

BALLETT

America. Eldridge Cleaver, in his book *Soul on Ice*, was one of Baldwin's more outspoken critics. But Baldwin continued writing, becoming increasingly dependent on his early life as a source of inspiration, accepting eagerly the role of the writer as a "poet" whose "assignment" was to accept the "energy" of the folk and transform it into art. It is as though he was following the wisdom of his own words in his story "Sonny's Blues." Like Sonny and his band, Baldwin saw clearly as he matured that he was telling a tale based on the blues of his own life as a writer and a man in America and abroad: "Creole began to tell us what the blues were all about. They were not about anything very new. He and his boys up there were keeping it new at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness."

Several of his essays and interviews of the 1980s discuss homosexuality and homophobia with fervor and forthrightness, most notably "Here Be Dragons." Thus, just as he had been the leading literary voice of the civil rights movement, he became an inspirational figure for the emerging gay rights movement. Baldwin's nonfiction was collected in *The Price of the Ticket* (1985).

During the final decade of his life, Baldwin taught at a number of American colleges and universities, including the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Hampshire College, frequently commuting back and forth between the United States and his home in Saint Paul de Vence in the south of France. After his death in France on November 30, 1987, the *New York Times* reported on its front page for the following day: "James Baldwin, Eloquent Essayist in Behalf of Civil Rights, Is Dead."

See also Autobiography, U.S.; Literature of the United States

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HORACE PORTER (1996)
Updated bibliography

The African-American presence in classical ballet, triumphantly confirmed by the founding of the Dance Theater of Harlem in 1969, grew slowly alongside general American interest in the European form of theatrical stage dancing. Classical ballet developed from dancing styles of sixteenth-century European courts. Refined in France, especially under the monarchy of Louis XIV, ballet became the preferred form of dance expression in Europe and Russia by the nineteenth century. Ballet captured the interest of an American public only after tours of Daighilev's Ballets Russes proved undeniably entertaining in the early part of the twentieth century. The assumption that the European outlook, history, and technical theory of ballet were alien to the black dancer culturally, temperamentally, and anatomically plagued African-American interest in the form for generations. Dance aesthetes wrote about the unsuitability of the black dancer's "tight joints, a natural turn-in rather than the desired ballet turn-out, hyperextension of the knee, [and] weak feet" (McDonagh, 1968, p. 44), and most black dancers, barred from all-white ballet schools, turned to performing careers in modern and jazz dance. Ballet training, however, remained the basis of many stage-dance techniques, and individual teachers had profound effects on pioneer African-American dance artists. In Chicago in the 1920s, Katherine Dunham studied ballet with Ludmilla Speranzeva before creating her own Dunham dance technique. The Jones-Haywood School of Dance, founded in Washington, D.C., in 1940, trained several significant ballet personalities, including Sylvester Campbell and Louis Johnson. Philadelphia's Judimar School, created in 1948, offered ballet classes led by Essie Marie Dorsey and produced several outstanding ballet artists, including Delores Brown, Tamara Guillebeaux, John Jones, and Billy Wilson.

The racial division of Americans led to the formation of several separatist, "all-black" dance companies to offer performing opportunities for growing numbers of classically trained dancers. Hemsley Winfield's New Negro Art Theater Dance Group brought concert dance to the New York Roxy Theater in 1932, effectively proving that largely white audiences would accept black dancers. John Martin of the *New York Times* noted the dancers' refusal to be "darkskinned reproductions of famous white prototypes" and termed the concert "an effort well worth the making" (Martin, 1932, p. 11). Winfield's company performed with the Hall Johnson Choir in dances of his own making.

Eugene Von Grona's American Negro Ballet debuted on November 21, 1937, at Harlem's Lafayette Theater. The son of a white American mother and a German father,

Arthur Bell

Dancing proved not to be the most lucrative of career choices for Arthur Bell. A pioneering black ballet dancer, he was found homeless wandering the streets of Brooklyn at age seventy-one in the late 1990s. Still, he does not regret following his dreams and, in fact, left his artistic mark on the classical dance scene of the 1940s and 1950s—a time that was not very receptive to African Americans in classical ballet.

Bell's Pentecostal parents viewed dance as sinful and so did not approve of their son's fascination with it. Attempting a career in dance was especially troubling to them because of the lack of employment opportunities for African Americans. Knowing the odds were not in his favor, Bell decided anyway to pursue dance as one of very few black students at the School of American Ballet. His skills were highly regarded and he eventually made a career for himself in Paris and London. Being invited by Frederick Ashton to appear in the New York City Ballet's world premiere of *Illuminations* was a career peak as he was the first black man to ever perform with this elite company.

