

## Letter from the Editor

We're back. This issue features Chuck Davis, artistic director of the Chuck Davis Dance Company, the international African dance company that got started right here in the boogie down. He enlightens us about life and times before the dance boom of the 70's and Hip Hop. Find out about one of our finest teachers, a forefather of Bronx dance who has given us important information to anyone interested in Bronx dance history.

It's amazing the amount of dance performances and news that occurred during these last 3 months since our last issue. Get a load of this list! BRIO (Bronx Recognizes Its Own) winner Afua Hall is currently working with Philadanco. Christopher Campbell came in from dancing with the Metropolitan Opera. From planet Alvin Ailey, Bronx-born Richard Rivera uses BAAD! as his incubator. My own company, Typical Theatre, presented a Dreamscape at BAAD! Kim Vasquez' West African influenced KUSH tore the Bronx up. Afro Dominican group Caracol kept its tradition alive and brought it right here. The Virsky Ukrainian National Dance Company brightened up the season at Lehman Center for the Performing Arts. Alice Tierstien directed her Fieldston Dance Company who presented works by Doug Elkins. Eight dance companies from the Bronx dance community came together for the 3rd Annual Bronx Dances for DRA concert. Claire Barratt's Cilla Vee Movement Projects lit up the Botanical Gardens. The Point CDC hosted an all important tribute to Xiomara. And Retumba brought down the spirits of the Three Kings at the Bronx zoo. And, don't forget about those Bronx Nutcrackers from Contemporary Ballet Theatre and Bronx Dance Theatre. Need I say more...read on.

-Arthur Aviles, Editor-in-Chief

# **Credits**

Arthur Aviles
Editor-in-Chief, Director of the Bronx Dance Coalition

Charles Rice-Gonzalez Assistant to the Editor

Alethea Pace Online Editor, Magazine Designer

Special thanks to Chuck Davis, Thelma Horton, Ivye and Eric Booth.

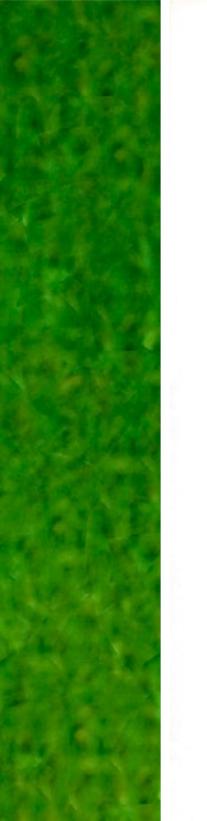
Photos courtesy of Chuck Davis and The African American Dance Ensemble.

Thanks to the Association of Hispanic Arts (AHA) and Melissa Ngirailemesang. We would also like to thank the volunteers for their support.

We appreciate feedback and/or additions to the magazine. If you would like to join the volunteer staff, please contact us at 718-842-5223.

This project is made possible with funds from the Bronx Council on the Arts through the Ford Foundation and with funds from the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Bronx Dance Magazine and Bronx Dance Coalition are projects of Arthur Aviles Typical Theatre and operate from the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD!), 841 Barretto Street, Bronx, NY 10474. BAAD! was founded by dancer/choreographer Arthur Aviles with assistance from the Point CDC.



## Minutes: September 21, 2004 Attending: Arthur Aviles, Claire Barratt, Melissa Calderon, Jane Gabriels, Alethea Pace, Pepper and Kimberly Vasquez

AP: Update on what people have done so far.

CB: Called directory and left messages for people to participate-performance, production or volunteer.

AP: So far performers are AATT, cilla\_vee, Kush, CBT, Physual and Opus.

KV: I'll ask at Bronx Dance Theater, maybe the belly dance teacher or the flamenco teacher. How about the students?

AP: We were considering a separate young people's event.

CB: Darkeem is interested in performing as well.

KV: Last year was the reception by donation or did you buy?

