



The History of Black Dance in America

Vernacular Jazz Dance Since 2003



CADE

Milestones

CADE created **2003**

"Lackawanna Blues" **2004**

"Swinging in the Hood" **2005**

Tribute to Norma Miller **2007**

Tribute to Katherine Dunham **2008**

"HBDA", Inglewood, CA **2011**

"HBDA", Santa Monica, CA **2012**



"The History of Black Dance in America"

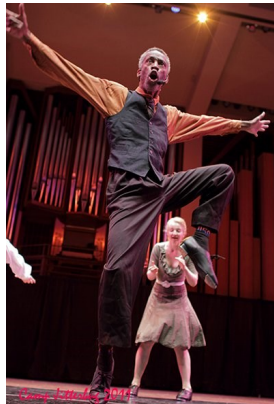
(HBDA)

- *The History of Black Dance in America is a multimedia feast of music, dance and video.*
- *HBDA traces our steps from the African Diaspora through decade after decade to the present day.*

About The Show

The History of Black Dance in America (HBDA) takes its audience on a 200 year journey through dances from the African Diaspora that developed in America. It is a multimedia feast of costumes, song and video, celebrating America's rich and diverse history and the exciting dances that are an integral part of it.

The journey begins in Africa and makes its way to the New World. Along the way it highlights dances that were so pervasive in their time that they leapt from community to community, usually becoming internationally-



Chester Whitmore: Dance Instructor, Choreographer, Band Leader, Cinematographer and Historian Extraordinaire.

known and performed around the world in Society. These dances became worldwide crazes from post-slavery to the present day. Yet, they grew out of the community of scattered Africans who ultimately made America their home, making them truly North American indigenous dances. They have left a legacy we cannot disregard.

HBDA was born out of the theatrical and dance expertise of Chester Whitmore. Chester, who has been named a United States' Cultural Ambassador by the Smithsonian Institute, created and toured the original version of *The History of Black Dance In America* with his company in the 1980s.

Managing Director Ron Parker joined Chester in 2003 to form the Central Avenue Dance Ensemble. They decided to revive HBDA, and it is their combined vision and passion that have led to this entertaining and historically-significant production.



About CADE



Based in Los Angeles, the Central Avenue Dance Ensemble (CADE) is a non-profit organization named after a culturally-rich part of the city whose impact has been too little-known. This 12-member, multi-aged, company is dedicated to preserving and promoting the contributions of African Americans to the ballroom and social dances of American popular culture. CADE's performances show

the connections between dance forms from generation to generation, and their connection to the music of those generations. They also show how American vernacular dances were shaped by spirituality and slavery.

CADE's goal is to express the infectious healing qualities of movement, to educate audiences and to spread the joy of dance.



Mission Statement

Many popular dances of the western hemisphere owe their birth to creative and talented people of African origin.

As early as the 17th century, dances such as the Pigeon Walk, Buck, Tap, Frog, Ring Shout, Cake Walk, Charleston, Black Bottom and others, up to and including Swing Dance/Lindy Hop, have been a part of the African American lexicon. These dances are collectively known as **vernacular dance**.

Due to many social, economic, and political influences over the last four decades, the African

American cultural connection to these art forms has been virtually lost or forgotten.

The goal of this dance company is to reintroduce people—most especially the African American community—to vernacular dance. To build awareness and appreciation of this art form by presenting an experience through dance that relates the birth of this country's dance culture that emerged from plantation spirituals to Le Jazz Hot, Charleston and the Swing years of Jitterbug, which covers the historical period from slavery through the Swing era.



Central Avenue Dance Ensemble
"Tango on the Streets", Santa Monica, CA

This show celebrates America's rich and diverse history and the exciting dances that are an integral part of it. Each of these dances grew out of the African Diaspora making them truly North American indigenous dances. These dances were so pervasive in their time that they leapt from community to community making them internationally known and danced in the world's societies. They have left a legacy we cannot disregard.

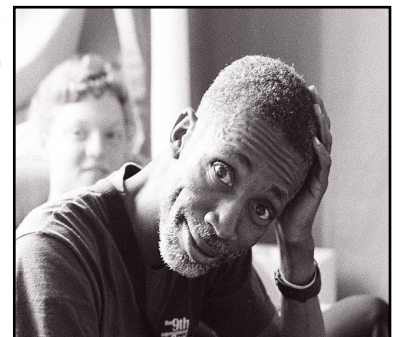
"...Making this production truly American in a way no other has been."



A Note About Chester Whitmore

In addition to being a Cultural Ambassador, Chester Whitmore was named a Living Treasure in 2005 by the International Association of Blacks in Dance. He is an internationally-known dance instructor, choreographer and historian, as well as a cinematographer and swing dance/history archivist.

He is also an accomplished musician and bandleader, having played with the Count Basie Orchestra and with Lionel Hampton. He leads his own Big Band called Opus One, which is known for its unstoppable flavor reminiscent of Cab Calloway.



Our Man Chester



CADE's History

CADE was originally founded in 2003 by a group of volunteer dancers led by Chester Whitmore.

