



dance at illinois



pivot

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Moving Forward

by Sara Hook, Head

The venerable April Berry quotes Katherine Dunham saying, “The heart always comes first.” Purpose, drive, and stamina develop out of how we answer the question, WHY? Why we dance precedes the How and the What. But often the WHY question is the hardest for most dedicated dancers to answer in any reasonably articulate way. Our reasons are many, complex, and as diverse as our individual DNA. What compels all of us, though, is the deep understanding that movement is primary. It is fundamental to our sense of being. And often, movement is the most direct way to express what words cannot.

Katherine Dunham, the mother of Black Dance, danced and led from the heart but was also a scholar, anthropologist, cultural researcher and leader, activist, and author. Her career spanned Broadway, concert stages, opera, TV, and Hollywood films, and inspired artists such

as Eartha Kit, Alvin Ailey, and countless others. Dunham was named one of the first one hundred of “America’s Irreplaceable Dance Treasures” by the Dance Heritage Coalition and received both the National Medal of Arts and the Kennedy Center Honors. Despite these accolades, Dunham’s work is very seldom reconstructed, and no academic institution has ever been granted permission to stage one of her 90 choreographic works—until now.

Dance at Illinois has garnered the rights to reconstruct Dunham’s *Afrique*, to be staged by April Berry, former Alvin Ailey Dance Company star and certified Master Dunham Technique instructor, who worked directly with Dunham and danced many of her roles in the Ailey Company’s celebration of Dunham’s work in the mid 80s. We are producing *Afrique* in our October Dance concert as part of our *Black on Black: A Celebration of Black Dance* 25–26 season, an idea inspired by our colleagues in the School of Art and Design who did a showcase of their work entitled *Black on Black on Black on Black* at Krannert Art Museum in 2022.

October Dance also features the work of guest artist Rena Butler (formerly of the Bill T. Jones Company and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago) and

 *The Winged* cast, backstage at the Joyce Theatre, NYC. **Front row, L to R:** Lily Freebery (BFA '26), Anna Brady (BFA '27), Jeremiah Jordan (BFA '27), Jayla Anderson (BFA '27); **Back row, L to R:** Erin Fabian (BFA '26), Chelsea Wahrendorf (MFA '27), Anna Lillig (BFA '25), Claire Rinberg (BFA '25), Brooklyn Lutz (BFA '25), e.g. Condon (MFA '26), Nik Owens (MFA '26), Gabriel Gonzalez (MFA '25), and Lydia Przybylski-Munden (Stage Manager)



TAKING FLIGHT ON A NEW YORK CITY STAGE (EXCERPTS)

by Anna Lillig (BFA '25)

As I wait in the hallway underneath The Joyce Theatre in NYC as part of the Martha Graham University Partners Showcase, the demanding

sound score of Graham’s *Steps in the Street* (1936) echoes from above. Choreographic memories of my time spent understudying and ultimately performing this work for Dance at Illinois’ October Dance 2023 concert resurface in my body. Our regisseurs, the directors responsible for staging theatrical works, Elizabeth Auclair and Miki Orihara are in the audience. Momentarily, we will perform excerpts from José Limón’s *The Winged* (1966), which explores the human desire to feel free and the flight of mythological creatures. Thankfully, our professor and regisseur Roxane D’Orléans Juste prepared us well. She was the associate artistic director of the Limón Dance Company and a performer for over 30 years, and she gave us advice and direction rooted in her wealth of knowledge. Thanks to her guidance, I felt prepared and confident to take the stage and connect my mind and body with the Limón technique in this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Read more from Anna at go.illinois.edu/NYCstage.



 Katherine Dunham, receiving her honorary doctorate degree from UIUC, 1994; Photo courtesy of Champaign-Urbana News Gazette



DANCE AT ILLINOIS AT THE AMERICAN COLLEGE DANCE ASSOCIATION (ACDA) NATIONAL FESTIVAL IN WASHINGTON, DC.

By Rose Boder (BFA '28)

As the culmination of our first-year experience at Dance at Illinois, my cohort had the amazing opportunity to perform *Martha and Hanya and Doris and Charles*, choreographed by Assistant Teaching Professor Rachel Rizzuto, at the American College Dance Association's national festival in Washington, DC. Poking fun at the histories of modern dance, this virtuosic and character-based piece required a level of performance dedication that I had yet to experience. In addition to an enriching weekend full of classes, connection building, and dance viewing, the honor of representing the University of Illinois Department of Dance in the gala concert was the icing on the cake. I am beyond grateful for the numerous skills gained and inspirations gleaned from this experience.