CB: Not as many people donated as I expected. BCA donated \$100 for food. We asked one dish per performer. Liquor was from George Acevado.

KV: Did you arrange for Sherman to play?

CB: That was Pepper. I didn't have as many connections as I do now after living here in the Bronx longer.

KV: I'll approach the same place that catered the 1<sup>st</sup> coalition meeting. Also, BCA and George for donations.

CB: Same location for reception?

P: Yes, it will be held in my studio. Was converted from my office last year.

AP: Make sure you let Gail (landlady) know. There was miscommunication last time.

P: Last year we created a sponsorship letter to take to supermarkets. Bravo's might donate. Ask for Peter and go with a list of needs.

CB: I went to the chain stores but it takes a long time to deal with bureaucracy.

P: Start asking now for next year. Going to the same people each time starts to wear on them. Maybe go with BxDC press kit.

KV: How about the postcards?

P: Poster was created by DRA and reduced to postcard size. Then, printing was donated by Leo at ProPrinting.

AA: Everyone should submit a photo for the postcard and then the DRA designer will choose.

P: Deadline for pictures is Friday the 24<sup>th</sup> so we can have the cards by the following week.

AA: Joy Dawn was interested in having her kids perform.
P: Maybe next year there can be a child event preceding the adult performance.

KV: Invite political figures.

MC: Are you opposed to a beer sponsor? Last year the Brooklyn Brewery donated to the Mott Haven Arts Festival. Absolut is another possibility.

KV: Sponsors won't be on the postcard if we contact them

P: We'll put them on the program.

AA: People who can't participate can buy 2 tickets.

CB: Who is the production crew?

AA: I'm one of them.

AP: Joy Dawn volunteered.

AA: BAAD! could use one more person for setup and breakdown.

CB: Also a sound person.

KV: I'll use BCA contacts to resend the volunteer letter.

MC: I should connect with Charles and his press list for sending the press releases.

MC: Will there be items for sale? Maybe create at package-goodie bags.

JG: Raffle the tickets.

CB: Sell it at the door. Claire will make basket.

KV: Tickets-\$1 for one and \$6 for five.

MC: Include stuff from sponsors.

P: Additional letter to ask for donations for gift basket. Drop off at BAAD!

KV: Ask BCA artisans.

JG: Difficult time for me. Merian Soto is performing that weekend at DTW. I'll try to find a performer.

# Dance @ BAAD! for DRA 3: The Bronx Dance Coalition's 3rd Annual Benefit for Dancers Responding to AIDS



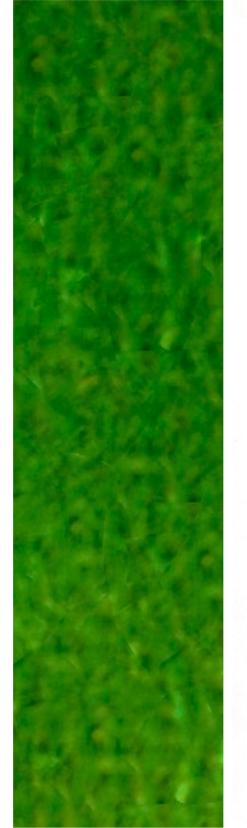
Andrea Blackwel

Opus Dance Theatre finds it necessary to participate in the [Dancers Responding to AIDS] event, because as performing artists, we are losing many of our colleagues, friends and family to AIDS. It seems as if the more educated and aware of AIDS we are as a community of artists, the more people we can reach and inform about this uphill battle. The performing arts are a strong venue to reach people and seek support about an illness that is slowly continuing to eliminate people in our society. We believe this venue on 10/29/2004 at BAAD will inform, uplift, and reach a new generation of artists who will need to know the struggle is a never ending war, and we all must support one another, for the battle is not over.

