



NATIONAL MEDAL OF ARTS | NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

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DALLAS BLACK DANCE THEATRE MAKES JACOB'S PILLOW DEBUT ON THE HENRY J. LEIR STAGE AND OKWUI OKPOKWASILI PRESENTS NEW SITE-SPECIFIC WORK IN THE FIRST WEEK OF AUGUST

July 22, 2021 – (BECKET, Mass.) – Dallas Black Dance Theatre, the oldest and largest continuously operating professional dance company in Dallas, makes its Jacob's Pillow debut in the sixth week of Festival 2021 on the Henry J. Leir Stage. From Aug. 4-8, the company will perform a Pillow-commissioned world premiere entitled *LIKE WATER* by sought-after choreographer Darrell Grand Moultrie, celebrated for his work with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, and Dance Theatre of Harlem. Dallas Black Dance Theatre will also perform *Face what's facing you!* by Claude Alexander III and *Night Run* by Christopher L. Huggins. Additionally that week, MacArthur Fellow Okwui Okpokwasili and collaborator Peter Born make their Pillow debut with the presentation of the world premiere of *Swallow the Moon*, an installation on the Pillow grounds that tells the story of a young girl with hair so powerful it allows her to receive and send messages through time.

Dallas Black Dance Theatre will also participate in an on-site PillowTalk moderated by Pillow Scholar Melanie George on Sun., Aug. 8 at 3:30 p.m., and the company will teach a Sunday Workshop that same day at 10 a.m. Online events this week include the digital premiere of Brian Brooks / Moving Company on Thurs., Aug. 5 at 7:30 p.m., and the digital premiere of *PillowTalk: Build Me a Theater* Fri., Aug. 6 at 4 p.m.

This week also marks the second installment of the Jacob's Pillow On the Road series. On the Road showcases free Pillow Pop-Ups around Berkshire County over two weekends. Performances will happen on a uniquely designed portable stage and feature local performers as well as Kulu Mele African Dance & Drum Ensemble on Aug. 7-8, a group dedicated to preserving the traditional dance and music of West Africa and the African diaspora.

"It is high time that audiences discover the artistry of Dallas Black Dance Theatre, a premiere American company about to celebrate its 45th Anniversary, and to host the Pillow debut of Okwui Okpokwasili, a transformational artist I have admired for a long time, who is creating what promises to be an astonishing work that will be sited by the edge of our pond right at dusk," says Jacob's Pillow Executive & Artistic Director Pamela Tatge.

Dallas Black Dance Theatre brings an invigorating program to Jacob's Pillow audiences this summer. Darrell Grand Moultrie said of his new work *LIKE WATER*: "This work is created in celebration of our resilience. We've been through a lot, but we still take flight. We celebrate the ground we stand on and each second we're here. Like water, we can't survive without love, compassion, and human connection" (*Broadway World*). *LIKE WATER* is the inaugural creation made possible by the Joan B. Hunter New Work Commission at Jacob's Pillow.

Claude Alexander III's *Face what's facing you!* explores what it means to confront life's many challenges and asks the open questions: What are your issues? What do they affect? Where does it hurt? How do you get through them? Explosive, physically-demanding choreography conjures feelings of cathartic healing and perseverance. *Night Run* by Christopher L. Huggins explores the transformation of social interactions as night falls and time seems to become an illusion. "The invitation to perform at the legendary Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival is an extraordinary honor," said Dallas Black Dance Theatre Artistic Director Melissa M. Young. "This opportunity will seal our place in the roots of American modern dance history, as well as amplify the work we do as a Black dance company in America in front of a global audience" (*Broadway World*).

Okwui Okpokwasili and collaborator Peter Born's *Swallow the Moon* envisions an embodied space that transmits a song from a young girl's future self to her present. This piece, created specifically for the Jacob's Pillow grounds, comes from a new work that explores Black hair not only as a cultural signifier, but as threads that are parts of a root system marking a lineage in space and time. The work's spiraling narrative revolves around a young girl who discovers that her hair is not something to tame and discipline, but rather a source of information; something to tend and be attentive to. As a result of chemical straightening, she loses all of her hair only for it to grow back bringing unique gifts and burdens. Visions of a past that reach back to a precolonial West African village are in flux with visits from a future hybrid form that may be her own transformed body. Her new hair growth possesses the complexity of root systems in old growth forests, and she becomes inundated with a flood of history, loss, and dreams. At Jacob's Pillow, the work explores a gesture and song from the young girl's future self that reaches the present and acknowledges the suffering that comes from bearing the burdens of history, but also insists that resilience will yield an expansive self that is deeply rooted in the earth while reaching up towards the celestial plane.