Ron Parker, a founding member and dance historian, soon took over as Director of the Ensemble. He began preparations for this new **"History of Black Dance in America"**, expanding its repertoire beyond Vernacular Jazz to include the more traditional Ballroom and American Rhythm dances – such as Salsa and Disco – that derived from African roots.

Chester and Ron's combined goal was to educate the community on the Black roots of vernacular jazz dances (Cake Walk, Black Bottom, Lindy Hop), as well as other more well-known dances (Charleston, Salsa, Disco, and even Waltz) by holding social dances, workshops and performances.

Since its inception, CADE has performed at local community events, given monthly live Big Band dances (entitled "Swinging in the Hood,") and performed "HBDA" 2 years straight, in 2012 to sold-out audiences. CADE also produced "A Tribute to Norma Miller" in 2007, and helped choreograph and perform "A Tribute to Katherine Dunham" in 2008.

CADE has a rich history of lectures and/or demonstrations as part of its international community outreach. We are available worldwide for residencies and performances at schools, clubs, theatres and colleges .



Original CADE members with Fayard Nicholas.



"The ability to combine the history with the wonderful visual is why my 90-yr. old mom said it was 'the best dance program she's seen in her life'."

-Laura Thornhill



Ron Parker

Ron Parker

Ron Parker is the current Director of the Ensemble.

He is a ballroom dance instructor, performer, choreographer and historian. A member of the Beverly Hills Cotillion Dance Ensemble - a vintage, ballroom-performing group - as well as former vice-president of the LA Chapter of USA Dance, his effort has been to spotlight the African influences on the traditional Ballroom and social dances, including the Foxtrot, Samba, Cha-Cha and the Argentine Tango.

He successfully produced the 2011 HBDA show, and both produced and directed the 2012 shows.



Central Avenue
Dance Ensemble

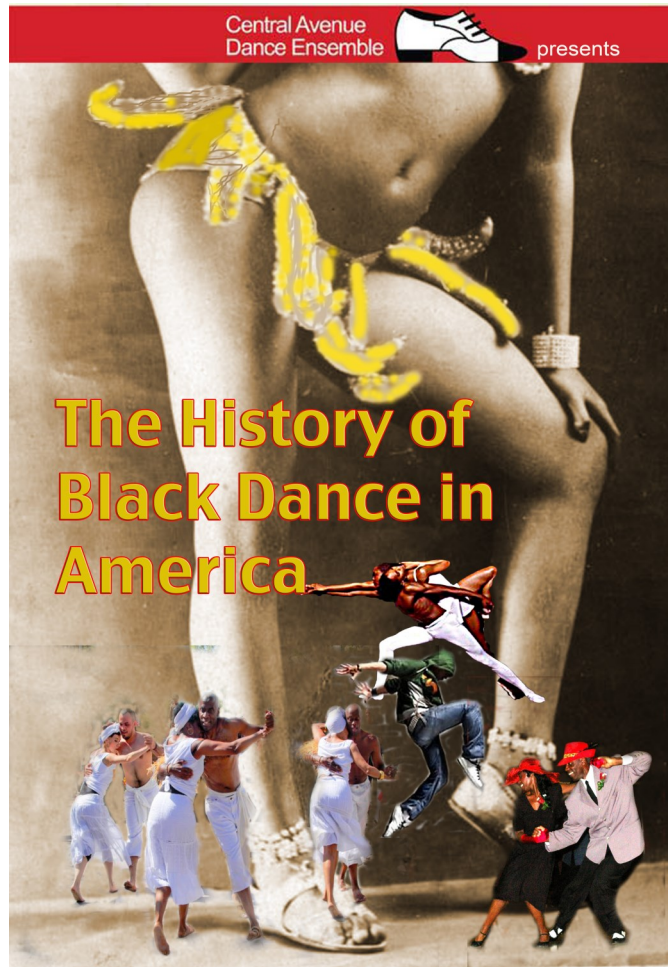
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Central Avenue
Dance Ensemble



What you learn you take
with you, and for the
rest of your life.



The History of Black Dance in America

"I want to congratulate you on a fantastic show. I enjoyed every aspect of it, from the costumes to the video clips and history, and needless to say the incredible dancing. The energy level was contagious." —Sheri Klein



Highlights from Central Avenue
Dance Ensemble's 2012 History
of Black Dance in America



www.BlackDanceHistory.org

The Central Avenue Dance Ensemble is a non-profit organization.
www.CentralAveDance.com or www.BlackDanceHistory.org
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Vernacular Jazz performed by Atiya El-Amin and Ron Parker (front) as well Erica Zuniga (back, left to right), Adunni McPherson, Salvador Corona, and Reginald Thornton.

PHOTO BY CHARLES EDELSON



This joint was jumping as The History of Black Dance in America strutted its stuff on stage at the historic, 100-year-old Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club located at 1210 4th Street. Brilliantly produced and directed by Ron Parker, the two-hour multimedia performance, in honor of Black History Month, was a "dance back" in time to the African roots of dance, and how it influenced dance in America, spanning the 1800s to today, beginning with a Zulu warrior ritual brought over from Africa by men destined to be sold into slavery.