The cast at the ACDA National Conference: Sofia Garcia (BFA '28), Kayla Hernandez (BA '28), Elle Kramer (BFA '28), Josie Stierwalt (BFA '28), Assistant Teaching Professor Rachel Rizzuto (MFA '21), Rose Boder (BFA '28), Emma Kunz (BFA '28), Abigail Legg (BFA '28), Head and Professor Sara Hook, and Chelsea Wahrendorf (MFA '27)



Assistant Teaching Professor Rachel Rizzuto's *Martha and Hanya and Doris and Charles*

ACDA SUMMARY

Dance at Illinois had an AMAZING ACDA experience at both the regional and national conferences. In March, Dance at Illinois students and faculty attended the North-Central regional conference at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where they participated in incredible classes, gatherings, and performances.

Both DAI adjudicated pieces *Martha and Hanya and Doris and Charles*, choreographed by Assistant Teaching Professor Rachel Rizzuto, and undergraduate senior Tessa Olson's *I inhaled a whole handful of this shaved plastic and it was like drowning*, were chosen for the Gala Concert. Third-year MFA candidate Gabriel Bruno Eng Gonzalez's solo *Midwest Princess (FRFR)* was presented in the Informal Concert.

In addition, *Martha and Hanya and Doris and Charles* was selected to represent the ACDA North-Central region at the 2025 ACDA National College Dance Association Conference in Washington, DC, in May.

Rose Boder (BFA '28) with Elle Kramer (BFA '28) in Assistant Teaching Professor Rachel Rizzuto's *Martha and Hanya and Doris and Charles*

"I'm still bursting with pride, nearly a month later, over our ACDA Nationals experience! The students were total stars, whether they were taking classes with other faculty and guest artists, adapting to last-minute tech changes with typical aplomb, or performing thrillingly and exactly like the professionals they've already proven themselves to be. I'm honored to have been on this yearlong journey with them."

Rachel Rizzuto, Assistant Teaching Professor



TEACHING DANCE (DANC 350)

By Nawal Assougdam (BA '25) and Anna Lillig (BFA '25)

Teaching Dance is an introductory, laboratory-style crash course consisting of the many resources, modes of thinking, and teaching methods that are used by dance educators, including various ways to structure and plan a dance class and how to prepare oneself for the unexpected nature of teaching. We discussed how to build a holistic lesson that includes the brain, not only the body, in a movement lesson and how we can apply through-lines to centralize our lessons to work towards specific learning objectives. Through frequent reflection and workshoping activities, we developed our individual teaching philosophies and our voices as new educators and observed the five-part lesson plan in action through assisting the Saturday Creative Dance for Children classes. Additionally, we had the opportunity to get hands-on teaching experience at three local schools with varying age groups (Leal Elementary School, Campus Middle School for Girls, and University Laboratory High School), where we developed lesson plans and delivered them as a group.

DANC 350: Teaching Dance students in front of University High School



iLANDING WORKSHOPS IN OUR COMMUNITY

by Jennifer Monson

For the past year, a collaborative artistic team including rebecca medina, Gonzalo Pinilla, Patricia Leon Q, Magdalena Novoa, Mark Becker, and I have been offering Spanish iLANDing workshops to Spanish-speaking families in the Champaign-Urbana area. The workshops take place at Anita Purves Nature Center at the Urbana Park District on a seasonal basis and offer an exchange of intergenerational cultural knowledge. Using the iLANDing scores based in dance and interdisciplinary art practice, we create a space for families from Latin America and the Caribbean to connect with each other and the changing seasons in relation to a sense of belonging and home. A layered sense of place and community experience emerges as parents bring forward memories and connections between the places they are from and where they are living now. The workshop gives them an opportunity to share stories, dances, and experiences that offer a respite and support reflection on the migration experience. We plan on offering a public sharing in the fall and hope to expand the workshops to public schools.

Jennifer Monson with Champaign-Urbana community members



GOOD HOUSE KEEP

By Anna Sapozhnikov (BFA '98, MFA '02)

On May 01, 2025, Anna Sapozhnikov, senior assistant head of program administration and engagement, presented *Good House Keep*, a dance work inspired by and designed to be presented in midcentury modern spaces throughout the Champaign-Urbana community and in conjunction with Krannert Art Museum's exhibition *Making Place for the Arts at Home: Performance and Midcentury Modern Architecture*. The performance included an all-star cast, including collaborators Associate Professor Roxane D'Orléans Juste, Health and Wellness Specialist Nicole Marini, Assistant Professor Alexandra Barbier, Professor Emerita Jan Erkert, and BA senior Olivia Papa, with documentation by Teaching Assistant Professor Laura Chiamonte and an original sound score by Elliot Reza Emadian (MFA '20).

