



BLACK DANCE



IMPROVISATION

CURATED BY LESLIE PARKER

ALEIGHA MAYO & ASHA ROWLAND

JULY 23 & 24 | 7 PM

Land Acknowledgement

Leslie Parker Dance Project shares a deep appreciation for this moment, tonight, as we acknowledge the extensive contribution of enslaved African labour to this country's pursuit of liberty for some although not for all.

Leslie Parker Dance Project acknowledges the land, waters, benevolent ancestors, and the soil upon which we are standing as the traditional homeland of Dakhóta and Ojibwe/Anishinaabe people.

We recognize all Indigenous people and all Indigenous people who have been displaced from traditional homeland(s).

Reflection

We invite audience members to reflect on these prompts after the performance:

What do you know now?

What do you feel now?

If you would like to share your response, please write your reflection on a provided index card in the theater lobby.

Runtime is approximately 75 minutes including a brief intermission.

Artists

Aleigha Mayo & Asha Rowland

Creative & Technical Leadership Team

Leslie Parker

Curator, Director & Producer

jay beardsley

Project Coordinator

Ansel Langmead

Stage Manager & Light Design

Sterling Miller

Creative Assistant & Front of House Manager

Ne'Vaeh Embaye

Stage Hand

Anniessa Antar

Sound Board Operator

Madeleine Hall

Marketing & Communications Coordinator

Mike Grogan

Light Designer Mentor

About Black Dance Improvisation

Leslie Parker Dance Project has mounted the Black Dance Improvisation (BDI) Initiative, including intensives, festival, and residencies in the Twin Cities. After the BDI Intensive 2024, Leslie Parker invited cohort 2024 & 2023 members to collaborate on the public sharing of an experiment performed by Leslie Parker & (long-time) Collaborators. The public offering of an experiment featuring a selection of BDI Intensive participants was performed at The Cedar Cultural Center and was co-presented by Northrop, Twin Cities Jazz Festival, and Leslie Parker Dance Project with funding support from Metropolitan Regional Arts Council; an experiment- a live collaborative improvisation public performance drawing from Blackness in experimental music, storytelling, visual art, and dance.



Leslie Parker Dance Project brought together improvisers in the Twin Cities again in 2025 who practice various models of improvisation globally for the Twin Cities BDI Intensive 2025. The BDI Initiative is rooted in the Call to Remember methodology to cultivate community through remembrance.

About Black Dance Improvisation

The focus of the BDI Residency Program is on dance creatives who are curious and want to deepen their awareness of Black Improvisation as rigorous performance research in contemporary dance practices.

This year, the BDI Residency is presented in two parts. Part I, taking place in July, centers independent study and the development of original solo performance research, which you will experience this evening.

Part II, the BDI Intensive, will be held September 8–18, 2026, bringing together a new cohort of artists for an immersive experience of embodied research, creative inquiry, and exploration rooted in Black improvisational practices.



Black Dance Improvisation Initiative has been supported by Minnesota State Arts Board, Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, Minneapolis Arts & Culture, Danspace Project NYC, Mixed Blood Theatre, MANCC, The Cedar Cultural Center, Jerome Foundation, TU Dance, MOVO Space, Pillsbury House + Theatre, Walker Arts Center, Northrop, Center For Performing Arts, McKnight Foundation, and Pangea World Theatre.

Curator, Producer, Artistic Director

Leslie Parker



Parker is a Bessie award recipient, Jerome Hill Artist Fellow 2019 - 2022, a Mcknight Choreographer Fellow 2022 and a Jerome@Camargo artist in residence 2024-2026. Her multi-year and multi-city work continues as it is rooted, researched, presented, and performed across the US and internationally at venues including Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt Germany), Blaise Senghor Cultural Centre (Senegal, Africa) Painted Bride Arts Center (Philadelphia, PA), The Camargo Foundation (Cassis, France), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, MN), Center for Performance Research (Brooklyn, NY), Movement Research (New York, New York), Danspace Project (New York, New York),

Pillsbury House Theatre (Minneapolis, MN), Pangea World Theatre (Minneapolis, MN), CounterPulse (San Francisco, CA), Harlem Stages E-Moves (New York City, NY), Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (Tallahassee, FL), and BOOM Concepts (Pittsburgh, PA). As an educator, Parker has led and facilitated classes as a full-time lecturer at University of Minnesota, as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Carleton College, a Resident Choreographer at Spelman Department of Theatre and Performance, as well as master classes and workshops at TU Dance Center, Mixed Blood Theatre, University of Michigan, Point Park University, Florida State University, Alabama School of Fine Arts, Keshet Dance and Performing Arts and Temple University.

Parker organized and initiated 'Moving Dialogue for Non-Violence' to facilitate dance as a therapeutic activity in collaboration with CAMBA, part of Brooklyn Women's Shelter programming.

Curator, Producer, Artistic Director

Parker (continued)

LPDP has received recognition and acknowledges support from National Dance Project/nefa, National Performance Network Creation Fund, National Performance Development Fund, National Performance Network Community Engagement Fund, Minnesota Regional Arts Council, Minnesota State Arts Board, Foundation for Contemporary Arts (NY), New Music USA, Jerome Foundation, and McKnight Foundation.

