



Black Dance Stories Kicks off March 2021 Programming with 'The Professor of Tap' Dianne 'Lady Di' Walker and Choreographer/Dancer Gabri Christa, Thu Mar 4 at 6pm

Featured Guests Include Gesel Mason, Jamal Story, Sidra Bell, Archie Burnett, Natasha Diamond-Walker, and Trebien Pollard

(Brooklyn, NY/ March 4, 2021) – Black Dance Stories kicks off its March 2021 programming with tap legend Dianne "Lady Di" Walker and choreographer/dancer Gabri Christa on Thursday, March 4. The popular program will present new episodes during March featuring Black dancers, choreographers, movement artists, and creatives who use their work to raise societal issues and strengthen community. Black Dance Stories also welcomes Gesel Mason, Jamal Story, Sidra Bell, Archie Burnett, Natasha Diamond-Walker, and Trebien Pollard. The series streams live on [YouTube](#) Thursdays at 6 pm EST.

Conceived and co-created by performer, producer, and dance writer Charmaine Warren, the weekly discussion series showcases and initiates conversations with Black creatives that explore social, historical, and personal issues and highlight the African Diaspora's humanity in the mysterious and celebrated dance world. Black Dance Stories is presented in association with 651 ARTS.

Black Dance Stories Upcoming Live Episodes

Thursdays at 6 pm EST

- March 4, 2021 | Dianne Walker & Gabri Christa
- March 11, 2021 | Gesel Mason & Jamal Story
- March 18, 2021 | Sidra Bell & Archie Burnett
- March 25, 2021 | Natasha Diamond-Walker & Trebien Pollard

In January 2021, Black Dance Stories and 651 ARTS announced their partnership to co-present the series for the Spring 2021 season. The new partnership reflects Black Dance Stories' commitment to support, uphold, highlight, and celebrate Black creatives and mark the first time 651 presents an online series as part of its suite of programming. For more information, visit Black Dance Stories website for more information www.blackdancestories.org

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Please consider donating to *Black Dance Stories* in support of this free virtual program. Venmo your contribution to @BlackDanceStories.

Note to Editor

Sidra Bell is the founder of Sidra Bell Dance New York and a choreographer and educator who is currently a Master Lecturer at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, an Adjunct Professor at Marymount Manhattan College, a Lecturer at SUNY Purchase, and an Adjunct Professor at Ball State University in Indiana. She has been an artist in residence at Harvard University and Professor at Georgian Court University and Barnard College. Bell received a B.A. in History from Yale University and an MFA in Choreography from Purchase College Conservatory of Dance. She is the founder and creative director of the award-winning MODULE Laboratory, a New York City-based immersive platform for movement and theater artists. Bell has won several awards, notably a First Prize for Choreography at the Solo Tanz Theater Festival in Stuttgart, Germany, and a National Dance Project Production Award from the New England Foundation for the Arts. Her work has been seen throughout the United States and Denmark, France, Austria, Bulgaria, Turkey, Slovenia, Sweden, Germany, China, Canada, Aruba, Korea, Brazil, and Greece. Bell has created over 100 works notably for BODYTRAFFIC, Ailey II, The Juilliard School, WhimW'Him, Boston Conservatory at Berklee College, River North Dance Chicago, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Sacramento Ballet, Ballet Austin, Springboard Danse Montréal, and Alonzo King's LINES Ballet School, among others

Archie Burnett is a highly respected underground club dancer in New York City who was one of the prime dancers during the late 70s and 80s, becoming well known for his freestyle of Whacking/Waacking and Voguing. He was a close friend and assistant of the grandfather of Voguing, the legend Willi Ninja, and is up until now a striving force in the NYC dance scene. He is invited as a judge for battles, such as for the "Funkin Stylez" 2009, and is most directly responsible for birthing the European Vogue scene that we have today. He has appeared in the documentary film "Check Your Body at the Door" (2001) by Dr. Sally Sommer, (Professor of Dance at Florida State University), which explores the movement vocabulary of legendary N.Y. Chouse dancers, including Archie Burnett, Willi Ninja, Ejoy Wilson, Marjory Smarth and Conrad Rochester. Made possible in part by contributions from the National Endowment of the Arts, Dr. Sommer interviews dancers from the local NYC scene and captures now-vintage footage from the late 1980s and early 1990s. "Check Your Body at the Door" now stands as a historical document and testament to the early years of NYC's house dance culture. He has lectured at Yale University, New York University, and Boston Massachusetts University on club culture's relevance and importance. He has taught in over 26 countries and continues to provide possibilities for culture.