Age caught up with Bell and he returned to New York City where he worked at a variety of menial jobs from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. Some time after this he became homeless. It is not clear what led to these circumstances, but he came into contact with a social worker named Mafia Mackin. Mackin was a former ballet photographer, so Bell's accounts of his experiences in 1950s London and Paris rang truthful to her whereas other social workers felt that Bell's accounts of his life in ballet were signs of dementia.

After confirming Bell's stories, Mackin contacted the *New York Times* who made Bell the subject of a feature article. Soon Bell received international news coverage and was reunited with two of his siblings. He went on to reside at the Actors Fund Retirement and Nursing Home in Englewood, New Jersey, where he spent the last six years of his life with a regained dignity. Bell died at the age of 77 on January 23, 2004.

Von Grona trained with modern dance choreographer Mary Wigman before moving to the United States in 1925. To form his company, he ran a newspaper advertisement in the *Amsterdam News* offering free dance lessons at the Harlem YMCA. Von Grona chose thirty trainees out of 150 respondents, and after three years of training in ballet and modern dance relaxation techniques, the company offered a program designed to address “the deeper and more intellectual resources of the Negro race” (Acocella, 1982, p. 24). The original program, choreographed by Von Grona to Ellington, Stravinsky, W. C. Handy, and J. S. Bach, was received by critics as “more of the nature of a pupil's recital than an epoch-making new ballet organization.” The program included a version of Stravinsky's *Firebird*, although critics worried that “a Negro interpretation of a classical ballet would . . . be too unrestrained” to appeal to a ballet audience. Lukewarm critical reception and the absence of a committed audience shuttered the company's concert engagements after only five months. In 1939 the company appeared in Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds* and at the Apollo Theater and was renamed Von Grona's

American Swing Ballet. By the end of that year Von Grona was bankrupt and disbanded the company. Dancers in the company included Lavinia Williams, Jon Edwards, and Al Bledger.

Wilson Williams's Negro Dance Company, founded in 1940 to “discipline talent, give it creative direction, [and] to train artists capable of expression through means of a technique” (Williams, 1940, p. 14), struggled for five years to garner dancers and patronage. Williams, an accomplished black modern dancer, intended to provide a three-year course at his School of Negro Ballet, with classes in folk forms as well as modern and classical ballet. The Negro Dance Company's first performances in 1943 were received as modern dance.

The First Negro Classic Ballet, also briefly known as the Hollywood Negro Ballet, was founded in 1948 by Joseph Rickhard. Rickhard, a German émigré and former dancer with the Ballets Russes, taught ballet to black students in Los Angeles. The company had a first concert in 1949. This was truly a classical company, with ballerinas performing on point. They performed *Variations Clas-*

siques, a suite of dances to Bach, as well as a reworking of *Cinderella* with African-American materials. Critically successful, the company lasted seven seasons touring the West Coast, with an annual performance at Los Angeles' Philharmonic Auditorium. In 1956 Rickhard brought his dancers to New York, and this company combined with the New York Negro Ballet.

Aubrey Hitchens' Negro Dance Theater, created in 1953, was an all-male repertory company. Hitchens was born in England and had danced with the Russian Opera Company in Paris before he opened his own New York school in 1947. Hitchens, who "ardently believed in the special dance talents of the Negro race" (Hitchins, 1956, p. 12), managed to book his group to perform at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in August 1954. Its repertory included *Gotham Suite* by Tony Charmoli, with "modern idioms based on classical forms being suggested by the five boroughs of New York City" (Hitchins, 1956, p. 13), and Hitchens' own *Italian Concerto* to music of Bach. Among the dancers associated with the Negro Dance Theater were Anthony Basse, Frank Glass, Nat Horne, Bernard Johnson, Charles Martin, Charles Moore, Joe Nash, Charles Queenan, Edward Walrond, and Arthur Wright. The company remained together only through 1955.

