Fall 2017

COALITION FOR DIASPORAN SCHOLARS MOVING

THE CDSM SENTINEL
COALITION OF DIASPORAN SCHOLARS MOVING – FALL 2017

Editorial Note from Brenda Dixon-Gottchild

“People of color have been opposing white supremacy for as long as they have been fighting for equal rights or, in other words, for as long as black people have been on American soil simply trying to live.”

Greetings, Dear People of Color,

And welcome to the “Sentinel,” newsletter of the Coalition for Diasporan Scholars Moving. The opening quote appeared in a New York Times Sunday article by the brilliant Diasporan poet, Claudia Rankine. I begin my comments on this dire note to highlight what it means to be Diasporan and American. Our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—including the pursuit of dance—is tossed into troubled waters by the policies of the administration elected November 2016.

That said, I write to assure you that CDSM is alive and well. Right now, our work is more crucial than ever. We agreed that we didn’t want to overrun your Inboxes with updates, so we’ve kept a low profile while fulfilling our mission. Although this is our first newsletter in a while, we’ve continued performing the “under the radar” work of coming to the aid of Diasporan dance practitioners who call upon us for help. When we receive a request, we put our heads together and heartstorm on the best way to serve this individual’s needs. Our resources include—but are not limited to—disseminating protocol papers written by James Frazier, Ph.D., and Onye Ozuzu (both of whom appeared in a New York Times Sunday article by the brilliant Diasporan poet, Claudia Rankine). I begin my comments on this dire note to highlight what it means to be Diasporan and American. Our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—including the pursuit of dance—is tossed into troubled waters by the policies of the administration elected November 2016.

The International Association of Blacks in Dance is CDSM’s umbrella organization. Since our inception (2013), our Roundtable at the annual IABD conference has become a tradition. I am pleased to announce that this event, titled “Survival Strategies for People of Color in Dance,” will be held on Saturday January 27, 2018, 2 to 4 pm, at the 30th Annual IABD Conference (Los Angeles, January 23-28). Our 2018 Roundtable participants are Emerita Professors Halifu Osumare, Linda Goodrich, and Yvonne Daniel; and doctoral candidates Kim Gadlin, Saroya Corbett, and Iaquail Shaheed. Each of these practitioners holds credentials that overlap in scholarship, performance, choreography, and management: a sterling cadre, indeed. We also welcome our new Advisory Board member Adanna Jones, Ph.D.

Finally, we look forward to hearing from CDSM members: contact us with your thoughts, ideas, problems—and solutions!

Several Ways in Which Diasporan Scholars are Moving:

Left to Right: Vershawn Saunders-Ward, Zita Allen, Dr. E. Gaynell Sherrod, Dr. Brenda Dixon
Gottschild, Cara Hagan and Dr. Julie Johnson.

International Association of Blacks in Dance/Coalition of Diasporan Moving Scholars (CDSM)

Saturday, January 28, 2017

2 – 4 p.m., Collective Strategies for Women of Color in Dance Convener and Moderator, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Ph.D.

Dance artists, graduate students, adjunct and tenured professors attended the CDSM’s session to learn information and share stories and strategies on how to navigate the muddy waters of higher education. Moderator Brenda Dixon Gottschild began the session with an embodied performance of Dr. Maya Angelou’s poem “Still I Rise”. Panelist Dr. Julie Johnson, lecturer at Spelman College, said that Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s intention was to create a safe space for the panelists and attendees to share their personal experiences.

“I appreciate the way Dr. Brenda and the panelists contributed to creating a safe space where we could share the diversity of our experiences,” Julie Johnson said. “Dr. Brenda masterfully crafted the panel experience by not giving us [the panelists] parameters; she just gave us time restrictions. She told us to trust in what we were thinking about. Having that type of license opened us up to be very personable.”

The panel consisted of a variety of women of color in dance who are in different places and spaces in their higher academic dance journeys: Zita Allen, dance writer and historian who holds an MA in Dance; Cara Hagan, Assistant Professor of Dance at a university in North Carolina; Dr. Julie Johnson, recent Ph.D. graduate and lecturer at Spelman College; Vershawn Saunders-Ward, Artistic Director of Red Clay Dance Company and adjunct professor; and Dr. E. Gaynell Sherrod, Assistant Professor of Dance at a university in Virginia.

Julie Johnson described the energy in the session as receptive and positive. Despite the fact that the session addressed issues of institutional racism, intimidation and xenophobic attitudes toward Diasporic dance practices, Julie Johnson said that attendees found comfort in one another’s stories.

“There were Ph.D. students and professors who were glad to hear similar experiences and struggles,” she said.

Julie Johnson said that she also felt that she could get specific about her experiences as a Ph.D. student. Her research interests are intersections of creative practice, community interaction and African Diasporic movement practices. Julie Johnson talked about feeling “broken” as a Ph.D. student.

“I had to figure out what I needed to do to center myself, claim my experience and find out what was leading me to my brokenness,” she said. “I had to find out who my advocates were, how to shift out of that pattern [of brokenness] and figure out what I needed to do to be successful.”

The CDSM’s panel experience created a physical space that represents the intergenerational discourse, support and strategizing that embodies the mission of the CDSM.

In Remembrance

This year we lost several important figures in Black Dance.

CDSM remembers the lives and legacies of Baba Chuck Davis, Faye Store, Kabby Mitchell, III and Neil Whitehead. We send our love to their families and friends, and honor the numerous contributions they have made.

Rest in Peace Ancestors.

CDSM’s Dr. Brenda Dixon Gottschild Named a Pew Fellow by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage

Photo by Ryan Collerd, courtesy of The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage named Dr. Brenda Dixon Gottschild as one of twelve individual artists...
who received the Pew Fellowship. Pew Fellows receive an unrestricted grant of $75,000 to further their work as well as “a set of customized, focused professional- and career-development resources,” according to The Center’s website.

We congratulate Dr. Brenda Dixon Gottschild on her 50-year career as a writer and cultural scholar!

**CDSM’s Lela Aisha Jones Named a Bessie Award 2017 Outstanding Emerging Choreographer Nominee**

The Bessies, the NY Dance and Performance Awards, nominated CDSM’s Lela Aisha Jones | FlyGround for the 2017 Outstanding Emerging Choreographer Award for her choreographic work Plight Release and the Diasporic Body: Jesus & Egun. Lela was joined on stage by CDSM’s Patricia “Teachmon” Jones and Zakiya L. Cornish in this work that was performed at Gibney Dance in NYC and curated by the wonderful Cynthia Oliver.

We congratulate Lela Aisha Jones on this prestigious nomination!

**Urban Bush Women and the UBW Choreographic Center Name Five Fellowship Candidates**

Marjani Forté-Saunders, Francesca Harper, Marguerite Hemmings, Paloma McGregor and Amara Tabor-Smith are the 2017 Choreographic Fellowship Candidates. The UBW Choreographic Center operates the Choreographic Fellowship Program as one of its many initiatives to support and bring great awareness to the choreographic work of women in the African Diaspora.

Each candidate will participate in a two-year program, which includes a nine-month planning process and one year of fellowship activities. Funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation supports the fellowship program. The candidates will receive from direct financial support, residency opportunities and mentorship.

We congratulate the 2017 UBW Fellowship Candidates!