



10 CONTEMPORARY BLACK CHOREOGRAPHERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

By [Audrey Seraphin](#) Posted [February 23, 2018](#) In [Black History Month](#), [Community](#), [Diversity and Inclusion](#)

In honor of Black History Month, we are celebrating black excellence by highlighting some of the very best black artists producing and creating work today. This week we are highlighting ten contemporary black choreographers you should know:



LA'TOYA PRINCESS JACKSON

La'Toya Princess Jackson is a dancer, singer-songwriter, and performing artist finishing her graduate studies at Harvard University. Her performance research is a combination of studies in African-American artistry in classical dance and the impact of African-American female artists on pop culture. She can be seen dancing with Harvard Dance Project and [Harvard-Radcliffe Modern Dance Company](#). Making use of all her various artistic talents, Jackson is working to produce a totally original ballet featuring music, choreography, and a libretto all created by her. Jackson can be found working in the community as a Teaching Artist for [Boston Ballet School](#), [Citydance](#), and [ECI on Location](#); she has also designed dance outreach and ballet programming for Boys and Girls Club of Boston. Jackson was most recently seen in the ensemble of Harvard's Theatre, Dance & Media department's production of *The Owl Answers* by Adrienne Kennedy. Jackson also releases original music as [ElectrKPrincess](#) and is fondly known as "That 80's Chic" in the music scene because of the retro influences prevalent in her songs. 

[@ElectrKPrincess](#)



CAMILLE A. BROWN

Camille A. Brown is a choreographer, clarinetist, and the Artistic Director of [Camille A. Brown & Dancers](#). Her work is now on display on Broadway in the choreography of the *Once on This Island* revival. Previous New York choreography credits include *Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway, *Fortress of Solitude* at The Public, and *tick, tick... BOOM!* starring Lin-Manuel Miranda at NY City Center's Encores! Off-Center. Brown has been commissioned by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Philadanco!, and Ballet Memphis, to name a few. She was named a Guggenheim Fellow in 2016 and premiered *ink*, the final work in her theatrical trilogy about race, culture, and identity, at the Kennedy Center in December. Brown is known for using contemporary movement styles to tell historical and ancestral stories on the stage with her company of dancers. She is currently traveling with her company performing *ink* and the second work in her trilogy, *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play*.  [@CamilleABrown](#)



SAVION GLOVER

Savion Glover is a tap dancer, actor, and choreographer from Newark, New Jersey. Born into a musical family, Glover had a grandfather who sang and play big band piano and a grandmother who played gospel music for Whitney Houston. Tap legend Gregory Hines was one of Glover's tap teachers and called him "possibly the best tap dancer that ever lived". Glover is known for his heavy and expressive foot and choreography style, which originates from improvisation and works to pay homage to more classic tap moves and styles before moving into more modern practices. Glover choreographed and assisted with the motion capture work for *Happy Feet* and *Happy Feet 2* for the protagonist penguin, Mumble. Most recently, Savion Glover was nominated for a Tony for his choreography on the musical *Shuffle Along*. Glover won the Tony Award for Best Choreography for *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* in 1996. A tap teacher since he was 14, Glover founded and runs the [HooFeRzClub School for Tap](#) in his hometown. 

[@TheSavionGlover](#)



TAISHA PAGGETT

Taisha Paggett is a dance artist known for her choreography, which works to bridge dance and visual arts mediums. She works for the stage, the gallery, and for public space performances. Born in Fresno and based in Los Angeles, Paggett teaches at the University of California Riverside. Paggett's choreography explores issues of race, gender, and body agency, and most recently, has questioned fixed notions of queer black existence and survival. Her most recent installation was *counts orchestrate, a meadow*, a collaboration with Meena Murugesan at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. In 2005, Paggett founded *itch journal*, a biannual online zine for LA-based dancers and artists to present their work in a new format and muse on the practice of art-making for like-minded readers. In 2017, she was one of ten women honored with an Avest Award for outstanding contributions to the arts in Southern California. Up next, Paggett will be a featured performer at UC Riverside's [NOT FESTIVAL](#), running from February 24 through March 3.