ABOUT DALLAS BLACK DANCE THEATRE

Founded in 1976 by Ann Williams, the mission of Dallas Black Dance Theatre is to create and produce contemporary modern dance at its highest level of artistic excellence through performances and educational programs that bridge cultures and reach diverse communities. With an ever-expanding national and global audience, the company employs a diverse, multi-ethnic troupe of dancers performing for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. As Dallas' oldest and largest professional dance company, Dallas Black Dance Theatre ranks as the 10th largest minority arts organization in the United States, and the fourth largest Black dance company in the nation. Under the direction of the Artistic Director, Melissa M. Young, the

contemporary company consists of 14 professional, full-time dancers performing a mixed repertory of modern, ballet, jazz, and ethnic works by nationally and internationally known choreographers. Over the course of its history, DBDT has performed for 4 million arts patrons and 2.6 million children worldwide (40,000 annually youth grades K–12). To keep up with demand and continue to serve the local community, Ann Williams formed DBDT: *Encore!* (formerly DBDT II), the second performing company of Dallas Black Dance Theatre, in 2000. This company consists of 10 classically trained and highly-skilled artists from around the nation. The National Endowment for the Arts designated Dallas Black Dance Theatre as an American Masterpiece Touring Artist in 2008. The company is also the recipient of the coveted 2017 Texas Medal of Arts Award for opening doors for artistic and educational opportunity for Texans of all ages. Dallas Black Dance Theatre is a resident company member of the AT&T Performing Arts Center – Dee and Charles Wylie Theatre. Dallas Black Dance Theatre's permanent home in the historic Moorland YMCA building in the Dallas Arts District includes dance studios, training facilities, and administrative offices.

ABOUT OKWUI OKPOKWASILI & PETER BORN

Okwui Okpokwasili is a Brooklyn-based performing artist working at the intersection of theater, dance and installation. Her work considers the dynamics of interiority and psychic space in shaping relationships, sociality, and memory grounded in the body and perspective of the Afro-femme. In partnership with collaborator Peter Born, Okpokwasili creates multidisciplinary projects. They include "Bessie" Award winning *Pent-Up: A Revenge Dance*, "Bessie" Award winning *Bronx Gothic*, *Bronx Gothic: The Oval*, *Poor People's TV Room*, *When I Return Who Will Receive Me*, and *Adaku's Revolt*. In the last few years, Okpokwasili has been working on *Sitting On A Man's Head*; a collaborative, improvisational sonic praxis with multiple artists inspired by the precolonial embodied protest practices of Southeastern Nigerian women called *Sitting On A Man*. The last iteration of this practice was an anchoring event in the Danspace Platform: *Utterances from the Chorus*, which she co-curated along with the team led by Judy Hussie-Taylor at Danspace Project in NYC. Okpokwasili was a 2018 Princeton University Hodder Fellow, a 2018 Herb Alpert Awardee in Dance, a 2018 Doris Duke Artist Awardee, and a 2018 MacArthur Fellow. She is currently a UNC Chapel Hill CPA fellow.

Peter Born is a director, designer and filmmaker. In addition to his work with Okpokwasili, he collaborates with David Thomson on a cycle of installation/performances revolving around a post-sexual incarnation of Venus. He created the set for Nora Chipaumire's *rite/riot* and he has created performance videos with Chipaumire including *El Capitan Kinglady*. He works as an art director and prop stylist for video and photo projects with clients such as *Vogue*, Estee Lauder, Barney's Co-op, Bloomingdale's, Old Navy, "25" magazine, Northrup Grumman, and *The Wall Street Journal*, with collaborators including Kanye West, Barnaby Roper, Santiago and Mauricio Sierra, Quentin Jones and NoStringsUS Puppet Productions. He is a former New York public high school teacher, an itinerant floral designer, corporate actor-facilitator, and furniture designer. His collaborations with Okwui Okpokwasili have garnered two "Bessie" Awards.

JACOB'S PILLOW CONNECTIONS

While Okwui Okpokwasili has had two prior engagements connected with Jacob's Pillow, this project marks her Pillow debut. In 2018, she presented *Poor People's TV Room*, another collaboration with Peter Born, in a co-presentation with MASS MoCA and the Pillow at MASS MoCA. In 2017, she presented a work in response to Nick Cave's monumental exhibition *Until* at MASS MoCA in a similar co-presentation.

