



Contact: Mary Verdi-Fletcher
President/Founding Artistic Director
VFletcher1@aol.com

For Immediate Release

Dancing Wheels Company to honor Legendary Ladies of Jazz!

CLEVELAND May 1, 2023—The Dancing Wheels Company & School will set the stage ablaze with a plethora of music, song, and dance as they bring to life the passion and dynamic work of women of color who revolutionized the 1920's–1950's jazz era and changed the tenor and tone of the genre paving the way for female vocal and musical artists throughout history.

About the Performance:

This inspiring and spirited concert takes place at Playhouse Square's Allen Theatre on Friday, June 16, 2023, at 8:00p.m. and will feature Catherine Meredith, Staycee Pearl, and Laura Ann Smyth—female choreographers who, through their inventive choreography, tell the amazing stories of historical women jazz vocalists and musicians. The performance will include guest appearances by the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra and vocalist Anqwenique Kinsel gracing the stage with a newly orchestrated rendition of a song originated by Abbey Lincoln. Also, a special appearance by the School of Dancing Wheels Performance Ensemble will be sure to delight everyone!

President/Founding Artistic Director Mary Verdi-Fletcher said “Creating a concert with mixed mediums of live music, song and dance is exhilarating! We pride ourselves in our inclusivity and creativity and the ability to bring artists of all genres together to celebrate and honor those legends that came before us.”

The concert will include a restaging of Catherine Meredith's “Five by Nina” that uses a suite of songs by Nina Simone. Staycee Pearl has chosen a work from the amazing jazz artist Abbey Lincoln, and Lauran Ann Smyth will premiere a full-length suite from the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald. Alex Martinez, first-time choreographer and former student of the School of Dancing Wheels, along with Sara Lawrence-Sucato, Dancing Wheels' Director of Education, chose a song by the celebrated vocalist Billie Holiday to which the School of Dancing Wheels Performance Ensemble will perform.

About the Choreographers:

Catherine Meredith has worked in television, film, musical theater and on the concert dance stage touring nationally/internationally with such companies as Cortez & Co. Contemporary/Ballet, Verb Ballets, Karen Reedy Dance Company and most recently with The Glue Factory (CorningWorks). She has performed in works by Alvin Ailey, George Balanchine, Talley Beatty, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, David Roussève, David Parsons, Shapiro & Smith, Beth Corning, and Hernando Cortez, with principal roles in Heinz Poll's *Bolero* and *Wings & Aires*, Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring* and *Lamentation*, Ulysses Dove's *Vespers*, and Dianne McIntyre's *In the Groove and Over the Top*. She has been on faculty at Slippery Rock University, Joffrey Ballet (NYC), Brooklyn Music School, Pineapple Studios (UK), and Cuyahoga Community College. Her choreographic work has been commissioned by Santa Monica College, Mercyhurst University, Kent State University, The University of Akron, Ohio Northern University, The Ashley Boudier Project, Verb Ballets, and the Dancing Wheels Company and presented at The Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.), AVAYAVA Festival (India), American Dance Guild (NYC), White Wave DUMBO Dance Festival, TED Talks, Dance St. Louis, HATCH Series at Jennifer Muller/The Works, Playhouse Square, Cain Park, Ohio Dance Festival, Jacob's Pavilion-Nautica, and American Dance Festival (NC). In the fall of 2019, she was commissioned by the New Dance Partners Project in Kansas to create a work for Störling Dance Theater. Her critically acclaimed piece *Aftermath* was selected for the Women in Dance Leadership Conference in Philadelphia, PA. She is the former Rehearsal Director and Resident Choreographer for the Dancing Wheels Company and has successfully translated Horton technique for wheelchair users. Meredith is currently an Assistant Professor of Dance at Kent State University. She holds an M.F.A. in Dance and Dance Education from American Dance Festival/Hollins University.