Edward Flemmyng's New York Negro Ballet Company, founded as Les Ballets Nègres in 1955, began as a small group that took daily technique classes with Maria Nevelska, a former member of the Bolshoi Ballet. Flemmyng, a charismatic and driven African-American dancer born in Detroit, organized private sponsorship of the company, which in 1957 led to a landmark tour of England, Scotland, and Wales. Among the dancers on that tour were Anthony Basse, Dolores Brown, Candace Caldwell, Sylvester Campbell, Georgia Collins, Theodore Crum, Roland Fraser, Thelma Hill, Michaelyn Jackson, Frances Jiminez, Bernard Johnson, Charles Neal, Cleo Quitman, Gene Sagan, Helen Taitt, Betty Ann Thompson, and Barbara Wright. The company's repertory included Ernest Parham's *Mardi Gras*; two Louis Johnson ballets—*Waltze*, a classical ballet for twelve dancers, and *Folk Impressions*, an American ballet set to music by Morton Gould; and a purely classical pas de deux from *Sleeping Beauty* danced by Dolores Brown and Bernard Johnson. Reviews of the company were flattering and encouraging, and the reviewer in the London-based *Dance and Dancers* wrote: "New York Negro ballet amounts to a sincere attempt at establishing the Negro as an important contributor to the art of ballet as a whole" (1957, p. 9). Soon after the two-month tour, Flemmyng's principal patron died and the company began to unravel. A 1958 performance in New York under the name Ballet Americana was noted by writ-

er Doris Hering as having a "zest and high energy . . . yet to be cast in the careful mould of ballet" (Hering, 1958, p. 57), but the company could not find sufficient patronage and was completely disbanded by 1960.

DANCES AND DANCERS

Documentation of African-American interest in the ballet exists well before the establishment of any of the all-black companies. Helena Justa-De Arms performed toe dances in vaudeville in the 1910s; Mary Richards danced on toe in the 1923 Broadway production of *Struttin' Along*; and Josephine Baker performed on toe for at least one number in her Paris Opera days. In 1940 Agnes De Mille created *Black Ritual* for the New York Ballet Theater, the precursor of the present-day American Ballet Theatre. Performed by a cast of sixteen women to a score by Darius Milhaud, the piece was intended to "project the psychological atmosphere of a primitive community during the performance of austere and vital ceremonies" (Martin, 1940, p. 23). Although this was not a classically shaped ballet, its cast had received dance training in a specially established "Negro Wing" of the Ballet Theater school. Critical reaction to the piece was muted but inspired dance writer Walter Terry's call for "a Negro vocabulary of movement . . . composed of modern dance movements, ballet steps, tap and others . . . [which] should enable the Negro to express himself artistically and not merely display his muscular prowess" (Terry, 1940).

The post-World War II era brought the beginnings of integrated classical dance in the United States. Talley Beatty, Arthur Bell, and Betty Nichols were briefly associated with New York's Ballet Society, where Beatty appeared in Lew Christiansen's *Blackface* (1947) and Bell in Frederick Ashton's *Illuminations* (1950). In 1952 Louis Johnson, a student of the School of American Ballet (SAB), created a role in Jerome Robbins's *Ballade* for the New York City Ballet. Johnson began his significant choreographic career with *Lament* (1953), a story ballet set to music of Heitor Villa-Lobos and first presented with an integrated cast at the third New York Ballet Club Annual Choreographers' Night.

Janet Collins, the most famous African-American classical dancer of this era, began her career in vaudeville and was a member of the original Katherine Dunham troupe. Born in New Orleans and raised in Los Angeles, Collins danced with Lester Horton before moving to New York in 1948, where she won a prestigious Rosenwald Fellowship to tour the East and Midwest in her own dances. Her 1949 New York performance debut was greeted with exceptional enthusiasm by John Martin (1949) of the *New York Times*, who called her a "rich talent and a striking

theatrical personality at the beginning of a promising career. Her style is basically eclectic; its direction is modern and its technical foundation chiefly ballet. The fusing element is a markedly personal approach." Collins won a Donaldson Award for her Broadway performance in Cole Porter's *Out of This World* (1951). Collins achieved her greatest fame as prima ballerina at the Metropolitan Opera from 1951 to 1954, where she danced in *Aida* (1951), *La Gioconda* (1952), and *Samson and Delilah* (1953).