TOMMIE-WAHEED EVANS

Tommie-Waheed Evans began his dance career in Los Angeles before a fellowship with the Ailey School brought him to New York. Evans trained there under legends like Matthew Rushing and Debbie Allen and served as an assistant to Troy Powell, artistic director of the Ailey II company. Waheed performed as a company member of both Philadanco! and Complexions Contemporary Ballet before founding his own company Waheed Works in 2006. With Waheed Works, Evans aims for a deeper connection between the audience through the dancers' movement; he seeks to create a new language for the theater that moves beyond words. Evans currently serves as the Artist-in-Residence at Philadanco! and just completed the 2017 Ballet Choreographic Residency at BalletX, which culminated in his new piece, *In between the passing...* Most recently, Evans' choreography was featured in *Verb Ballets* at the [Ohio Regional Music Arts and Cultural Outreach \(ORMACO\)](#) on February 17. [🐦 @WaheedWorks](#)



DERICK K. GRANT

Born in Boston, director, performer, and choreography Derick Grant began his tap career at age two at [The Roxbury Center for the Performing Arts](#). A performer of the Dianne Walker "hoofin" style, he found fame in executing Savion Glover's choreography in *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* as an original company member on Broadway, and taking over for Glover in the lead role in the subsequent first National Tour. He toured the world for three years with the Jazz Tap Ensemble before settling in New York City. Most recently, his piece *A Night Out: Tap!*, about the history of tap dance successfully toured the country. Today, Grant teaches tap dance at Steps on Broadway and serves as a national spokesperson So Danca dancewear. Grant's illustrious career includes a Helen Hayes Award, a Princess Grace Award for Upcoming Young Artist, and two Los Angeles Ovation Awards.



LULA WASHINGTON

Lula Washington started her career with a protest — she was originally denied admission to UCLA in the 70's to study dance because of her “advanced” age of 22. Married and with a small child, she appealed to the dean and gained admission to the school that would launch her long career, where she would found UCLA's Black Dance Association. While at UCLA, Washington performed with Cher and Al Green, in *Funny Lady* with Barbara Streisand, and on the Academy Awards telecast. In 1980, she founded her own non-profit dance school, the [Lula Washington Dance Theatre](#), which has since taught over 45,000 inner-city students in low-cost and free classes in African-inspired dance forms. The school and Washington's company performs not only her original works, but works of other African-American choreographers and has received NEA funding to bring original commissions to life. Washington's choreography was seen on the big screen in 2009 in James Cameron's *Avatar*; Washington designed not only all movement for motion capture, but the signature “I See You” greeting and gesture the film became known for.

 [@LWDT80](#)



ALVIN RANGEL

Alvin Rangel began his career in his hometown Ponce, Puerto Rico, performing ballet and jazz as a young dancer. Since moving to the mainland, Rangel has performed all over the U.S. with afro-contemporary Dance Theatre X and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company (DCDC). Rangel's best-known project with his own company, [In-Version Dance Project](#), *Tango Vesre [Inverted Tango]* has received international recognition. A pair of duets performed by two male dancers, *Tango Vesre* explores the evolution of male tango in Argentina. Rangel's choreography as a whole thrives on interdisciplinary collaboration and seeks to discover what makes us human. Today, Rangel brings his mix of classical ballet, Afro-Caribbean, jazz, and modern dance to California State University-Fullerton, where he is an Associate Professor of Dance.



CYNTHIA OLIVER

Cynthia Oliver is a choreographer and performance artist who creates what she calls “performance collages” that combine and interrupt dance with spoken word, theatrical performance, and sound mixes. Oliver is significantly influenced by black avant-garde art and incorporates aesthetic styles in her work that draw from Caribbean, African, and American traditions and trends. Her most recent work *Virago-Man Dem* just finished touring the U.S., enjoying a successful premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's [Next Wave Festival](#). Exploring black masculinity from a feminine perspective, Oliver challenged herself to choreograph a viewpoint she did not fully understand without resorting to stereotype. Her scholarly pursuits and research of contemporary dance, feminism, and black popular culture has led Oliver to choreograph pieces and write books on the meeting of the subjects, including her 2009 book *Queen of the Virgins: Pageantry and Womanhood in the Caribbean*, and her performance piece *Calypso's Moving Geographies*, which investigates the role of calypso dance in Caribbean identities. Oliver teaches dance at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she is also an Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Humanities, Arts, and Related Fields.



DAZAUN SOLEYN

Dazaun Soleyn is a performer and teaching artist in the Bay Area who has trained and now teaches everything from ballet to hip-hop. Upon graduation from University of South Florida with a BFA in Modern Dance Performance and Choreography, Soleyn was accepted and trained at the [Alonzo King LINES Ballet Program](#). Soleyn is the artistic director of [dauzen.dance](#), a company which aims to explore the depths and dynamic fullness of the human soul. This month, Soleyn performed his most recent work-in-progress, *Metaphoric Existence*, at the [Black Choreographers' Festival](#) in San Francisco. *Metaphoric Existence* is based on Soleyn and his dancers' experience with code-switching, the practice of adapting one's speech or mannerisms to blend in to the dominant culture in the room. *Metaphoric Existence* will have its fully realized premiere at [Dance Mission Theatre](#) this spring. [🐦 @dazaun_s](#)



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