Anna Sapozhnikov, Nicole Marini (BFA '98), Olivia Papa (BA '25), Jan Erkert, Laura Chiamonte (MFA '09), and Alexandra Barbier in Sapozhnikov's *Good House Keep*

Our Musicians



MARK BECKER

Mark Becker has been accompanying dance classes for two years, focusing on Samba and Capoeira music arrangements. The collaboration with Mestre Denis Chiaramonte in Capoeira classes has taught Mark a lot about the importance of maintaining traditional music and dance forms while also connecting with new audiences and offering them opportunities to be themselves in an inclusive space.



BEVERLY HILLMER

Beverly Hillmer has been accompanying ballet classes for the last 25 years at DAI and recently started to play for modern and contemporary classes. A major highlight was participating in Jacob Henss' (MFA '22) MFA thesis in November Dance 2021, where she had the delight of playing Rachmaninoff and Wagner on the Ikenberry Steinway.



CODY JENSEN

Cody Jensen has been accompanying classes for DAI since 2010. He has performed live for a handful of performances and has created around 10 sound scores. One of his favorite collaborations was with Sarah Marks Mininsohn (MFA '22) on her piece *Shund*, an exploration of her Jewish roots and Klezmer music, which coincided with his own burgeoning interest.

MING KIM

Ming Kim began accompanying ballet classes in spring 2022. Many of her experiences have been exciting and rewarding. A particularly memorable collaboration was with Associate Professor Roxane D'Orléans Juste in *Dancing on the Ceiling*, a Krannert Center Marquee event. Although Ming was playing from a written score, the process felt very alive and collaborative.



MARK WHITE

Mark White is entering his third year as an accompanist with DAI, playing for major and non-major classes in all styles and forms. Mark feels that every class has allowed him to grow as a musician. As a composer, Mark has composed/performed in about a half dozen pieces. Working on Associate Professor Paige Cunningham Caldarella and guest artist/alum Anna Rogovoy's piece *Age* for February Dance 2025 was a highlight.



AARON WILSON

Aaron Wilson has been accompanying classes for DAI since 2016. A highlight was accompanying for the infamous C.O. (Cynthia Oliver). Aaron is grateful for meeting so many talented musicians over the years and watching students grow into great dancers and performers. He is looking forward to each class as its own next musical journey.

Musicians not pictured:
JOHN TOENJES
JAMIE MAUCK
BRANT ROBERTS

Dance at Illinois has a long history of working with local area musicians and composers inside of the classroom and on our stages. Our accompanists are accomplished artists and are integral members of our community.



Summer Intensives



We hosted THREE dance intensives this summer: the Katherine Dunham Intensive with April Berry; the Experimental Dance Film Intensive with Laura Chiaramonte (MFA '09), Joshua Pridemore (Teaching Assistant Professor, Art & Design), Jenny Oyallon-Koloski (Assistant Professor, Media & Cinema Studies), and Matt Harsh; and the annual High School Summer Dance Intensive. This year, the High School Intensive features instructors Dr. Kemal Nance, Ty'esha Lewis (MFA '23), Anna Sapozhnikov (BFA '98, MFA '02), and Sonia Kellermann (MFA '11). Dancers from all over the country flocked to central Illinois, filling our studio spaces with movement, commitment, and inquiry.

Transitions

John Toenjes and Dr. Kemal Nance are excited to be back from their sabbaticals...



DR. C. KEMAL NANCE

During his first sabbatical, Associate Professor C. Kemal Nance, PhD, conducted research for his forthcoming book *Dancing Our Africa! Kariamuwelsh and the Legacy of Umfundalai*. Soon to be published by University of Illinois Press, *Dancing Our Africa!* is a collaborative autoethnography of the Umfundalai dance culture from 1993 to the present for which he dialoged with Umfundalai practitioners from all over the country. With support of the Campus Research Board, Dr. Nance also produced the “Legacy Concert” in which he mounted two of the late Kariamuwelsh’s classic works and other African Diasporic dance choreographies including his own work *Red* (2019). He also conducted professional development workshops and participated in exhibits and masterclasses throughout the country.

by Elliot Reza Emadian



JOHN TOENJES

Professor John Toenjes has been learning to program the “Unreal Engine” game engine software to make virtual reality versions of his theatrical productions, starting with a work from 2008 called *Leonardo’s Chimes*. John has also been collaborating with the Stu/dio at Illinois to redesign and finish his *Master Dancer* VR project, which is planned to be finished by the end of summer 2025, as well as collaborating with artists on various installations and performances. Finally, John completed a chapter in an upcoming book entitled *Music and Motion. Interweaving Artistic Practice and Theory in Dance and Beyond*, slated for publication by the end of 2025.

by Elliot Reza Emadian



MOLLY MCLAUGHLIN

Molly McLaughlin, our new office administrator, had a wonderful first year with us. Major accomplishments involved planning three huge travel itineraries for our students: the American College Dance Association Conference at University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point; the National ACDA Festival in Washington, DC; and the New York City trip with the cast of *The Winged* at The Joyce Theater.



