

Dance Place Preserves the Histories of DanceAfrica, DC and Announces New Oral History Webpage

November, 2020 (Washington, DC) -- Dance Place received a **2020 Oral History Project Extension Grant** from the **Oral History Collaborative** and **HumanitiesDC** to continue the work of preserving the oral histories of **DanceAfrica, DC**. The grant allowed Dance Place to capture the histories from a wider community, highlighting how DanceAfrica, DC fits into the larger scope of Dance Place's **40-year history** as a dance presenter, school and community arts center in Ward 5's Brookland/Edgewood neighborhood. Dance Place will **launch a new web page** where the public can stream the DanceAfrica, DC oral histories on **November 1st, 2020**.

Over the summer, remote interviews were conducted with five individuals whose voices and legacies have been instrumental in the institutional history and growth of both DanceAfrica, DC and Dance Place. The narrators include Dance Place's Founding Director Emerita, **Carla Perlo**; Dance Place's Director Emerita, **Deborah Riley**; Former Chair of the Board of Directors of Dance Place, **Denise Rollins**; long-time member of the Dance Place community, **Donna Kearney**; and original company member of Coyaba Dance Theater and coordinator of the Coyaba Youth Academy, **Mama Marcia Howard**.

The oral history projects are a part of Dance Place's ongoing effort to establish an archive of its 40 years of history. Dance Place began to capture the oral histories of DanceAfrica, DC elders in 2018 as the recipient of an Oral History Collaborative Partnership Grant from HumanitiesDC. The initial project included the voices of Mama Sylvia Soumah, Baba Melvin Deal, Baba Bailai, Mama Makini, Baba Assane Konte and Mama Akua and yielded positive community response, uncovering a strong desire to capture the histories of the 33-year old Festival rooted in DC.

This program was supported by a grant from HumanitiesDC as part of the "Humanities Grant Program", and initiative funded by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities. Dance Place's 2020 Oral History Project will be included in the DanceAfrica, DC oral history collection in the DC Public Library in early 2021.

2020 Oral Histories

Founding Director Emerita of Dance Place **Carla Perlo** reflects on her life and leadership of Dance Place, the organizing host of DanceAfrica, DC. Perlo speaks about her professional trajectory and building one of the nation's leading dance organizations with focus on how DanceAfrica, DC fits into the larger scope of Dance Place's 40-year history as a dance presenter, school and community arts center in Ward 5's Brookland/Edgewood neighborhood. Perlo also speaks on her legacy in the dance community and the future of dance post COVID-19.

Director Emerita of Dance Place **Deborah Riley** reflects on her life and leadership of Dance Place. Riley talks about her career as a professional choreographer, performer and teacher and how her love for dance fuels all that she does. Riley describes the magic of DanceAfrica, DC and its importance to the community. Riley also discusses her legacy and what she hopes to see continue in the dance field post COVID-19 as Dance Place celebrates its 40-year history.

Denise Rollins, former Chair of the Board of Directors at Dance Place, reflects on her life and relationship to the DC African dance community. Rollins speaks about her professional trajectory that began in public policy, which led her to spend a number of years working for the African American Institute and eventually USAID. Rollins recalls the early years of Dance Place and DanceAfrica, DC and how each remains important to her life today.

Donna Kearney, long-time member of the Dance Place community, reflects on her life and love of dance. Kearney speaks about her childhood growing up in the Edgewood neighborhood of Washington, DC and how she came to perform with Coyaba Dance Theater and work at Dance Place. Kearney talks about her performances at DanceAfrica, DC as well as DanceAfrica festivals across the country. Kearney tributes Dance Place as the place where she began to grow into the dancer, educator and mentor she is today.

Mama Marcia Howard, original company member of Coyaba Dance Theater and coordinator of the Coyaba Youth Academy, reflects on her life and passion for dance. Howard speaks about her childhood growing up in Baltimore, her dance training and early recollections of racial tension in the country. After a brief hiatus, Howard talks about how dance reentered her life and became her sole purpose, leading her to travel around the world to perform and study dances of the African diaspora, as well as hold numerous teaching positions around DC. Howard talks of the importance of DanceAfrica, DC and how the festival is an anchor in the community. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fight for racial justice, Howard believes dance can help us unite and heal during the most difficult times.

About Dance Place

Founded in 1980, Dance Place builds a community of artists, audiences and students through high quality performances, commissions, training and educational programs. We are committed to enriching the field of dance locally, nationally and internationally. Led by Executive Artistic Director Christopher K. Morgan, our thriving arts campus serves as an anchor in our Brookland / Edgewood neighborhood in Washington, DC.

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