Staycee Pearl is the co-artistic director of PearlArts and STAYCEE PEARL dance project & Soy Sos, where she creates artful experiences through dance centered multimedia works in collaboration with her husband and artistic collaborator, Herman Pearl. Staycee received her initial dance training at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center. In 2009, STAYCEE PEARL dance project & Soy Sos (SPdp&SS) debuted at the Kelly Strayhorn Theater. Since then, the duo has produced several works including ... "On Being" OCTAVIA and FLOWERZ and are currently working on their National Dance Project CIRCLES. Staycee is passionate about sharing resources and creating opportunities for the arts community by initiating project-generating programs including the Charrette Series, The In Studio Series, and the PEARLDIVING Movement Residency.

Laura Ann Smyth began her journey as an artist at 4 years old attending the Edmonton School of Ballet in Alberta, Canada. Her training focused on R.A.D. and Cecchetti ballet, as well as theatrical jazz and classical modern techniques. Smyth obtained a BA in Sociology from the University of Calgary and a Journalism Certificate from Mount Royal University. As an emerging artist, she

performed and presented works in festivals throughout Canada; Prairie Dance Circuit, Fluid Movement Arts Festival, Edmonton Fringe Festival, Alberta Dance Explosions, Ignite Festival, Alberta Feats Festival, Calgary Cares AIDS Benefit and Dancer's Studio West: AIR. After obtaining her MFA in Dance from The University of California, Irvine in 2012, Smyth performed professionally in modern, contemporary, and jazz genres with a variety of highly-acclaimed companies including: Regina Klenjoski Dance Company, Donna Sternberg and Dancers, JazzAntiqua Dance and Music Ensemble, and Brockus:RED. In addition to performing, Smyth has extensive and diverse experience in choreography. Smyth has choreographed and served as faculty at Santa Monica College, Long Beach City College, Golden West College and Loyola Marymount University. Smyth has also worked as a choreographer on theatre productions at Pepperdine University. Smyth has presented at the International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference (IABD), The World Dance Alliance Conference (WDA), the National Dance Education Organization Conference (NDEO) and holds her Simonson Method Teacher Training Certification. Smyth is currently a full-time faculty member at Cornish College of the Arts and is pursuing her PhD in Dance at Texas Woman's University.

About the Gala:

The theme and location of the Dancing Wheels Company & School gala varies each year. This year the Allen Theatre lobby and stage will be transformed to honor women of color from the 1920's–1950's jazz era. This theme not only conveys imagery of fun and frivolity, but, more importantly, enables us to expound upon the important work that these legendary women brought to the jazz scene. We are proud to have TV Channel 3 WKYC's Carmen Blackwell as Celebrity Host of the event. Honorary Co-chairs, also members of the Dancing Wheels Board of Directors, Ross Cameron and Bob Solich will emcee the evening's activities. An impressive near fifty Circle of Hosts and more than twenty Event Committee members will ensure the success of this fundraising event. Music by Cleveland Jazz Orchestra, luscious appetizers by Driftwood Caterers, and ambiance and fun interactive activities provided by Rock the House will guarantee all party goers are thoroughly entertained.

Ticket Information:

VIP tickets are \$150 (includes pre and post gala events). Call (216) 432-0306 or visit our website at www.dancingwheels.org.

General Admission tickets are \$50 (groups of 10 or more and student tickets with ID are \$35 each). Call Playhouse Square (216) 241-6000 or go online to www.playhousesquare.org.

All tickets include a champagne and dessert reception after the performance.

About the Company:

Dancing Wheels Company & School

Under the Artistic Direction of Mary Verdi-Fletcher, America's first professional wheelchair dancer, the Dancing Wheels Company is now in its 42nd season. As a strong advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, Verdi-Fletcher opened the doors of opportunity for people with disabilities who desire to be on equal ground with their non-disabled peers. Based in Cleveland, Ohio, the Dancing Wheels Company educates and employs professionally trained dancers with and without disabilities. The Company tours globally with performances reaching over 6 million people since its inception. Educational outreach programs, under the direction of Sara Lawrence-Sucato, serve over 4,000 children and adults throughout Northeast Ohio annually. To learn more about the Dancing Wheels Company & School, visit www.dancingwheels.org.

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