Many African-American ballet artists found an acceptance in Europe unknown in the United States. Sylvester Campbell remained in Europe after the New York Negro Ballet tour and eventually became a principal with the Netherlands National Ballet, dancing leading roles in *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Le Corsaire*. Gene Sagan and Roland Fraser, also of the New York Negro Ballet, joined the Marseilles Ballet and the Cologne Ballet, respectively. Brooklyn-born Jamie Bower danced with Roland Petit's Ballets de Paris and appeared with the company in the MGM film *The Glass Slipper* (1953). In 1954 Raven Wilkenson was admitted to the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo as that company's sole black female ballerina. Wilkenson stayed with the company for six years, although she was occasionally barred from performing in some southern theaters because of her race. Arthur Mitchell, who joined the New York City Ballet as its first permanent black dancer in 1955, experienced similar racial discrimination when U.S. television broadcasters refused to air programs in which he danced with white ballerinas.

The affiliation of African-American dancers with mostly white companies accelerated throughout the 1960s. The Harkness Ballet of New York ran an aggressive recruitment and educational program in consultation with New York Negro Ballet alumna Thelma Hill that, by 1968, had successfully placed five black members in that company. Choreographer Alvin Ailey, who created *Feast of Ashes* for the Joffrey Ballet in 1962, also made *Ariadne* (1965), *El Amor Brujo* (1966), and *Macumba* (1966) for the Harkness Ballet. Keith Lee joined the American Ballet Theatre in 1969, and in 1970 he created the popular ballet *Times Past* to music by Cole Porter. Lee achieved the rank of soloist in 1971 and left in 1974 to form his own company. Significant post-civil rights era dancers affiliated with major American ballet companies include John Jones, who danced with Jerome Robbins's Ballets: USA, the Dance Theater of Harlem, the Joffrey Ballet, and the Harkness Ballet; Christian Holder of the Joffrey Ballet; Debra Austin of the New York City Ballet and the Pennsylvania Ballet; and Mel Tomlinson of the Dance Theater of Harlem and the New York City Ballet.

THE DANCE THEATER OF HARLEM LEGACY

The founding of the Dance Theater of Harlem (DTH) in 1969 conclusively ended speculation about the suitability of African-American interest in ballet. Arthur Mitchell's company and its affiliated school provided training and performing opportunities for black dancers and choreographers from all parts of the world. Heralded as a major company of international stature within its first fifteen years, the DTH fostered an unsurpassed standard of black classicism revealed in the versatile technique of principal dancers Stephanie Dabney, Lorraine Graves, Christina Johnson, Virginia Johnson, Tai Jiminez, Andrea Long, Ronald Perry, Judith Rotardier, Eddie J. Shellman, Lowell Smith, and Donald Williams.

As DTH performances set a standard of black classicism, discernible African-American influences on ballet began to be understood and documented. Choreographer George Balanchine, who served on the original DTH board of directors, successfully articulated a neoclassical style of ballet that emphasized thrust hips and rhythmic syncopations commonly found in African-American social dance styles. Prominent in his masterpieces *The Four Temperaments* (1946) and the "Rubies" section of *Jewels* (1967) are references to the Charleston, the cakewalk, the lindy hop, and tap dancing.

The critical success of the DTH hinged upon its dancers' ability to embody these social movement styles within classical technique. The company excelled in its resilient performances of the Balanchine repertory. It also turned to African-American folk materials that underscored affinities between ballet and ritual dance, as in Louis Johnson's *Forces of Rhythm* (1972), which comically juxtaposed several styles, including generic "African" dance, vaudeville, Dunham-based modern, disco, and ballet; Geoffrey Holder's *Dougl*a (1974), a stylized wedding-ceremony synthesis of African and Hindu motifs; and Billy Wilson's *Ginastera* (1991), a combination of Spanish postures and point dancing.

Black musicians inspired several important ballet collaborations, including Alvin Ailey and Duke Ellington's *The River* (1970), which was choreographed for the American Ballet Theatre and included both parody and distillation of social African dance styles in several sections; Wynton Marsalis and Peter Martins's *Jazz (Six Syncopated Movements)* (1993), created for the New York City Ballet and featuring African-American dance soloist Albert Evans; and the Joffrey Ballet production of *Billboards*, set to music by Prince (1993). In Atlanta, the company Balletnic has successfully fused classical technique with other forms since 1990. Other choreographers who have worked in the classical idiom include Paul Russell, once



The dancers Carmen De Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder, 1955. Among the most versatile dancers of their generation, De Lavallade and Holder were accomplished in both theatrical dance and ballet, and also enjoyed success as choreographers, actors, directors, and authors. Photograph by Carl Van Vechten. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE CARL VAN VECHTEN TRUST

a leading dancer with the DTH, who became artistic director of the American Festival Ballet of Boise, Idaho, in 1988; former DTH principal Homer Bryant, who formed the Chicago-based Bryant Ballet in 1991; Barbados-born John Alleyne, who trained at the National Ballet School of Canada and in 1993 was appointed artistic director of Ballet British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada; and Ulysses Dove, former principal of the Alvin Ailey company. Dove's searingly physical point ballets predict a heightened awareness of African-American performance practice in their reliance on asymmetry, prolonged balance, and cool stance tempered by explosive power.