Gabri Christa's mission is to transform the understanding of humanity through the arts. Born and raised in the Caribbean island nation of Curaçao, Gabri is a member of a crossroads culture. Her work expresses the politics and poetics of interchanging races, rhythms, and histories. Multi-disciplinary and wide-ranging in form, Gabri's art-making spans film, choreography, performance, curation, writing, and more. Her subject matter helps determine her approach. When the eloquence and expressive power of dance started to feel limited, she turned to film. Now when she choreographs, she finds herself looking through a more dramaturgical lens. Writing, research, and taking part as a performer can influence the medium or direction of a work.

Natasha M. Diamond-Walker was born in Los Angeles, CA. Currently, she is a seventh-season soloist with the Martha Dance Graham Company and dances lead roles in Graham's Appalachian

Spring, Cave of the Heart, Ekstasis (solo), Herodiade, and Lamentation (solo). Natasha holds a special place in the company's history as she was the first African American woman to perform Graham's iconic solo Lamentation (1930) in America in 2020. While at Graham, she has worked with and originated roles in the ballets of Nacho Duato, Kyle Abraham, Sonya Tayeh, Annie-B. Parson, Pam Tanowitz, Maxine Doyle, and Bobbi Jene Smith-to name a few! Apart from her work with Graham, Ms. Diamond Walker is a guest artist with Big Dance Theater (N.Y.) and can be seen in many T.V./Film projects, including commercial campaigns for Hermes, Pure Barre, and GNC. She has co-starred on Fox's Gotham and Netflix's Friends from College. And most recently was featured in Moulin Rouge Reed Lupleau's film Sixth Borough, as well as, Boaz Yakin's Avivawith movement direction by Bobbi Jene Smith. Natasha is also a published author, movement consultant, and pilates instructor. She is a graduate of the Ailey/Fordham University BFA Program

Gesel Mason is a choreographer, performer, educator, and arts facilitator. She is Artistic Director of Gesel Mason Performance Projects and an Associate Professor at University of Texas at Austin. She was a member of Liz Lerman Dance Exchange and Ralph Lemon/Cross Performance Projects and has performed with Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, Repertory Dance Theatre of Utah, and under the direction of Chuck Davis, Jacek Łumiński (Silesian Dance Theatre), Murray Louis, and Victoria Marks. Mason's solo project, NO BOUNDARIES: Dancing the Visions of Contemporary Black Choreographers, has featured the work of Kyle Abraham, Robert Battle, Rennie Harris, Dianne McIntyre, Donald McKayle, Bebe Miller, David Rousséve, Reggie Wilson, Andrea E. Woods Valdéz, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. NO BOUNDARIES has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, NEFA's National Dance Project, and National Performance Network. Mason is also working on creating a digital archive, recently featured on NPR, to illuminate the unique inventions, legacies, and aesthetics of the choreographers and to reveal the tenacity, resilience, and diversity of Black dance across seven decades. In her work, Mason utilizes dance, theater, humor, and storytelling to bring visibility to voices unheard, situations neglected, or perspectives considered taboo. In 2017, Mason was one of four choreographers commissioned to create work for American Dance Festival's Footprints. In 2015, Mason received a Map Fund for her project antithesis, which challenged how female sexuality is perceived, performed, and (re)presented. Mason was one of six choreographers selected by the Joyce Theater for a Rockefeller Residency Initiative in 2011 and received the Millennium Stage Local Dance Commissioning Project from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 2007.

Trebién Pollard is a graduate of Florida A&M University, BS in Mathematics Education and NYU Tisch School of the Arts, MFA in Dance. He received training at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, Florida A & M University, Florida State University, Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance, and many gifted teachers and choreographers. Trebién has performed with many dance companies, including RIOULT, the MET (Metropolitan Opera Ballet), Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, Bebe Miller Company, Urban Bush Women, and Pilobolus. He has been on faculty at the American Dance Festival, Queens College, Adelphi University, the University of Southern Mississippi, Goucher College, Middlebury College, Marymount Manhattan College, Montclair State University, and the University at Buffalo. Currently, Trebién is an Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University and a licensed certified **GYROTONIC®** and **GYROKINESIS®** trainer.