PERFORMANCE & TICKET INFORMATION

Dallas Black Dance Theatre

Henry J. Leir Stage, Aug. 4-8

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday at 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday at 2 p.m.

\$45

Available to watch online Aug. 19-Sept. 2; Online premiere Aug. 19 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are on sale now; online at jacobspillow.org, via phone 413.243.0745, and at the Jacob's Pillow Box Office at 358 George Carter Road, Becket, MA 01223.

Okwui Okpokwasili and Peter Born

Pillow Grounds, Aug. 6-7

Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m.

\$25

Tickets are on sale now; online at jacobspillow.org, via phone 413.243.0745, and at the Jacob's Pillow Box Office at 358 George Carter Road, Becket, MA 01223.

ALSO THIS WEEK:

Jacob's Pillow On the Road

Aug. 7-8

Locations:

BECKET North Becket Park – Maple Street, Sun., Aug. 8 at 5 p.m.; **GREAT BARRINGTON**

Town Hall Park; Sun., Aug. 8 at 1 p.m.; **NORTH ADAMS** River Grove Park – Corner of River &

Houghton St., Sat., Aug. 7 at 5 p.m.; **PITTSFIELD**, Rosemary and Reverend Willard Durant Park, 30 John St, Sat., Aug. 7 at 1 p.m.

On the Road showcases free Pillow Pop-Ups around Berkshire County over two weekends. Pack a blanket or your favorite outdoor chair, invite your family and friends, and bring a snack to enjoy this 45 minute pop-up performance in a park near you!

Performances will happen on a uniquely designed portable stage and feature local performers, as well as Philadelphia-based Kulu Mele African Dance & Drum Ensemble (Aug. 7-8) dedicated to preserving the traditional dance and music of West Africa and the African diaspora.

ON-SITE EVENTS

Sunday Workshop: Dallas Black Dance Theatre

Sun., Aug. 8 at 10 a.m.

The Great Lawn Tent

\$20

Open to intermediate/advanced dancers, ages 16+

Take your dancing to the next level with Dallas Black Dance Theatre featuring 7th season company dancer Hana Delong! Improve your skills with a Horton-based modern dance class that will fortify the body, enhance your technique, and uncover new layers of artistry.

Please wear comfortable dance attire to move in. Participants are welcome to dance in socks or ballet shoes.

PillowTalk: Dallas Black Dance Theatre

Sun., Aug. 8 at 3:30 p.m.

Blake's Barn

FREE

Revered as the oldest and largest continuously operating professional dance company in Dallas, this versatile ensemble is making its long-awaited Pillow debut. Artistic Director Melissa Young will be in conversation with Pillow Scholar Melanie George in this hour-long presentation.

PillowTalks are a curated series of entertaining and informative discussions with choreographers, writers, filmmakers, and cultural experts. Moderated by Pillow Scholars, PillowTalks provide an opportunity to gain behind-the-scenes insight into the field of dance. Hour-long PillowTalks take place on-site at Blake's Barn Sundays at 3:30 p.m. at Blake's Barn (next to the Box Office), and are free and open to the public with advance registration. Recordings of online PillowTalks will be shared throughout the summer, premiering Fridays at 4pm.

ONLINE EVENTS

Brian Brooks / Moving Company

Online premiere with live chat Aug. 5 at 7:30 p.m. Eastern

Digital Screening Aug. 5-19

FREE

A "master of momentum" (Chicago Tribune), Brian Brooks has choreographed for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Miami City Ballet, Wendy Whelan, and his own New York-based company. In The Moving Company's first Pillow performance since 2013, they perform two world premieres and revisit *Closing Distance* which premiered just before the pandemic and hasn't been performed since.

Flight Study, a new work set to a dynamic string quartet piece by GRAMMY-Award winning classical composer Bryce Dessner, was developed in multiple residencies over the past year.

Brooks also performs a new untitled solo work for himself for the first time in over five years.

Closing Distance is set to a Pulitzer Prize-winning score by composer Caroline Shaw, and features

the eight-voice Williamstown, MA-based ensemble Roomful of Teeth. The program was shaped, in part, by the company's time spent at the Pillow Lab last October.

Virtual Class: Families Dance Together

Fri., Aug 6 at 3 p.m. Eastern

All Fridays July 9-Aug. 27- ONGOING

FREE

All levels and ages welcome. This class is offered free of charge.

