FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 20, 2023

Contact: Michelle Tabnick, (646) 765-4773, michelle@michelletabnickpr.com

The International Association of Blacks in Dance
Receives National Medal of Arts
March 20, 2023
The White House, Washington, D.C.

The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) is proud to receive the 2023 National Medal of Arts today at the White House in Washington, D.C. The National Medal of Arts is the highest award given to artists and arts patrons by the United States government. The National Medal of Arts is awarded by the President of the United States to individuals or groups who are deserving of special recognition by reason of their outstanding contributions to the excellence, growth, support and availability of the arts in the United States.

“The current climate in our country has us more closely examining access and opportunity, body image, cultural integration vs. cultural appropriation, policymaking, mental health and well-being, philanthropy, and a host of other issues,” said Denise Saunders Thompson, President and CEO of The International Association of Blacks in Dance. “There is no discipline that nurtures and sparks the ability to imagine, unleashes creativity and innovation, and offers promise as a powerful catalyst for change, more than arts, culture and humanities. They challenge dominant narratives in ways that other media cannot, yet connect us to each other, move us to action, and unify our collective voices. Art engages the soul.”

About The International Association of Blacks in Dance
The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) preserves and promotes dance by people of African ancestry or origin, and assists and increases opportunities for artists in advocacy, audience development, education, funding, networking, performance, philosophical dialogue, and touring. IABD serves a diverse national and international membership of agents and managers, arts administrators, choreographers, dance artists, dance companies, dance-serving organizations, dance-related personnel, educators, educational institutions, historians, researchers, scholars, students, studios, and supporters of the Dance field. The membership, totaling nearly 3,500, spans the globe and can be found on five out of seven continents—Africa, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America.

In 1988, Joan Myers Brown, Founder and Executive Artistic Director of Philadanco! The Philadelphia Dance Company, along with the Philadanco! staff, launched the 1st International Conference on Black Dance Companies with eighty professionals in attendance. Ms. Brown felt that a gathering of the Black Dance community would serve not only her needs, but those of other Black Dance professionals. Inspired by the convening and the possibility of an organization committed to Black Dance, constituents of the 1990 Denver, CO, Conference, hosted by Cleo
Parker Robinson Dance, presented a motion calling for a formal association. In 1991, in Dayton, Ohio, IABD was formalized by some of the most prominent companies and individuals in the dance community, including its five Founding dance company members: Cleo Parker Robinson Dance (CO); Dallas Black Dance Theatre (TX); Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (OH); Lula Washington Dance Theatre (CA), and Philadanco! (PA).

IABD did not incorporate as a nonprofit organization until 2011, and was volunteer-led until 2017 when the Board of Directors appointed Denise Saunders Thompson as its first President and CEO. At this time, the Association received a half million-dollar grant award from the Mellon Foundation to establish and develop operational infrastructure and conduct an organizational health study of the Black Dance sector’s dance companies. Today, IABD is comprised of a full and part time staff, a $1.75 million annual operating budget, and pivotal year-round programs and resources, including: The Annual International Conference and Festival of Blacks in Dance; the Comprehensive Organizational Health Initiative | Managing Organizational Vitality and Endurance (COH|MOVE), EVOLVE Regional Dance Summit; emergency preparedness and business continuity planning services, archiving and preservation; fiscal sponsorship, and an emergency fund.

Critical to IABD is the amplification of the virtuosic artistry exhibited throughout the Black Dance community. The Association documents and addresses Black aesthetics in dance, and educates younger generations about the contributions of Black Dance artists. IABD advocates fiercely on behalf of the sector to elevate the contributions of Black Dance practitioners, countering the false narrative that they do not exist. In spite of a legacy of excellence and innovation, member companies and artists continue to cite barriers to advancement such as inequitable access to presenters, showcases, and audition opportunities. IABD strives to meet this critical need through performance presentations and auditions for men and women of color in ballet and modern dance companies, summer training programs, and college dance programs.

IABD’s vision is for dance, by people of African ancestry or origin, to be revered, respected, and preserved in the consciousness and cultural institutions of all people. Through its tireless efforts in the arts and culture sector, IABD validates the significant connections and influence that Blacks in Dance have on the American and international cultural landscape. IABD’s work is rich with insights, knowledge, and expertise vital to current and future Black Dance professionals and the dance sector at large.