INSPIRIT, a dance company is a strong supporter of Dancers Responding to Aids. We believe that without their tireless efforts so many of our colleagues in the dance world and theater community would not be able to afford the medications they need to treat their illnesses, feed themselves, or afford to pay their rent. DRA is an exceptional organization who strives to bridge gaps in healthcare for low or no income artist infected with HIV and AIDS. INSPIRIT is proud to be a part of their effort in any way necessary.



Paloma McGregor





Chuck Davis

The African American Dance Ensemble seeks to preserve and share the finest traditions of African and African American dance and music through research, education and entertainment. With our motto, "peace, love, respect for everybody," we celebrate traditional African culture, aesthetics and values as resources for all people and utilize these resources to encourage interracial cooperation, cross-cultural understanding and societal analysis.

# ORIGINS OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN DANCE ENSEMBLE

The Early Years

The story of the African American Dance Ensemble begins with Chuck Davis, a native of Raleigh, North Carolina, whose path from Raleigh's all black Ligon High School through Howard University's Theater and Dance Program eventually led him to New York City and the world of professional dance.

Chuck's first job as a regular member of a professional troupe came in 1959 when he joined the Klara Harrington Dance Company. From that point through 1968 he danced professionally with a number of modern, jazz, Afro-Cuban and African companies. Among these are the Olatunji Dance Company, the Eleo Pomare Dance Company, and the Bernice Johnson Dance Company. These were learning years and Chuck learned from the best. The list of mentors is long and impressive. Thelma Hill, Eleo Pomare, Jean Leon Destine, Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus are among those who make the connections between African and Western experiences.

#### The African Connection

Chuck Davis' connection to Africa began with his birthright, but the artistic connection began with a performance of the Sierra Leone National Dance Company at the New York World's Fair in 1964. Study in Africa became a goal. The opportunity came in 1977 when the Chuck Davis Dance Company participated in FESTAC, an international exposition and celebration of African culture, held in Lagos, Nigeria. Each year thereafter, he has returned to the continent for further study of traditional dance styles and music.

### The Chuck Davis Dance Company

In 1968, the Chuck Davis Dance Company was founded in New York City with Chuck Davis as the Artistic Director. The company performed to rave reviews in the New York area and elsewhere in the United States, gradually establishing itself as one of the nation's premier Afro-American dance companies. This was the company that came to Durham, North Carolina in 1980 at the invitation of the American Dance Festival. It was a case of "love at first sight." There was no letting go. Chuck Davis, the American Dance Festival, and the local community have generated a synergy larger than any of them alone could have achieved. Stages and auditoriums could not contain the performances. The environment became the stage, and the audiences became the performers. "Peace, love, respect for everybody," became the simple but powerful message the art was bringing to the community.

## The African American Dance Ensemble

Each season from 1980 to 1984 the Chuck Davis Dance Company was in residence with the American Dance Festival's Community Services Program and each season the participants in this outreach program grew. By 1983 it had become obvious that there was a developing core of local dancers whose levels of proficiency were approaching those of the professionals from whom they were learning. The African American Dance Ensemble was born. The Ensemble's "arrival" came in February 1984 when they gave their first full concert as an independent professional company. In the 1985 season of the American Dance Festival, the African American Dance Ensemble stood on its own and took its place among the other established companies when it premiered two new Chuck Davis works, "Saturday Night, Sunday Morning," and "Drought," both of which were commissioned by the American Dance Festival.

The Ensemble is comprised nine musicians and dancers under the leadership of Artistic Director, Chuck Davis, a Musical Director; a twelve member working Board of Directors, committed to the further development of the Ensemble; and an administrative staff of four professionals. The organization has constituted itself as a nonprofit corporation.