JAKE PINHOLSTER

Following a national search, Jake Pinholster was selected as dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts. We are thrilled to have Dean Pinholster in our corner.

by Michelle Hassel



OFFICE OF ARTS INTEGRATION

by June Clark Eubanks

We are excited to share that Dr. M. Cynthia Oliver has been appointed as the Special Advisor to the Chancellor for Arts Integration. Known for her illustrious career as a professional dancer, choreographer, and director, she is looking forward to her 26th year of teaching and inspiring dance students at Illinois.

Along with her Office for Arts Integration (OAI) team, Dr. Oliver is now focusing on the arts, specifically, from a “ten-thousand-mile view” of the campus, to usher more arts and artists into institutional practices, at every level. The OAI offers small grant funds up to \$15,000, cosponsorship funds up to \$1,000, grant application support, faculty-release-time awards, student event tickets, and other resources to actively bring the arts into conversation with a variety of disciplines, communities, and events across campus. Visit oai.illinois.edu for more information.

by Elliot Reza Emadian

In Memory

by A. Raheim White (BFA '11)

DIRK MOL

Beloved supporter of Dance at Illinois, former Dance Partner Advancement Committee (DPAC) President

Dirk Mol and I met during my first year teaching at Dance at Illinois' Summer Dance Intensive during a dinner that Jan Erkert, former department head, hosted for friends of dance. This was a core group of beings who believed in the mission and vision of the department and donated time, energy, and money toward forwarding that vision. At the time, Dirk and Jerry were donating funds to support a scholarship for an underrepresented/minority first-year student as part of the *No Debt for Dancers* initiative. Later, in a grand gesture, Jan revealed the scholarship would be named after me, the A. Raheim White Scholarship. This is one of the many ways I've been touched by Dirk's generosity.

I experienced beautiful times with this gregarious, fun, loving spirit. Dirk generously offered to facilitate therapeutic healing sessions that helped transform some of my negative energy and jumpstarted healing and recovery. Dirk had such kind eyes. He was also a bit of a trickster. He loved to poke fun, and I'd give it right back.

In my tradition, after one year of transitioning, you can add a loved one to your ancestral prayers. Dirk still lives boldly in my ancestral space, constantly assisting me in finding more joy, abundance, and generosity in my heart. He is still a beautiful teacher for me.

Dirk, I love you, Boo. But you already know that.



Dirk Mol and Jerry Wray, courtesy of Jerry Wray



A. Raheim White (BFA '11)

dance at illinois

Yuno Kimura (BFA '25) in Merce Cunningham's *MinEvent*, reconstructed by Associate Professor Paige Cunningham Caldarella (MFA '07)



Nik Owens (MFA '26) and e g Condon (MFA '26) in their duet *Unhelpful Spectacle*



Lena Baumann (BFA '27), Cheyenne Smith (BFA '27), Nawal Assougdam (BA '25), Brooklyn Lutz (BFA '25), and Jayla Anderson (BFA '27) in Anna Lillig's (BFA '25) *EDMxMD*



Class of 2025



Back row, L to R: Ashley Bruno (BFA '25), Bellamy Negron (BFA '25), Anna Lillig (BFA '25), Gabriel Gonzalez (MFA '25), Brooklyn Lutz (BFA '25), Josie Alfano (BA '25), Tessa Olson (BFA '25), Damiyah Williams (BFA '25), Claire Rineberg (BFA '25), Aleksander Tecza (MFA '25), and Banafsheh Amiri (MFA '25); **Front row, L to R:** Olivia Papa (BA '25), Sarah Vickerman (BFA '25), Jackie O'Brochta (BA '25), Nawal Assougdan (BA '25), Yuno Kimura (BFA '25), and Khiari Everett (BFA '25)

Undergrad News

by Rachel Rizzuto (MFA '21)

Our graduating BA and BFA seniors will be pursuing various careers and trajectories, continuing to train, choreograph, and perform in cities like Chicago, St. Louis, Peoria, and beyond. Two of our graduates will enter physical therapy doctorate programs in the fall, and another will go on to earn her master's in speech pathology. Other immediate post-grad paths include joining the St. Louis Dance Theatre trainee program, becoming a high school dance teacher, and coaching a junior high dance team. We're well acquainted with our students' versatility and resolve—skills they've painstakingly honed over their time at DAI—and we know how well this will serve them in the future. We are so proud of our graduates, and we look forward to seeing them again soon in our audiences, alumni gatherings, and perhaps even our studios.

