



Tri-DAC Dance Staff and Guest Artists Bios

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Dr. Anne S. Richardson has been the Tri-DAC Dance Program Director for over 20 years. She holds a degree in Dance Performance from Point Park University in Pittsburgh, Pa., a Master's Degree in Teaching Theatre and a Masters in Educational Administration both from USC, and an EdD in Educational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University. Over the years, she has choreographed for Workshop Theatre, Columbia City Ballet, Trustus Theatre, and Sumter Civic Ballet. She has taught dance and/or theatre at Hand Middle School, Crayton Middle School, and Dreher High School in Richland One and Richland Northeast High School, the Palmetto Center for the Arts in Richland 2. She currently teaches Theatre at Westwood High School. She has successfully written the Distinguished Arts Program grant and the Arts in Basic Curriculum grant and been awarded over \$100,000 for public school Arts program funding. She is the 2018 Verner Award Recipient for Education.

Anita Ashley founded Columbia Ballet School in 1980. With over 50 years' teaching experience, she has served as founder and director of the state's first professional ballet company, South Carolina Ballet Theatre, and is one of the founders of Ann Brodie's Carolina Ballet. She has taught classical ballet, jazz and theatre dance at USC, USC Aiken, Columbia College, South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities, Eglevsky Ballet, and North Carolina School for the Arts. Her students have gone on to successful careers in ballet companies such as Louisville Ballet, Kansas City Ballet, Bebe Miller, Boston Ballet, Eglevsky Ballet, and Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Other students have found success in film, television, music, and Tony Award winning Broadway productions. Her students have been National Finalists at Youth America Grand Prix five times.

Ms. Ashley's choreography has been performed throughout the Southeast, Michigan, Ohio and Canada, as well as by Ann Brodie's Carolina Ballet, Columbia Classical Ballet, Artists for Africa, Town Theatre, Workshop Theatre and Trustus Theatre, where she was a company member. Her choreography has received positive reviews in

Dance magazine and she was featured in Dance Teacher magazine. She was awarded the Maria Tallchief Award for Excellence by the Eastern Cherokee Nation.

Virginia McElveen - is the Co-Director for the Palmetto Center for the Arts Academy where she teaches ballet and tap and assists with the PCA Magnet Dance Program, teaches at Chosen Dance Academy and Orangeburg Civic Ballet. She taught in the private sector at both Calvert-Brodie School of Dance and at Columbia Classical Ballet School. She was the Founder and Director of Columbia Dance Associates. She has studied ballet with such renowned teachers as Michael Lland with American Ballet Theatre and Igor Swetsoff.

James Velasco - Represented by Bloc Talent Agency, James Velasco is a South Carolina raised dancer who has spent the last eight years in Los Angeles, California. Velasco is an alumni of North Carolina School of The Arts as well as The American Musical and Dramatic Academy (AMDA) training in New York City and Los Angeles. He has performed in numerous commercials including MAC Cosmetics, American Horror Story Promo, Carolina Herrera, ENKi by Leroy Merlin, and Moschino Fashion line. He has also danced on an episode of ABC's hit show *The Goldbergs*, and sang alongside *Dear Evan Hansen* star Ben Platt in a performance for *America's Got Talent*. He can also be found in the music video *Solita* by Latin Pop Star Kali Uchis.

With a background in Musical Theater, James has also danced with Disney Cruise Line. He's been in two regional productions of Broadway's smash hit show *Newsies the Musical* as Specs and Henry, showcasing not only dance and acrobatics, but singing and acting as well! He also performed in a Panto of Robin Hood and Maid Marian at the Laguna Playhouse, where he played the role of Terrance as well as one of the dancers.

James has recently been dancing with Columbia City Ballet performing in shows such as *Dracula*, *The Nutcracker*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Off The Wall*, and *Studio 54*. Velasco also has a passion for songwriting. His original music can be found on all streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. He was a top five finalist in the SongDoor Songwriting competition in 2019, as well as an honorable mention in other

categories. James has a passion for the arts, and hopes to inspire everyone to be creative in multiple ways.

