

Dance Theatre of Harlem comes to Philly

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For nearly five decades, the Dance Theatre of Harlem has been a leading dance institution of unparalleled global acclaim that uses the art form of classical ballet to change people's lives.

Inspired by the example of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring new opportunity to the lives of the young people in the Harlem neighborhood in which he grew up, Arthur Mitchell, along with the late Karel Shook, founded the Dance Theatre of Harlem in the basement of a church in 1969. Mitchell, who had found success as a principal dancer with the renowned New York City Ballet, understood the power of training in a classical art form to bring discipline and focus to a challenged community.

Philadelphia-native Robert Garland is the company's former principal dancer, and upon his retirement from the stage, was appointed by Mitchell and became the organization's first Resident Choreographer. He has also choreographed for New York City Ballet, The Royal Ballet, and Oakland Ballet, among many others.

After creating a work for the Dance Theatre of Harlem School Ensemble, Mitchell invited Garland to create a work for The Dance Theatre of Harlem Company.

Garland - who declared at the start of the interview that he was "Mt. Airy ... born and bred!" - has commercial work that includes music videos, commercials and short films, featuring the children's television show Sesame Street, a Nike commercial featuring New York Yankee Derek Jeter, the NAACP Image Awards, a short film for designer Donna Karan, and the "Charmin Cha-Cha" for Procter and Gamble.

"I always came naturally to dancing," recalled Garland. "My family was my wildly musical talented — my mother still plays for her church — so, I have always had music around me and, I have always had lots of cousins where dancing was a special thing." The proud Mt. Airy

native added: "Remember, it was that was the era of 'Soul Train' so you had to be able to dance if you were going to be cool at all."

Today, the Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH) has been re-launched under the leadership of a second generation of artists.

The return of the DTH company comes after an eight-year hiatus that allowed for a systematic strengthening of the organization, including rebuilding the board of directors under the leadership of Chairman Kendrick F. Ashton, Jr, revitalized programs and increased fundraising capacity.

Artistic Director Virginia Johnson was a founding member and former prima ballerina and Executive Director Laveen Naidu was a choreographer and the former school director, both continue Mitchell's vision to build community, inspire and uplift through the power of art.

Returning to his roots is coming full circle for Garland. "Oh, it is super-duper special," said the choreographer. "I first saw the Dance Theatre of Harlem at the Shubert Theater when I was a teenager, and I went to every single performance and I remember all the dancers — one of them being Virginia Johnson who is now are artistic director. And actually, myself and Virginia performed together at the Shubert Theater once I had joined the company, so it was very interesting being in the theater that I once sat in as a teenager watching the Dance Theatre of Harlem... Yeah... Pretty amazing!"

With a carefully selected and diverse group of new dancers with awe-inspiring talent and promising careers, DTH is poised to reclaim its rightful place in the world of ballet.

"We have a new group of dancers that are completely ready and eager keep the name of Dance Theatre of Harlem alive in the world and beyond," Garland said.

Audiences will enjoy such DTH favorites as Garland's "Return," Christopher Huggins' "In The Mirror Of Her Mind" and Donald Byrd's "Contested Space," as well as works

by Balanchine and world-premiere contemporary ballets, including Garland's latest work, "Gloria," to music by Francis Poulenc.

"I am grateful to be able to continue the work, artistry and traditions established by our founders Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook," said Virginia Johnson. "The story that I hope Dance Theatre of Harlem will tell again is of the power of the arts to transform lives. We look forward to inspiring a new generation of dancers who are prepared to give our audiences—and this art form—everything they've got."

The newly relaunched Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH) wraps up Dance Celebration's 30th anniversary season, presented by Dance Affiliates and the Annenberg Center. Performances take place at the Annenberg Center, 3680 Walnut St., on Thursday, May 16 at 7:30 p.m.; Friday, May 17 at 8 p.m.; Saturday, May 18 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; and Sunday, May 19 at 3 p.m.

Tickets are \$20-\$75 (prices are subject to change). For tickets or for more information, visit AnnenbergCenter.org or call (215) 898-3900. Tickets can also be purchased in person at the Annenberg Center Box Office.

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