Under Parker's most creative choreography, the highly spirited and incredibly talented Central Avenue Dance Ensemble, as well as guest dancers, danced their way through African and African-American inspired popular social dances. Vintage film clips of such icons as Lena Horne, Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers, and Vernon & Irene Castle, accompanied by a fascinating instructional narrative, augmented the live performances and covered the evolution of such dances as the "Cake Walk." That dance was started by slaves on plantations to mimic high society and the winning slaves would receive cake as their prize, which is how the name evolved.

This gifted, high energy ensemble, dressed in appropriate, gorgeous period cos-

tumes, danced their way through 28 dances including "Black Bottom," "Walking the Dog," "Jazz Dance," "Fox Trot," "Charleston," "Ragtime," "Mambo," "Samba," "Lindy Hop," "Swing," "Urban Cha Cha," "Bop," "Disco/Hustle," "Salsa," and the fad dances of the 80s and 90s, as well as a rousing tap dance sequence. Most of the dances were preceded with an explanation of their derivation. Perhaps the most surprising revelation was learning that the most beautiful and sensual "Argentine Tango" evolved out of dancing by Black slaves who wound up in South America, calling themselves African Argentines. The dance team began with the original version and beautifully transitioned the movements into what we now know as "Argentine Tango."

The evening, sponsored and hosted by Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club, who gave the production needed support, was a joyous, fun-filled homage to the African roots of dance. In the spirit of continuing the celebration, at the end of the program, dancing continued in the upstairs ballroom of the club where some audience members put on their dance shoes and whirled away the rest of the evening.

A word about the Santa Monica Bay Woman's Club: The club presents many cultural and civic events throughout the year, the next one being on March 30 at 7:30 p.m. called "For Freedom," Taking a Stand Against Human Trafficking. The evening will include food, live music, keynote speakers, and a silent auction. For more information, call 310.395.1308 or visit www.smbwc.org.

Contact Beverly Cohn
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Review From ExploreDance.com

URL:<http://exploredance.com/article.htm?id=3268>

The History of Black Dance in America

by Rachel Levin

February 25, 2012

The Santa Monica Bay Women's Club

1210 Fourth Street

Santa Monica, CA 90401

310-395-1308

Performed by the Central Avenue Dance Ensemble
Chester Whitmore, Founder and Choreographer
Ron Parker, Managing Director
www.historyofblackdance.org

Last weekend, for the second year in a row, the Central Avenue Dance Ensemble (CADE) performed its entertaining and educational show "The History of Black Dance in America" at the Santa Monica Bay Women's Club in honor of Black History Month. A combination of live dance and video with voiceover narration, the show aimed to trace a line between the spiritual and social dances of enslaved Africans and the development of vernacular dances in the Americas.

Throughout the ambitious program, which leapt from traditional Zulu dances in Africa to popular American dances from the 1800s to the 2000s, the resounding message was that American dance (and dance throughout the Americas) has been defined by the contributions of slavery's descendents. The movement styles brought from native African lands as well as the modes of physical expression that emerged as a response to slavery and segregation in the New World laid the foundation for what came to be quintessentially American dance forms, from the Cakewalk to the Charleston, swing to salsa, and disco to hip hop.

It may sound like fodder for a PhD dissertation, but lively performances by the unflappable ensemble members of CADE, along with the folksy video supplements, made the history lesson simple to digest and easy to get swept up in. The most well-known dances were, not surprisingly, the most crowd-pleasing. The spirited Black Bottom and Charleston from the 1920s, with their exuberant kicks and tongue-in-cheek pelvic thrusts, were an energetic highlight. The zoot suits and velvety slides of the Vernacular Jazz number dripped with style. A video of the ensemble performing fad dances of the 80s and 90s, from the electric slide to the Roger Rabbit, was a pure party.

But the lesser-known dances were opportunities to expose the crowd to an even richer history and explore the African contribution to dance in the Americas on a deeper level. Archival footage of spiritual dances like the Ring Shout from the mid-1800s demonstrated a close corporeal link with African tribal rituals. A performance of Candombe, originally danced by descendents of Bantu in Argentina and Uruguay, revealed a striking and surprising similarity to the Argentine tango; it is thought to be the root of the dance that germinated in the brothels of Buenos Aires.

The tango is a prime example of the theme of cooptation that ran throughout the show. Time and again, white dance makers took dances developed in black communities and popularized them to a white majority, who often had no awareness of their black origin. Whether it was Irene and Vernon Castle introducing the Foxtrot in the 1930s, Arthur Murray watering down the Cuban Mambo, or American Bandstand broadcasting white dancers doing the Bop, black contributions to American dance were often concealed.

This, in turn, is what made the CADE show so poignant and important, as it was a rare chance to shine a spotlight on a history that's been told primarily in academic circles by historians but rarely by dancers. The show's introductory voiceover suggested that dance is in fact the heart of the African American spirit. Stripped of their freedom and identity upon arrival in the New World, the Africans forced here by the slave trade could only carry memories, both cognitive and corporeal. Dance is the essence of what remained. It is a history literally written on the body.

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