Nicole Czekalski - Mrs. Czekalski is the Dance Program Director at the Palmetto Center for the Arts at Richland Northeast High School and works for Columbia City Ballet. She received her degree in dance education from Winthrop University. This is her 14th year teaching in Tri-District.

Vincent E. Thomas, dancer, choreographer and teacher, received his MFA in Dance from Florida State University and a BME in Music from the University of South Carolina. He has danced with Dance Repertory Theatre (FSU), Randy James Dance Works (NY/NJ), EDGEWORKS Dance Theater (DC), and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange (MD). His choreography has been presented at various national and international venues including DUMBO Festival (NY), Velocity Festival (DC), Modern Moves Festival (DC), Philly Fringe (PA), Edinburgh Fringe Festival (UK-Scotland), Barcelona and Madrid, Spain, Avignon, France, Athens, Greece, Bari, Italy, Copenhagen, Denmark, Shanghai, Taipei, and Singapore. He received rave reviews for his performance of “Come Change” (2012) and “iWitness” (2014) in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Scotland). Theater credits: Movement Coach/Choreographer for Everyman Theater’s Brother’s Size by Tarell Alvin McCraney in Baltimore, MD (2012), Mosaic Theatre’s Unexplored Interior by Jay Sander in Washington, DC (2015), and Everyman Theater’s Los Otros by Ellen Fitzhugh in Baltimore, MD (2017), and Associate Choreographer/Movement Coach for Williamstown Theater Festival’s Most Happy in Concert in Williamstown, MA (2022) directed by Daniel Fish. He is the Artistic Director/Choreographer of the national touring What’s Going On project. Vincent was awarded the 2011-2012 Towson University Student Government Association Faculty Member of the Year, a 2014-2015 NextLook Artist for the University of Maryland College Park and Joe’s Movement Emporium, a 2012-13 American Dance Institute Incubator Artist (MD), 2016 Baker Artist Award finalists, the 2017 Pola Nirenska Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance (DC), the 2019 University System of Maryland Regents Faculty Award for Excellence in Research, Scholarship & Creative Activity, the 2020 MDEA Living Legacy Award, a 2021 William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund Awardee, and a 2022 Baker Award Finalist. He is an Urban Bush

Women BOLD Facilitator, faculty member for the UBW Summer Institutes (NY), and Professor of Dance at Towson University (MD). His multi-dimensional company VTDance builds on the use of contemporary dance, improvisation, text/ movement, a variety of sound sources, and collaborations with other artists, including dancers, musicians, poets, visual artists, and others [to be discovered]. These ideas coupled with witty, poignant, athletic and gestural movement are the rich palette for VTDance. www.vtdance.org

Erica Cooper - Miss Cooper is a graduate of Columbia College where she was a dance major. She also graduated from the PCA Dance program at Richland Northeast High School. This year, Miss Cooper joins as a full time dance teacher for the Tri-DAC program where she has been teaching for five years. Currently, she is the Dance Educator at Brockman Elementary School in Richland 1 and also teaches in the private sector at Goins Dancing. Miss Cooper continues to perform in mainstage productions at the Columbia Children's Theatre.

Jacquelyn Stokes, currently a Dance Educator at L.W. Conder Arts Integrated Magnet School in Columbia, SC. A native of Clairton PA, with a BS degree in Physical Education with emphasis in Corrective Therapy, Norfolk State University and an Algur H. Meadows Fellow at Southern Methodist University where she obtained an MFA in Dance. Ms. Stokes has served as an Assistant Professor of Dance and Artistic Director for Orchesis Dance Theatre of Virginia State University; the Dance Collective Dance Theatre of Benedict College and an Assistant Lecturer in the Dance Program at Coker College. She has been a presenter at the SCAHPERD Conference and South Carolina Council for African American Studies Conference; and has been a master teacher at the National Black College Dance Exchange, the Southeast Regional American College Dance Festival and International Music Camp in Dunseith, ND. She is committed to dance education and the historical connections of dance in society. She is particularly dedicated to the research of Katherine Dunham and preservation of her legacy. Recently, Ms. Stokes set a Dunham inspired work "A Gathering of Women" on CoMo Dance Company, Columbus, Ohio.