Experience the joy of creating simple dances from the comfort of your home in this intergenerational 45-minute movement class, designed for movers of all ages to enjoy together. From kids to adults, we invite you to get your whole household moving! Led by artists of Dance Exchange.

No special preparation needed; simply register, gather your movers, click the Zoom class link, and start dancing. We encourage you to find a safe, open space to move in and make sure to modify any movement as needed.

Taking place at Jacob's Pillow since 2001, Families Dance Together is an annual, treasured movement program led by Artist Jeff Bliss, in collaboration with the Becket Arts Center.

Zoom link required to join class; link will be sent to RSVPs by 10:30am Eastern on the day of class or provided on the website after 10:30am the day of class.

PillowTalk: Build Me a Theater

Digital Screening of live, on-site event debuts Fri., Aug. 6 at 4 p.m. Eastern

FREE

Ted Shawn's instructions to architect Joseph Franz provide the title for an exhibition and this exploration of Pillow performance spaces, past and present. Architect David Croteau and other special guests discuss work now underway in the Ted Shawn Theatre and other recent developments.

Jacob's Pillow Curriculum in Motion® Institute Presentation

Sun., Aug. 1, 8, 15 at 11 a.m.

FREE, Held on Zoom.

Witness the work of Curriculum in Motion® Institute graduates as they share their application of Curriculum in Motion® in their communities. These 7-minute presentations tell their stories. Different presenters each week. *Additional event details to be announced.*

FESTIVAL 2021 EXHIBITS & ARCHIVES—ONGOING

Blake's Barn, June 30-Aug. 29, open Wed.-Sat. 12-8 p.m., Tuesday and Sunday 12-5 p.m.

FREE

Build Me a Theater; exhibition

Ted Shawn's instructions to architect Joseph Franz provide the title for this examination of all the Pillow's performance spaces, past and present. Artifacts and images from the Ted Shawn Theatre, Doris Duke Theatre, Henry J. Leir Stage, and the Bakalar Studio create a kaleidoscopic celebration of live performance at the Pillow.

Jacob's Pillow Archives/Norton Owen Reading Room

This spacious, informal library and reading room allows ticketed visitors to view videos, browse through books, access the Pillow's computer catalog, or peruse permanent collections of Pillow programs and photographs from the Pillow's Archives. The newly expanded Norton Owen Reading Room also features recent donations and more archival treasures from the Stephan Driscoll Collection. Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive, available on a popular touch-screen kiosk in the Reading Room, provides instant access to rare film clips ranging from the present day back to the 1930s.

ABOUT JACOB'S PILLOW:

Jacob's Pillow is a National Historic Landmark, recipient of the National Medal of Arts, and home to America's longest-running international dance festival, currently in the midst of its transition to becoming a year-round center for dance through a five-year strategic plan titled Vision '22. Jacob's Pillow rests on the traditional lands of the Agawam, the Nipmuc, the Pocumtuc, and the Mohican and we honor their elders past, present, and future. Each Festival includes more than 50 national and international dance companies and over 500 free and ticketed performances, talks, tours, classes, exhibits, events, and community programs. The School at Jacob's Pillow, one of the field's most prestigious professional dance training centers, encompasses the diverse disciplines of Contemporary Ballet, Contemporary, Tap, Photography, Choreography, and an annual rotating program. The Pillow also provides professional advancement opportunities across disciplines of arts administration, design, video, and production through seasonal internships and a year-round Administrative Fellows program. With growing community engagement programs, the Pillow serves as a partner and active citizen in its local community. The Pillow's extensive Archives, open year-round to the public and online at danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org, chronicle more than a century of dance in photographs, programs, books, costumes, audiotapes, and videos. Notable artists who have created or premiered dances at the Pillow include choreographers Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Alvin Ailey, Donald McKayle, Kevin McKenzie, Twyla Tharp, Ralph Lemon, Susan Marshall, Trisha Brown, Ronald K. Brown, Wally Cardona, Andrea Miller, and Trey McIntyre; performed by artists such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carmen de Lavallade, Mark Morris, Dame Margot Fonteyn, Edward Villella, Rasta Thomas, and hundreds of others. On March 2, 2011, President Barack Obama honored Jacob's Pillow with a National Medal of Arts, the highest arts award given by the United States Government, making the Pillow the first dance presenting organization to receive this prestigious award. The Pillow's Director since 2016 is Pamela Tatge. For more information, visit www.jacobspillow.org.

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