



Photo: Vibecke Dahle

UPROOTED

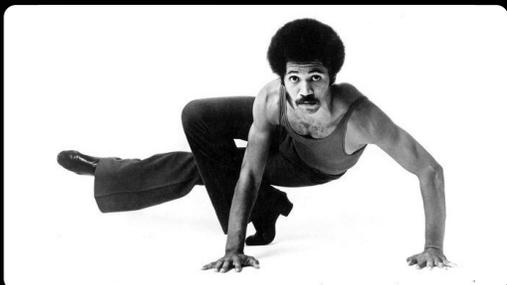
The Journey of Jazz Dance

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- *Uprooted* is a documentary that examines the history, lineage, and future progressions of jazz dance (2020, dir. Khadifa Wong).
- The film features, among others, USC Kaufman professors E. Moncell Durden and Saleemah E. Knight.

WED | 2.8.23 | 7 PM
Ray Stark Family Theatre

SELECTED DANCE ARTISTS MENTIONED IN UPROOTED



Fred Benjamin



Pepsi Bethel



Katherine Dunham



Frank Hatchett



JoJo Smith

FRED BENJAMIN (1944–2013) danced with the Talley Beatty Company from 1963 to 1966 and founded the Fred Benjamin Dance Company in 1968. “Benjamin added ballet to Beatty’s modern, energized style and helped popularize the genre known as ballet-jazz,” writes the African American Registry. The Fred Benjamin Dance Company frequently did neighborhood performances on flatbed trucks as part of the Harlem Cultural Council’s DanceMobile. Benjamin was chair of the jazz department at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center and also taught at the Clark Center for the Performing Arts, among many other institutions.

PEPSI BETHEL (1918–2002) practiced authentic jazz dance in social dance venues such as the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem and created his own ensemble, the Southland 400 Club. He is known for iconic lindy hop choreography. Bethel learned to dance “from the streets and from the ballrooms,” he told the *New York Times* in 1978. Bethel performed on Broadway in *Kwamina*, choreographed by Agnes de Mille, and taught at the Alvin Ailey dance school and the Clark Center for the Performing Arts in the 1960s and ’70s. In 1960, he founded the Authentic Jazz Dance Theater to preserve and perform original jazz dance styles.

KATHERINE DUNHAM (1909–2006) was a dancer, choreographer, and anthropologist who was committed to tracing the roots of Black culture. Dunham’s groundbreaking and influential choreography merged African American, Caribbean, African, and South American movement styles with ballet; she did foundational work in dance anthropology; and she founded the Dunham School of Dance and Theatre (later the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research), whose “interdisciplinary curriculum was considered radical at the time and remains unique today” (“Katherine Dunham: A Life in Dance,” Library of Congress).

FRANK HATCHETT (1935–2013) was a founder of Broadway Dance Center and a legendary jazz dance teacher who had a profound influence on a generation of dancers. Hatchett’s signature VOP style brought together “strength, funk, and individual interpretation” (broadwaydancecenter.com).

JOJO SMITH (1938–2019) co-founded Jo Jo’s Dance Factory with his wife, Sue Samuels. Known as a “choreographer to the stars,” Smith danced on Broadway in the 1964 revival of *West Side Story*, served as a dance consultant on *Saturday Night Fever*, and trained dancers including Debbie Allen.

ABOUT THE PANELISTS

Khadifa Wong is an award-winning director. Born in London, Wong was a dancer before moving into film and theatre directing. Recent theatre credits include *Five Plays and Changing Destiny* as the Jerwood Assistant Director working with Kwame Kwei-Armah (*Young Vic*); *Rockets and Blue Lights* (National Theatre); *How I Learned To Swim, I'm Your Rope, La Gringa, Adventurous, and 15 Heroines* (Jermyn Street Theatre); and *Black Women Dating White Men* (Drayton Arms Theatre). Her debut documentary, *Uprooted: The Journey of Jazz Dance*, is currently screening on HBO Max.

E. Moncell Durden is a dance educator, choreographer, ethnographer, embodied historian, and author. Durden is an associate professor of practice in the USC Kaufman School of Dance, specializing in pedagogical practices that prove cultural and historical context in what he calls the “morphology of Afro-kinetic memory.” A highly sought-after instructor, Durden teaches practical and theoretical classes in the U.S. and abroad, and is an expert in locking, house, hip-hop, authentic jazz, and party dances from 1900 to the present. In 2010, Durden founded Intangible Roots, an organization dedicated to the education and preservation of Afro-Diasporic social dance formations.