<https://www.leslieparkerdance.com/>

Artists



Aleigha Mayo

Aleigha Mayo is a performing artist and teaching artist from the unceded land of the Anishinaabe, Myaamia, Kaskaskia, Kiikaapoi, and Peoria peoples, now known as Chicago, IL. They began their dance journey at Mayfair Academy of Fine Arts and graduated from Howard University with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and where they also studied Graham technique and Ballet. After college, Aleigha continued their dance education at Alonzo King Lines Ballet Training Program, where they deepened their understanding and love of contemporary movement, improvisation, and ballet. Throughout those two years they had the privilege of performing works by Roderick George, Maurya Kerr, and Sidra Bell. Aleigha later joined Dallas Black Dance Theatre: Encore! under the direction of Nycole Ray. In their two seasons with DBDT: Encore! Aleigha has worked with Christopher Huggins, Katarzyna Skarpetowska, Levi Marsman, Takehiro Ueyama and more. In their time with TU Dance: CULTIVATE Aleigha has had the opportunity to perform works by Yusha-Marie Sorzano, Camille A. Brown, and Ronald K. Brown, Tumelo Khupe, Laurel Keen, Gregory Dolbashian and was directed under the leadership of Toni Piece-Sands.



Photos by Canaan Mattson, Brian Guilliaux, Kari Mosel

Artists



Asha Rowland



Asha Rowland is a dancer, choreographer, storyteller, and dreamer based in Minneapolis, Mni Sota Makoce and Chicago, Illinois. Her experimental movement methodology is based on her 20 years practice in dance specializing in Bharatanatyam (Smt. Hema and Krithika Rajagopalan), Raq Sharqi (Sabah Saeed), Datura Style (Rachel Brice), and Black American Street Dance (Tanji Harper and more). Asha's practice centers the questioning of environments and mentalities that perpetuates anti-blackness, environmental racism, and classist structures from an African and South Asian diasporic lens. Driven by curiosity and cultural intersections; Asha's research is often derivative of historical investigation and uncovering stories that are lost and forgotten. Aesthetically, her work is narrative-driven, ethereal, world-building, and straddles dualities of chaos and meditation. She often blends visual art work into performance settings. Her latest evening-length production, *The Alchemist's Soul*, debuted in February 2025. Asha collaborates with Lakshmi Ramgopal's, Lykanthea, as a dancer, choreographer, and vocalist. She has participated in numerous residencies around the United States and has performed nationally and internationally as a soloist, with Lykanthea, and as a company dancer with Natya Dance Theatre. Some residencies she has participated in include the Black Ensemble Productions' IFE Lab Fellowship, the Center for Performing Arts Residency, Unrehearsed Residency, The Chrysalis Milkweed Residency, and the MCA Chicago Performs Series with Lykanthea. She is a 2026 recipient of the MN State Arts Board Creative Individuals Grant and a 2026 McKnight Dancer Fellow.



Photos by Dennis Glisson, Ravi Ganapathy, RGBTV

Creative & Production Team



Anniessa Antar

Anniessa Antar is an educator, software engineer, and performance artist. She has worked with organizations such as Springboard for the Arts, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Mizna, the Minnesota Marine Art Museum, the School for Poetic Computation, Body Watani and Backwoodz Studioz. When she's not running sound boards, she teaches at MCAD, develops artist and community org websites, produces music and creates video art.



Sterling Miller

“What they call you is one thing.
What you answer to is something else.”
— Lucille Clifton



Mike Grogan

Mike Grogan, based in Minneapolis, is the Technical Director at the University of Minnesota Department of Dance. He has provided high-quality services to the Twin Cities performing arts community for over thirty years.

Creative & Production Team



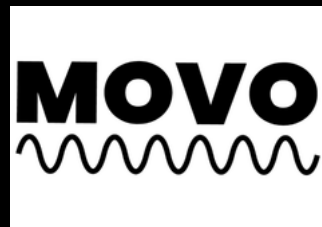
Ansel Langmead

Ansel Langmead has a long list of roles; visual artist, project/production/stage manager, lighting designer, and multi-media crafter based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Ansel's production and technical work has brought them to Ted Mann Concert Hall, the University of Minnesota Theater Arts and Dance departments, the Taja Will Ensemble, Mni Giizhik Theater Ensemble, Leslie Parker Dance Project, The Cedar Cultural Center and other local artists and venues. Their paintings have been featured in the Autism Society of MN's NeurodivergArt campaign, the Burl Community Art Gallery and Art Glow by the Stephanie Evelo Program for Art Inclusion. They graduated from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Dance in 2021. Ansel aims to create safe and supportive work environments for all oppressed peoples in their production work, as well as align their art and production practices with their values of anti-racism, decolonization, and disability justice.

Supporters For This Residency



TU DANCE



Past Supporters

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Minneapolis Arts & Culture Center For Performing Arts

Center Danspace

Project NYC MANCC

Jerome Foundation

Pillsbury House + Theatre Walker Arts Center

Northrop McKnight Foundation

& Pangea World Theatre.