Grad News

by Roxane D'Orléans Juste (MFA '21)

In the last three years, MFA graduates and scholars Aleksander Tecza, Gabriel Bruno Eng Gonzalez, and Banafsheh Amiri dove into unique interdisciplinary research and performance processes. Aleksander questioned phenomena of convergence of the human energetic connection and quantum physics, Gabriel looked at the singularity and concept of beauty through viewer-

ship and consumerism of technology, and Banafsheh introduced the complex history of Iranian traditional music and dance as a powerful tool to advocate for change.

In October, Banafsheh will present her lecture *Re-imagining Iranian Dance, Voice, Form and Traditions* as part of the Global Fusion Conference at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois. She will pursue her ongoing research as a singer, choreographer, and dancer embodying traditional Iranian Music, which she aims to make more visible in performance and academic spaces worldwide.

This summer, Gabriel will participate in a visual arts residency at ACRE in Wisconsin and was invited to join Professor Tere O'Connor's new work which will premiere at New York Live Arts in New York City in December. In spring 2026, he will create a new work through Beloit College's Victor E. Ferrall, Jr. Endowed Artists-in-Residence Program.

Next fall, Aleksander will be choreographing the musical *Anastasia* for Lyric Theatre at Illinois and returning to teach at Dance at Illinois. He will work at the Plant Clinic on campus, utilizing his experience as a microbiologist. In addition, he will continue to teach his ballroom and Alexander Technique students in Chicago and in Champaign-Urbana.

Faculty Awards and Recognitions

Back row, L to R: Roxane D'Orléans Juste, Paige Cunningham Caldarella, Laura Chiaromonte, Molly McLaughlin, Rachel Rizzuto, Cynthia Oliver, Rebecca Netti-Fiol, Sara Hook, Betsy Brandt, Tere O'Connor, Alexandra Barbier, and Sam Hanson; **Front row, L to R:** Jennifer Monson, Anna Sapozhnikov, Serouj Aprahamian, and Nicole Marini



PAIGE CUNNINGHAM CALDARELLA

During the 2024–2025 academic year, Associate Professor Paige Cunningham Caldarella copresented a workshop entitled *One Long Arm: The Non-Ballet Ballet Class* with MFA 2024 alumna Anna Peretz Rogovoy (MFA '24) at the National Dance Education Organization conference in Seattle, Washington. She was also invited to participate in the *Experiencing Time/Embodying Rhythm* Symposium at Columbia College Chicago. Caldarella and Rogovoy continued their collaboration with the premiere of a duet version of their piece *Age* at the Cleveland Dance Festival. Other 24–25 highlights include performing in Cynthia Oliver's work *TURN.TURNING.TURN.T.*

DR. SEROUJ APRAHAMIAN

Dr. Serouj Aprahamian received the College of FAA Faculty Award for Excellence in Research. Nominated by Betsy Brandt, he was recognized for his research that uncovers the many myths surrounding hip hop's evolution and the role that breaking has played in the development of hip hop culture.

DR. CYNTHIA OLIVER

Dr. Cynthia Oliver was one of six artists chosen to receive a grant from the Sweat Variant Spring 2025 Dispatch in support of individual and small companies to explore and research their own artistry.

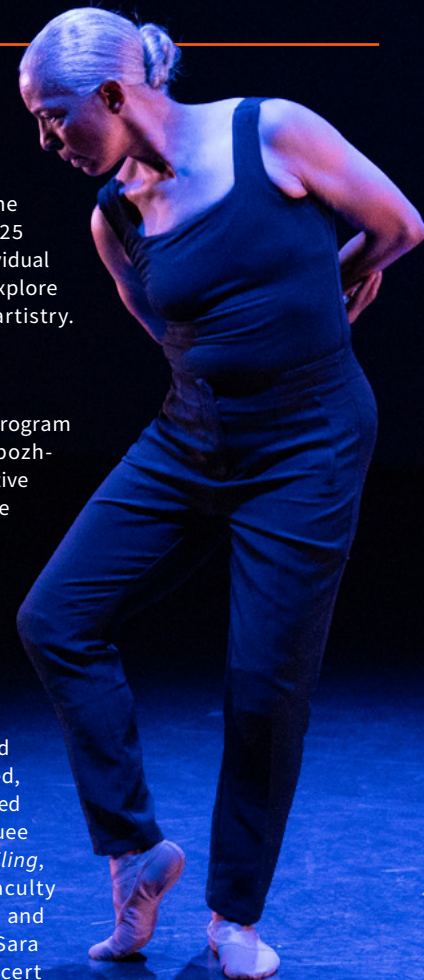
ANNA SAPOZHNIKOV

Senior Assistant Head of Program Administration Anna Sapozhnikov received a 2025 Creative Catalyst grant from the Illinois Arts Council agency in order to expand her work *Good House Keep*.