-Taken from The African American Dance Ensemble Website: http://users.vnet.net/aade/mem.html

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Lydia Perez-Assoc. Director

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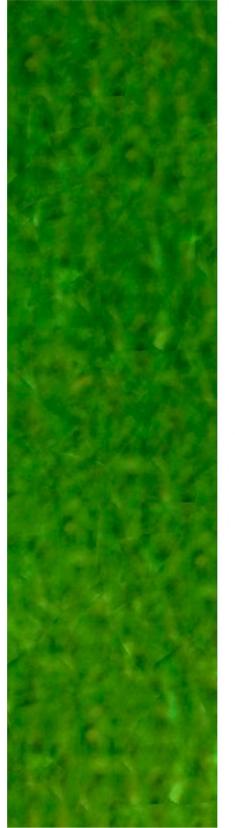
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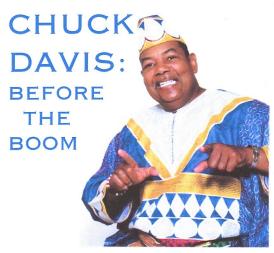
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# **COLLEGES AND**

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(Continued page 9)





IN A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW WITH MR. DAVIS THE BRONX DANCE MAGAZINE LEARNED ABOUT BRONX DANCE AND COMMUNITY IN THE 1960'S FROM A DANCE LEGEND.

Arthur Aviles: I just want to let this whole group of Bronx dancers know, (I'm one of them), know who came before, so that we are not just re-inventing the wheel again. I wanted to ask you a couple questions about what your involvement was in the Bronx and how you can give that to our new audiences here. I was wondering, in your own words, could you tell me what your involvement was and who you were in the Bronx?

**Chuck Davis:** Well, for one the Chuck Davis Dance Company started in the Bronx at the South Bronx Community Action Theater.

AA: Where was that?

CD: This was back in the 60's right on Brook Ave. We began as a community class, as a way of pulling in some of the gang members from Patterson projects. It was our effort to reach out, and in attempting to reach out it began to take on a life of its own. Ms. Pruitt and the staff pulled together an extremely professional staff that was not only experts in

their fields but also had intellectual knowledge and the desire to reach young people. In many instances you would have the drama department over here and the dance department over there. At The South Bronx we had a unified ensemble. In other words, the kids did not look at it as, 'oh, I'm a dancer' or 'I'm an actor.' They had to be involved in everything. And my particular expertise was in the dance and oh I had such a grand time. As the company developed under the aegis of Bess Pruitt under the aegis of the South Bronx Community Action Theatre the Bronx began to claim us as its own and in doing so they supported us. Whenever we did little performances, wherever we were, they would show up. It got to the point where dance companies from Manhattan were coming over to the Bronx. They knew we had developed a support system over there.

**AA:** That's great! Did you have young men and young women?

**CD:** Oh yes our classes were about half and half. We had about 25 young men and 25 to 30 young women.

**AA:** That's amazing because you know how difficult it is to get men.

CD: You see we were #1. I'm a male and I'm 6ft 6inches. So they had that image and I was pretty wild so when they broke, I would break. If I had to demonstrate the female side, no problem. If I had to demonstrate the male side, no problem. I was able to answer the question. Now, we were dealing with traditional African dance. We had lots of support from the ballet, from the dance companies of Brazil, from different companies in Africa. The young men and women were able to differentiate between movements. Different dances were done for different reasons. So I insisted on everybody learning everything because one of these days you might decide to teach. If you are going to teach then you can not be a one sided teacher.

AA: What year did you start in the Bronx?

CD: 1967.

AA: Could you tell us about the difficulties you

CD: I think the difficulties would be the same that a young company would have no matter where they were. You see, we had the luxury of being involved with the community action theater. So because of that we had a lot of professional support and many of the pitfalls were circumvented because we had people who had been there and done that. Most of us who would teach there or were involved were also with Joan Miller up there at Lehman. She was responsible for putting a lot of people out there. And then you had different centers that had their own African dance departments and began to grow once they saw what was happening at the theatre. More is not always better. You had so many people who had a voice who wanted to say this and who wanted to say that. They began to step on each others toes, no pun intended, of course. In doing so, it began to divide the audience that was coming along at that time when we were really beginning to understand and know who