Saleemah E. Knight is an internationally recognized interdisciplinary artist, choreographer, TV personality, lifestyle influencer, and professional dancer. A former student of Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and trained in the Gus Giordano jazz dance technique, Knight graduated magna cum laude with a BFA from the University of Arizona School of Dance and received her MFA as a graduate fellow at UC Irvine’s Claire Trevor School of the Arts. Her performance credits include concert works of renowned choreographers Bill T. Jones, Donald Byrd, Bebe Miller, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar. She has also performed commercially on the Daytime Emmys, ABC’s *Dancing with the Stars*, the Billboard Music Awards, Country Music Television’s *MADE TV* series, and Disney’s *The Lion King* Broadway musical, and with Beyoncé, Chris Brown, Tyrese, and Jillian Michaels, as well as provided choreography for Daddy Yankee, Wiz Khalifa, and many more. She has taught contemporary jazz master classes globally for conservatory programs such as Complexions Contemporary Ballet Academy and was an invited guest master teacher for St. Petersburg Russia’s DAR Jazz Festival. She is also a special guest instructor for Tremaine Dance Conventions and has been an invited presenter, red carpet guest, and judge for the World Choreography Awards. Knight is a full-time professor and an original founding faculty at the USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance. Simultaneous to her career, she began building the curricular foundations of the school in 2014.



Khadifa Wong



E. Moncell Durden



Saleemah E. Knight

THE SAVOY BALLROOM

The Savoy Ballroom, called the “Heartbeat of Harlem” by Langston Hughes, was a venue for music and dancing on Lenox Avenue between 140th and 141st Streets from 1926 to 1958. Dances including the Lindy Hop, a major part of jazz dance history and tradition, were developed and popularized at the Savoy. The Savoy Ballroom was also an important space in the development of jazz music. Rare among ballrooms at the time, the Savoy had a no-discrimination policy and was one of the first integrated public spaces in the United States.





A.I.M by Kyle Abraham: *An Untitled Love*



Nikole Hannah-Jones



Debbie Allen Dance Academy

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What factors shape how history is constructed and passed along? What are some of the factors that have affected who has been canonized, and who has been left out of, jazz dance histories?
- Uprooted* brings up questions about communal ownership and sharing of culture versus individual ownership of a style or technique. What values, philosophies, or worldviews underlie these different ways of thinking about dance and other art forms?
- How has racism influenced the history of jazz dance?
- What has been the impact of the AIDS epidemic on jazz dance?
- What current events or circumstances might be influencing the trajectory of jazz dance today?



USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- 2/15/23:** [A.I.M by Kyle Abraham: *An Untitled Love*](#)
- 2/21/23:** [An Evening with Nikole Hannah-Jones](#)
- 2/22/23:** [John Singleton: A Celebration—*2 Fast 2 Furious*](#)
- 3/5/23:** [John Singleton: A Celebration—*Hustle & Flow*](#)
- 3/5/23:** [John Singleton: A Celebration—*Black Snake Moane*](#)
- Classes and performances at the USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance
[kaufman.usc.edu](https://www.kaufman.usc.edu)
- Intangible Roots
intangiblroots.org
- Debbie Allen Dance Academy
Debbiealldanceacademy.com

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

JAVIER GARIBAY of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Uprooted: The Journey of Jazz, jazz music, and the history of jazz dance. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS

- ◉ Lindsay Guarino and Wendy Oliver, [*Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches*](#) (Florida: Univ. Press of Florida, 2014).
- ◉ Janice D. LaPointe-Crump and Kimberly Staley, [*Discovering Jazz Dance: America's Energy and Soul*](#) (Madison: WCB Brown & Benchmark, 1992).
- ◉ Christi Jay Wells, [*Between Beats: The Jazz Tradition and Black Vernacular Dance*](#) (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2021).

DATABASES

- ◉ [Dance Heritage Video Archive](#)
A collection of more than 2,000 digitized videos of dance performances, rehearsals, and interviews that preserve culturally significant global and U.S. dance traditions.
- ◉ [Naxos Music Library Jazz](#)
Audio recordings from all eras of jazz history.



Dance Heritage Video Archive

JOURNALS

- ◉ [Dance Chronicle](#)
Covers a wide variety of topics, including dance and music, theater, film, literature, painting, and aesthetics. It offers the best from both established dance historians and the new generation of dance scholars.
- ◉ [Dance Research Journal](#)
Provides an international forum for the presentation and discussion of contemporary dance research. Includes articles with critical perspectives on dance and well-being.

