Gals and founding member/former Assistant Director of the Chuck Davis African American Dance Ensemble. Her work addresses identity as a danced concept — a fluid space, where gender, race, nationhood, location, age, size, language, religion, health, power and access converge. Research interests include Black visibility in public spaces, memory, African-rooted practices in the context of healing in Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador and Caribbean sites. The connection of dance and healing lead to co-founding “Indigo Yard Gals”; several site-responsive works: “Enter the Yard” (2016), “Go To Water” (2017), “Indigo Tent: Caroline and Jim, More than a Silhouette” (2022) present as a collaborative of performance artists grounded in the belief and potency of shared space, divinities, ancestors, magic and the spiritual medicine, which unfolds in our own backyards — what we call HOME. “IYG” layers dance, sculpture, and healing rituals into performance events. We believe these culturally relevant works spark deep discussions about the relationships between places, people, culture, imagination and possibility. “IYG” engages multi-year projects, exploring the intersections of social justice, environmental activism, ritual, identity and storytelling. Vinesett is a prolific choreographer, and has writings appearing or forthcoming in several venues, including, the “Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine,” and the “Oxford Handbook of Black Dance,” ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz.

Richard Vinesett has studied African percussion, specifically the instrumentation of the djembe orchestration, under the guidance of Khalid Saleem. He has also studied Candomblé Ketu percussion with Bira Santos and Batá percussion with David Font. Richard is the Musical Director for the Duke African Repertory Ensemble and has been a long-serving musical accompanist for Duke’s African dance classes.

Candice Wang is a visiting student from Duke Kunshan University, Class of 2025, majoring in Psychology. She underwent comprehensive training in Chinese classical dance in Xi’an, China, from October 2020 to July 2021. In 2022, her solo dance repertoire won the Grand Prix at the European Dance Arena Championships’ Chinese Dance Catalog. Additionally, she achieved first prize for Chinese choreography at the Russian International Choreography Competition and second prize for the professional level group at the China-Japan International Art Festival.
Cynthia Wang is a junior from Nanjing, China, majoring in Economics and minoring in Theater Studies. Growing up, she experienced many kinds of dance styles: ballet, K-pop, hip-hop, jazz — and her favorite one yet is modern. She really enjoys contemporary Chinese dance and hip-hop dance classes she is taking this semester and hopes to continue to explore her relationship with dance moving forward.

Nina Wheeler is a native of Durham, North Carolina. She has taught beginner, intermediate and advanced jazz dance at Duke University for 18 years. She is also an adjunct teacher at Elon University where she teaches beginner, intermediate and advanced jazz dance for the Dance Department. She has been at Elon for 27 years. Nina owns and operates Nina’s School of Dance, where she has taught and mentored students since 1974. Nina’s teaching credits are to the many students who have gone on into professional careers. She is responsible for the birth of the North Carolina Scholastic Dance Awards. These awards challenge and promote dance in the public schools of North Carolina. Nina received the Laramie Hitchings Dance Award in 1993 for her many contributions to the Durham community in the field of dance. Nina started Multiple Choices for the Children, a jazz dance benefit for Duke Children's Hospital in 1986 and has raised over $500,000. She is proud to say, “children helping children”. She is mostly proud of her

Wesley L. Williams, Jr is a native of Baltimore, Maryland, who was raised in Durham, NC. Wesley is a dancer, teacher, coach and choreographer. He is 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 an adjunct faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of The Arts based in Winston Salem, NC. He is co-founder & director of SUAH School of Music & Dance based in Greensboro, NC. He loves the balance of teaching and spending time in nature.
Faculty

Andrea E. Woods Valdés: Chair of the Dance Program; Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance
Iyun Ashani Harrison: Director of Undergraduate Studies; Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance
Sarah Wilbur: Director of Graduate Studies; Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance
Jingqiu Guan: Assistant 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

Alyah Burnett-Baker
Kristin Clotfelter
Lee Edwards
Ray Schwartz
Nina Wheeler

James Clotfelter
Kristin Duncan
Ife Michelle Presswood
Katya Wesolowski
Staff Musicians

Beverly Botsford
Natalie Gilbert
John Hanks
Westin Portillo
Richard J. Vinesett

Staff

Jenise Taylor: Business Manager
Adrienne Brandon: Assistant to the Director of Undergraduate Studies; Staff Assistant
Dierdre Shipman: Assistant to the Director of Graduate Studies

Production staff

Lighting Designer: Bill Webb
Photography & Cover Photo: Alec Himwich