we are and where this came from. So, as a result, anyone from Africa became a god and if they could move one muscle in rhythm then they became 2 gods. And as you have witnessed, I'm sure, many of the dancers coming in from Africa learned their choreography just like anyone else learns theirs, which means they would

learn the combinations, learn the songs by rote. But, when they got over here they would pretend they knew every damn thing. So you would have one thing being taught over here and another thing being taught over there. Then when we all came together, there began to be this friction to divide everybody. But I think as time went on and people began to do more and more research they began to understand what we were up against.

**AA:** But you know it's as if what you did is help to create community. Because, you know, community is like almost a natural thing where people start dividing each other. It seems as if you gave that base of an understanding of

might have had in the Bronx?

how people could do things and they will do them differently and then they will start to divide up and create factions and that's a real dialogue.

**CD:** That's what was happening by the time we got up to Bronx Community College (BCC). BCC gave us a home and we were there doing master classes. We had all this space. This was 1976. Back in those days, many of the Chuck Davis Dance Company's most famous works were done there at BCCD:

**AA:** You are a person who could go anywhere you want in the world. How did you get from North Carolina to the Bronx?

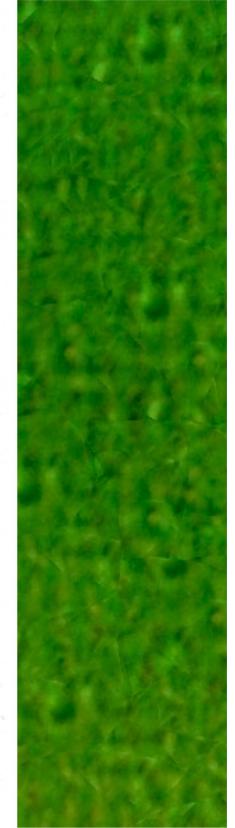
CD: I was in the military. Then I left the military and I was in Washington DC and I came into NY through Olatunji and others and by doing so I got to be dance captain of Olatunji's company. Spike Mafatto was from South

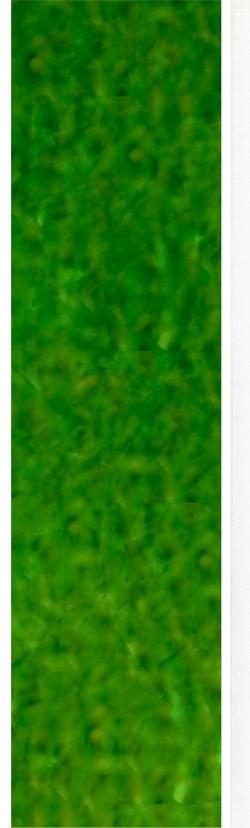
Africa and he brought all of that energy in and went to Julliard. I used to sneak in to Julliard and take classes with Dudley. It was Mary Hinkston's class every morning. I wasn't enrolled there. I would just sneak in but that was before the barns on the doors and all that stuff.

**AA:** Whenever I go to different places outside of the

United States and tell people that I live in the Bronx, their eyes go crazy and they think that it is a strange thing. And they ask me if I'm ok. I'm wondering what you think of the reputation of the Bronx back then in relationship to its reputation now.

CD: People react to what they don't know. That's the way I look at it. What's that movie? Fort Apache and several others, that's what they see. That's right. It's the same thing in the Bronx. The only difference in the Bronx is the fact that there were movies made, not about the positive issues but it was all about the negative. People don't really want to hear about the good that is happening.





(From pg. 7)

**AA:** It's the sign of the times not the Bronx, right?

CD: Right it's any where you go these days. A lot of that started to happen at the end of the 1960's when people started with 'this is the age of Aquarius.' The emphasis was not on learning. The emphasis was on being. And that made a big difference. People began to see how much I can get over rather than how much I can digest. In that way it was all about persona rather than what it is that one knows. During that age of Aquarius, they did not take the time to learn. They took the time to be. And it hurt everyone and it wasn't until recently, like in the 90's, that people began to realize that there are five generations of functional illiterates.