Jamal Story trained at the Lula Washington Dance Theatre. He holds degrees in Dance Performance and T.V./Radio Communications from Southern Methodist University. He performed with Complexions, Dallas Black Dance Theater, Fort Worth/Dallas Ballet, Donald Byrd/the Group, Madonna's 2001 *Drowned World Tour*, Complexions, and Cher's *Living Proof: The Farewell Tour* and is currently the dance and aerial captain for her *Here We Go Again* tour. In addition to workshop teaching appearances at several dance training programs, Jamal taught as an interim professor at the University of Missouri Kansas City. Chair of the National Dance Committee for

SAG-AFTRA, Jamal is the author of *12:34* and *Toss in the Ether*, both available on his website <http://www.jamalstory.com/online-book-store>.

Dianne “Lady Di” Walker is one of a handful of internationally acclaimed women in the field of tap dance. She has been honored with numerous awards throughout her career, including several for lifetime achievements in dance. She has performed with tap masters Gregory Hines, Steve Condos, Jimmy Slyde, and her mentor, Leon Collins to name a few. Performances include the Tony award-winning “Black and Blue” in New York and in Paris. As the assistant choreographer/dance captain, she helped to remount the show before the latest European and American tours. As a soloist, she regularly performs clubs, jazz festivals and tap festivals across the U.S. and abroad. Film credits include the movie “Tap”, the PBS special “Great Performances: Tap Dance in America,” the PBS production of *BLACK AND BLUE* directed by Robert Altman; PBS Great Performances:” Tap Dance in America”; Documentary, “Honi Coles, The Class Act of Tap”; Documentary, “Songs Unwritten...Leon Collins” and as the principal commentator in the PBS release, (WTTW-Chicago) “JUBA”.

Black Dance Stories (BDS) is a community working together to support, uphold, highlight, and celebrate Black creatives. They are committed to providing a platform to amplify Black creatives’ voices and stimulate conversations around timely issues across the African Diaspora. Through its free, public weekly story sharing series and a variety of education and networking programs, Black Dance Stories fosters community, solidarity, cultural exchange and highlights the work and humanity of Black artists. It launched in June 2021 in response to Black dance artists’ need to talk about life during COVID-19 and support the Black Lives Matter movement. The series is consistent with Black artists’ tradition of finding a way to amplify their voices during turbulent times. When civil, moral, and social freedoms are challenged and stifled, Black artists find ways to use their talents as activism. Founder and co-creator Charmaine Warren reminds weekly viewers: “Black dance artists have not been quiet since. Black dance artists have been doing the work. Black dance artists continue to make work. To stay involved, we will hold weekly impromptu discussions and tell stories—Black Dance Stories. This is one action—we will stay involved.”

Black Dance Stories has featured pioneering dance and movement artists including Kyle Abraham, Oluwadamilare “Dare” Ayorinde, Camille A. Brown, Ayodele Casel, nora chipaumire, Lorenzo “Rennie” Harris, Raja Feather Kelly, Bebe Miller, Kyle Marshall, Maria Bauman Morales, Okwui Okpokwasili, David Roussève, Abdel R. Salaam, Jason Samuels Smith, Marjani Forté-Saunders, Jawole Willo Jo Zollar, and more. The producing team consists of Black creatives in the arts, including Founder and Co-Creator Charmaine Warren, Co-Creator Kimani Fowlin, Graphic Designer Tony Turner, Publicist Cynthia Tate, Web Designer Gabe Dekoladenu, Director of Digital Media Makeda Smith, Video Producer Kaitlyn Chandler, and Director of Finance and Development Renee Redding-Jones. Antonio Burkett (International Interpreting) and Shannon Morrison (Morr Interpreting) have worked together to provide ASL interpreting services for Black Dance Stories.

Founded in Brooklyn, NY in 1988, the mission of **651 ARTS** is to deepen awareness of and appreciation of contemporary performing arts and culture of the African Diaspora, and to provide professional and creative opportunities for artists of African descent.

651’s signature programs have featured pioneering Black choreographers from around the world including Germaine Acogny, Nora Chipaumire, Carmen de Lavallade, Diane McIntyre, Bebe Miller, Abdel R. Salaam and Jawole Willo Jo Zollar. As part of its commitment to the furtherance of conversations and celebration of Diaspora music, the institution has presented dialogues and performances by Somi, Hugh Masekela, and Grammy-winning artist Betty Carter, to name a few. Theatrical and text-based works by Anna Deavere Smith, Sekou Sundiata, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Ntozake Shange, Okwui Okpokwasili and Maria Bauman are representative of the hundreds of

artists and productions featuring solo creations, collaborations, emerging artists, and works-in-development all produced by 651's visionary leadership in the field of Black performance.

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