SARA HOOK, JENNIFER MONSON, & ROXANE D'ORLÉANS JUSTE

Sara Hook, professor and department head, produced, choreographed, and performed in Krannert Center's Marquee event *Dancing on the Ceiling*, which featured fellow faculty members Jennifer Monson and Roxane D'Orléans Juste. Sara also codirected the concert *Time Will Tell* with collaborator David Parker at Links Hall in Chicago.

Roxane D'Orléans Juste (MFA '21) in Daniel Nagrin's solo, *Spanish Dance*, performed as part of *Dancing on the Ceiling*



Awards

Dance Partner Undergraduate Project Awards
(est. 2010) Targeted for summer study by undergraduates.
Lena Baumann (BFA '27)
Abby Legg (BFA '28)
Jasmine O'Connor (BA '26)

Mary Elizabeth Hamstrom Award
Awarded to a graduate student for summer study.
Chelsea Wahrendorf (MFA '27)

Patricia Knowles Graduate Travel Award
Designated for an outstanding MFA candidate in the Department of Dance to be used for travel and study that deepens their artistic life.
Maggie Segale (MFA '26)

Courtney B. Kellogg Memorial Scholarship
(est. 2015) For an outstanding undergraduate dance student. Established in memory of Courtney B. Kellogg Wojcik (BFA '00).
Jade Lajeune (BFA '27)

A. Raheim White Scholarship
(est. 2017) Merit-based award for an underrepresented/ minority first-year student. This award is named in honor of alumnus A. Raheim White (BFA '11), who has cultivated an imaginative, innovative, and sustainable artistic life.
TBD

Ahmad D. and Dulce G. Issa Dance Scholarship
For overall outstanding achievements.
TBD

Fernadina Chan Scholarship
(est. 2019) Given by alumna Fernadina Chan (MFA '72) to help make education more affordable for student dancers at UIUC.
Nathalia Trogden (MFA '28)
Hollis Bartlett (MFA '28)

Moe Family Dance Award
(est. 1996) Awarded to a dance major with potential for unique contributions to the profession, which may lie outside the realm of performance in the traditional sense.
Avi Pellegrinetti (BFA '26)

Outstanding Undergraduate Performance Award
Sarah Rose Vickerman (BFA'25)

Vannie L. Sheiry Memorial Scholarship
(est. 1994) Given to a dance major who has demonstrated exceptional performing talent. Priority given to graduate students.
Nik Owens (MFA '26)

Senior Magnolia Award
For a dance student who has shown the most growth and development throughout their four years.
Damiyah Williams (BFA '25)

Leadership Award
(est. 2018) This award honors those who have served as leaders in our community.
Anna Lillig (BFA '25)

Wanda M.Nettl Prize for Student Choreography
(est. 2002) This annual award is designated for best choreography by an undergraduate or graduate student.
Gabriel Bruno Eng Gonzalez (MFA '25)

William McClellan Memorial Scholarship
(est. 2017) In Honor of William McClellan (BFA '00) for outstanding achievement in choreography and performance.
Tessa Olson (BFA '25)

Lisa Carducci Memorial Scholarship
For an overall outstanding BFA/BA student. Established in honor of Lisa Carducci (BFA '84) by her family.
Claire Rineberg (BFA '25)
Jackie O'Brochta (BA '25)

John C. and Pamela A. McKinley Rozehnal Scholarship
(est. 2024) For an undergraduate or graduate student who has financial need.
Paula Sousa (MFA '28)

Len Lewicki Award
(est. 2025) For an outstanding student who shows generosity of spirit, good citizenship, and is a leader within the Dance at Illinois community.
Emma Kunz (BFA '28)
Nawal Assougdam (BA '25)
Banafsheh Amiri (MFA '25)

Alumni News

LESLIE CUYJET NAMED GUGGENHEIM FELLOW



Leslie Cuyjet (BFA '03) in her solo *For All Your Life*; photo by Maria Baranova

The Guggenheim Foundation marked its 100th anniversary by announcing the 2025 class of Guggenheim Fellows—198 exceptional individuals across 53 disciplines—selected from nearly 3,500 applicants. One of the recipients is Dance at Illinois alumna Leslie Cuyjet (BFA '03). Cuyjet, who is based out of Brooklyn, NY, has been choreographing and dancing in New York since 2004, collaborating and performing with other creators “on rooftops, good and bad floors, and alleyways; on stage, in film, art, on tour, and on the fly,” according to her website. She is the recipient of two Bessie Awards, a top honor in the world of dance which recognizes pioneering work in choreography, performance, music composition, visual design, legacy, and service to the field of dance. One was awarded in 2019 for her sustained achievement as Outstanding Performer, and another for her 2021 solo *Blur* which earned her a 2022 award for Outstanding Choreographer/Creator. Cuyjet and Angie Pittman (MFA '15) will be performing in Krannert Center’s Marquee season in September 2025.