**AA:** Do you feel there is anything you can directly point to that inspired any of your dance pieces here in the Bronx?

**CD:** I don't have a piece like that. All I can say is that the energy in the Bronx, when I was

there, was conducive to my doing choreography and even though I might not have taken on a subject, the Bronx was there.

**AA:** Is there is anything you would like to say to our Bronx Dance Coalition?

CD: I would like to say that Bronx dancers should not get caught up in the Bronx but recognize the fact that dance is beyond the boundaries. You are learning there. Take what you learn and go out and share it so that people can change that image of the Bronx. When you see that beautiful positive energy coming out, then Fort Apache and all that stuff, people will begin to look at it for what it is, as a movie.

**AA:** Wow, good inspirational words and we are going to spread them.

**CD:** You just put it in there and let everybody know to show up come on over. Let's have a grand reunion.

Black History Month at Bronx Community College presents

Chuck Davis and the African American Dance Ensemble

Thursday, February 10, 2005

Master Class/ Alumni Gym, 10:30-11:30am

Performance/ GML Auditorium, 12:15-1:15pm

Tickets are free but reservations are required.

Contact Dr. Suzan Moss at smoss7@verizon.net



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# OUTSIDE THE BRONX 2005

#### **Fieldston Dance Company**

From the Inside Out January 28 @ 12pm 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y (on Lexington Avenue 212-413-5553

## Inspirit, A Dance Company

2005 APAP Showcase
January 7 @ 7PM, January 10 @9pmThe Joan Weill Center for Dance Alvin Ailey Studios
405 West 55th Street, NYC

#### Pepatian

Bronx Dance Express featuring Arthur Aviles Typical Theatre, Antonio Ramos, Merian Soto, Jessie Flores, Richard Rivera and Full Circle January 8 @10PM APAP, City Center, Studio 5

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Sat		4	Contemporary Ballet Theatre: Nutcacker @Hostos, 3pm. 7:30pm	18	25	
ïF.		m	D Contemporary Dutracker @Hostos, 10:15am, 7:30pm	17	24	31
Tho		2	OContemporary Ballet Theatre: Nutracker @Hostos, 12:15 Inside Out: Fieldston Dance Co. presents work by Doug Elkins @ Fieldston School, 7:30	1 6 Pepatian presents Cout of La Botanica with Arthur Aviles, @ Pregones, La Casa Blanca	23	30
Wed	004	_	∞	15	22	29
Tue	mber 2004		7	14	21	28
Mon	emb		9	13	20	27
Sun	Dece		2	12	1 9 Вголх Dance Theatre: The Nutracker @ Lehman High School, 4pm	26

Sat	_	$\infty$	15	22	29	
.E.		7	41	21	28	
Thu		9	13	20	27	
Wed	10	5	12	19	26	
Tue	ary 2005	4	1	18	25	
Mon	Jary	က	10	17	24	31
Sun	Janu	2	6	16	23	30 Arthur Aviles Golia Cruz/Tito Puente Songbook Preview @BAADI, 2pm

Sat		22	2 Opus Dance Theater @ The Point, 8pm \$12, \$5	19	26	
Æ		Forces of Nature @ Hostos Main Theater, 10:15am and 12:15pm \$5	11	18	25	
Thu		က	1 OChuck Davis & The African American Dance Ensemble@ Bronx Community College, Master Class, 10:30am Performance, 12:15am Email smoss/@verizon.net for reservations	17	24	
Wed	05	2	6	16	23	
Tue	February 2005		$\infty$	15	22	
Mon	Judr)		7	14	21	28
Sun	Febr		9	13	20	27 Trinity Irish Dance 27 Company @ Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 2pm \$25