The profound artistic achievement of the DTH, innumerable individual African-American artists in companies around the world, and Balanchine's neoclassic fusion of ballet and African dance style created a contemporary ballet repertory that was indisputably African based, vividly realized in works by American choreographers Gerald Arpino, William Forsythe, Jerome Robbins, and Twyla Tharp. Ironically, core African-American dance styles,

which value subversive invention, participatory interaction, and an overwhelming sense of bodily presence, diverge neatly from ballet's traditional conception of strictly codified body line, a silenced and motionless audience, and movement as metaphoric abstraction. The process of building an African-American audience base responsive to ballet, an action begun by the DTH, is necessary to expand the legacy of black classicism for generations to come.

See also Ailey, Alvin; Apollo Theater; Dance Theater of Harlem; Dove, Ulysses; Dunham, Katherine; Ellington, Edward Kennedy "Duke"; Holder, Geoffrey; Marsalis, Wynton; Mitchell, Arthur

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THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ (1996)
Updated by author 2005

BALTIMORE AFRO-AMERICAN

The *Baltimore Afro-American*, first published in 1892 and now in its second century of continuous publication, is the oldest family-owned black newspaper in America. During its peak years, between the two world wars, the newspaper printed thirteen separate editions from New Jersey to South Carolina and competed with both the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* to be the nation's largest African-American paper.

Founded by ex-slave John Henry Murphy, the *Afro-American* grew from a small, church-based newsletter to the largest black paper on the eastern seaboard, with a circulation that reached over 225,000. After John Murphy died, his son Carl became senior editor and publisher. For nearly forty years, Carl Murphy and the *Afro-American* never shied from reporting the truths of life in a segregated America.

As early as 1912 the *Afro-American* addressed the discriminatory practices of the U.S. military. In the late 1930s the paper reported on the early signs of apartheid in South Africa and was soon supporting Thurgood Marshall and the legal battles of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to end school segregation. Throughout these years, numerous articles were devoted to black leaders such as Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Bunche, and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In addition to providing the news of the day, the *Afro-American* performed a community service by publishing the births, marriages, and deaths of local African Americans, since these listings were rarely found in the white-owned newspapers of the time. Ironically, the newspaper's gradual decline in circulation in the later decades of the twentieth century was due in part to its success in pressuring the white news media to hire black journalists. In 2005, the *Afro-American* claimed a readership of more than 120,000.

See also Bunche, Ralph; *Chicago Defender*; Du Bois, W. E. B.; Journalism; Garvey, Marcus; King, Martin Luther, Jr.; Marshall, Thurgood; *Pittsburgh Courier*

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MICHAEL A. LORD (1996)
Updated bibliography

BAMBARA, TONI CADE

MARCH 25, 1939
DECEMBER 29, 1995

Born Toni Cade in New York City to Helen Brent Henderson Cade, writer Toni Cade Bambara adopted her last name in 1970. Bambara grew up in various sections of New York (Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Queens) as well as in Jersey City, New Jersey. She earned a B.A. in theater arts and English from Queens College in 1959—the year in which she published her first short story, "Sweet Town"—and an M.A. in English from City College of New York in 1965. At the same time, she served as a community organizer and activist as well as occupational therapist for the psychiatric division of Metropolitan Hospital.

Bambara's consciousness was raised early as she watched her mother instruct her grade school teachers about African-American history and culture and as she listened on New York street corners to Garveyites, Father Diviners, Rastafarians, Muslims, Pan-Africanists, and communists. She learned early of the resiliency that would be needed for a poor black female to survive. Bambara's streetwise sensibility informs two collections of writings by black women that she edited, *The Black Woman* (1970) and *Tales and Stories for Black Folks* (1971). The stories she contributed to these collections portray young black women who weather difficult times and who challenge others to join the struggle for equality.

From 1959 to 1970 Bambara wrote a series of short stories that were published in 1972 as *Gorilla, My Love*. A collection of fifteen stories, this book focuses on relationships that rejuvenate—family, community, and self-love. Her second collection of stories, *The Sea Birds Are Still*