CHICAGO ALUMNI CONCERT AT LINKS HALL



In November 2024, Dance at Illinois held its second alumni concert in two sold-out shows at Chicago’s Links Hall. Choreographers included Laura Chiaramonte (MFA '09) and Esteban Donoso (MFA '08), Mark Kater (BFA '80), Mya McClellan (BFA '21), Laina Reese Werner-Powell (BFA '15), Chris Johnson (MFA '97), Melissa Pillarella (BFA '10), Isabella Saldana (BFA '24), Kaleigh Dent (BFA '20), Christine Betsill (MFA '10), Johannah Wininsky (MFA '01), Alyssa Motter (BFA '01), Alex Kinard (BFA '22), Skylar Males (BFA '15), Anna Sapozhnikov (BFA '98, MFA '02), and Bevara Anderson (MFA '22).

Jordyn Gibson (BFA '23) in Bevara Anderson’s (MFA '22) *In Every Lifetime, Cover Me*

Skylar Males (BFA '15) in her solo *Liminal*



¹ Kayla Hernandez (BA '28), Iyanuoluwa Kenhinde (Dance Minor), Ella Andersen (BFA '27), Nawal Assougdam (BA '25), and Cheyenne Smith (BFA '27) in Damiyah Williams’s (BFA '25) *The Throwdown: Ignite to Unite* ² Josie Stierwalt (BFA '28) and Jade Lajeune (BFA '27) in Ashley Bruno’s (BFA '25) *Mosiac* ³ Jade Lajeune (BFA '27), Yuno Kimura (BFA '25), Vanessa Zhang (Dance Minor), Ella Andersen (BFA '27), and Jasmine O'Connor (BA '26) in Yuno Kimura’s (BFA '25) *eye2eye* ⁴ Jayla Anderson (BFA '27) and Brooklyn Lutz (BFA '25) in Anna Lillig’s (BFA '25) *EDMxMD* ⁵ Erin Fabian (BFA '26) and Bellamy Negron (BFA '25) in Negron’s *Double, Double, Toil and Trouble*

⁶ Olivia Papa (BA '25) and Claire Rineberg (BFA '25) in Sarah Vickerman’s (BFA '25) *Cyclic* ⁷ Khiari Everett (BFA '25) in his solo *Memorabilia of the First Spring* ⁸ Sophie Philbrick (Dance Minor), Avi Pellegrinetti (BFA '26), Anna Lillig (BFA '25), Jasmine O'Connor (BA '26), Lena Baumann (BFA '27), Sofia Garcia (BFA '28), Emma Kunz (BFA '28), and Anna Brady (BFA '27) in Brooklyn Lutz’s (BFA '25) *Any Color You Like* ⁹ Sarah Vickerman (BFA '25) in Claire Rineberg’s (BFA '25) *Sensitivity*

Donors

2024–2025

David & Betty Allen
Juan Alvarez & Ruth Wyman
Serouj Aprahamian
Cliff & Paula Barnes
Garrett Black
Amanda Blackshear
Joe Bowie
Kelly Bradham
Betsy Brandt & Mike Preusch
Leslie Buchbinder
Brian Caldarella & Paige Cunningham Caldarella
Jerry Carden & Tim Temple
Jon & Janet Chandler
Charles & Janet Chiaramonte
Joan Clement
Lauren Cockerham
Roxane D’Orléans Juste
Donald & Winifred Daisley
Margaret Donovan
Joyce Eisold
Elliot Emadian
Richard Erickson
Jan Erkert
Bruce Evans & Mary Graham
Dana Findley
Natalie Fiol
Stephen Fiol & Rebecca Nettl-Fiol
Sara Franko
Sandi Freebery
Paul & Joan Germano
William & Rose Goodman
Diane Gottheil
Don & Kim Hardin
Matthew & Alicia Harvey
Don Hittle & Alicia Trezise
Sara Hook & Sean Murphy
Patricia Hruby Powell
Dulce Issa
Frank & Patricia Knowles
Ming-Shen Ku
Michael Lambert & Tim Hutchison



Sojung Lim (MFA '24) in Rebecca Nettl-Fiol's Ayre

Stuart Lerner
Daniel Lewart
Len Lewicki
Brad Marcus
Donna Mastricola
Jason & Pernelle Maxwell
Regina McClellan
Robert & Kristen Mellican
Michael Mininsohn & Pamela Marks
Jennifer Monson
David O’Brien & Masumi Iriye
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Stephen & Basia Yakaitis
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Be a Pivotal Force

DONATE NOW

Donors play a pivotal role in the realization of the department’s mission to become a national center for the development of dance artists and leaders. The collaborative work generated in our program has been spreading across campus and out into the world, and we can do even more to share what dance can contribute to our society. Dance Partners—our generous donors—provide the core strength for our students, our creative work, and our vision for advancing the art of dance.

Our Dance Partners Advancement Committee (DPAC), made up of a small group of dedicated Dance Partners, acts as a bridge between Dance at Illinois and the community. Along with DPAC, we hope you will join us in our mission to cultivate imaginative, innovative, and sustainable artistic lives.

To make a gift, please designate the desired fund (e.g., “Scholarships” or “Production & Enrichment”) on your check made payable to the University of Illinois Foundation/Department of Dance, and mail to University of Illinois Foundation, PO Box 734500, Chicago, IL 60673-4500.

For information on how to donate online: go.illinois.edu/SupportDance.

Gabriella Quaresima (BFA '27), Nawal Assougdam (BA '25), Lena Baumann (BFA '27), and Avi Pellegrinetti (BFA '26) in Tessa Olson's (BFA '25) *I inhaled a whole handful of this shaved plastic and it was like drowning*



DPAC

Special thanks to the Dance Partners Advancement Committee and to Michael Lambert who has served as president of DPAC for the past three years (2022–2025).

Kelly Bradham
Tim Hutchison
Masumi Iriye
Michael Lambert
Len Lewicki
Sally Shepherd
Alicia Trezise

Top: DPAC Members Masumi Iriye, Tim Hutchison, Alicia Trezise, and Michael Lambert
Middle: Anna Sapozhnikov (MFA '02), Sara Hook, and DPAC member Len Lewicki
Bottom: Rebecca Nettl-Fiol, DPAC Member Sally Shepherd, and Nicole Marini
Right: Fernadina Chan (MA '72)



PARTNERS & DONORS

Dance at Illinois is grateful for the support that our Dance Partners and donors provide each year, creating amazing opportunities for our students and faculty, and enriching and sustaining our artistic practices.

Special thanks to Fernadina Chan (MA '72) for her generous donation towards our New York City trip at The Joyce Theater with the Martha Graham University Partners Showcase.

Lead donor Len Lewicki and our Dance Partners Advancement Committee helped bring our new Storefront Studio to life, equipped with new flooring, lighting, window shades, and sound system.

Our first-ever crowdfunding campaign took place in March 2025, raising funds for our upcoming 25–26 production season titled Black on Black: A Celebration of Black Dance.

25-26



Season

FLATLANDS FILM FESTIVAL

September 11

February 6

Spurlock Museum

OCTOBER DANCE

October 9-11

Tryon Festival Theatre

STUDENT WORKS CONCERT

November 19-20

DRK

JANUARY DANCE

January 29-31

Colwell Playhouse

STUDIODANCE

March 5-7

Studio Theatre

SENIOR THESIS CONCERT

April 25-26

Studio Theatre

by Stacey Robinson

Auditions

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

October 4, 2025

Open House and Audition

January 24, 2026

Chicago, Visceral Dance Chicago

GRADUATE PROGRAM

December 12, 2025 (virtual)

January 28-29, 2026 (in-person)

Credits

DANCE FACULTY

Betty Allen Lecturer and Creative Dance for Children Director

Serouj Aprahamian Assistant Professor

Oluwadamilare Ayorinde Lecturer

Alexandra Barbier Assistant Professor

Betsy Brandt Associate Teaching Professor and Non-Majors Program Director

Laura Chiamonte Assistant Teaching Professor and Media Coordinator

Denis Chiamonte Lecturer

Paige Cunningham Caldarella Associate Professor

Roxane D'Orléans Juste Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director

Jan Erkert Professor Emerita

Sam Hanson Lecturer, Assistant Media Coordinator

Sara Hook Head and Professor

Patricia Knowles Professor Emerita

Linda Lehovc Associate Professor Emerita

Ty'esha Lewis Lecturer

Sojung Lim Lecturer

Nicole Marini Lecturer

Jennifer Monson Professor

C. Kemal Nance Associate Professor

Rebecca Netti-Fioli Professor

Tere O'Connor Professor

Cynthia Oliver Professor

Rachel Rizzuto Assistant Teaching Professor and Undergraduate Director

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MAGAZINE CREDITS

Anna Sapozhnikov Editor

Natalie Fioli Performance photos, Design

Anne Jackson Copy Editor

Front Cover: Avi Pellegrinetti (BFA '26) and Jenny Bo (Dance Minor) in Gabriel Gonzalez's (MFA '25) *stunning!*

Back Cover: Rose Boder (BFA '28) in Banafshe Amiri's (MFA '25) *Khazan (Autumn)*



Jennifer Monson in her solo *Move Thing: Surface Layer 3*



College of Fine & Applied Arts

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