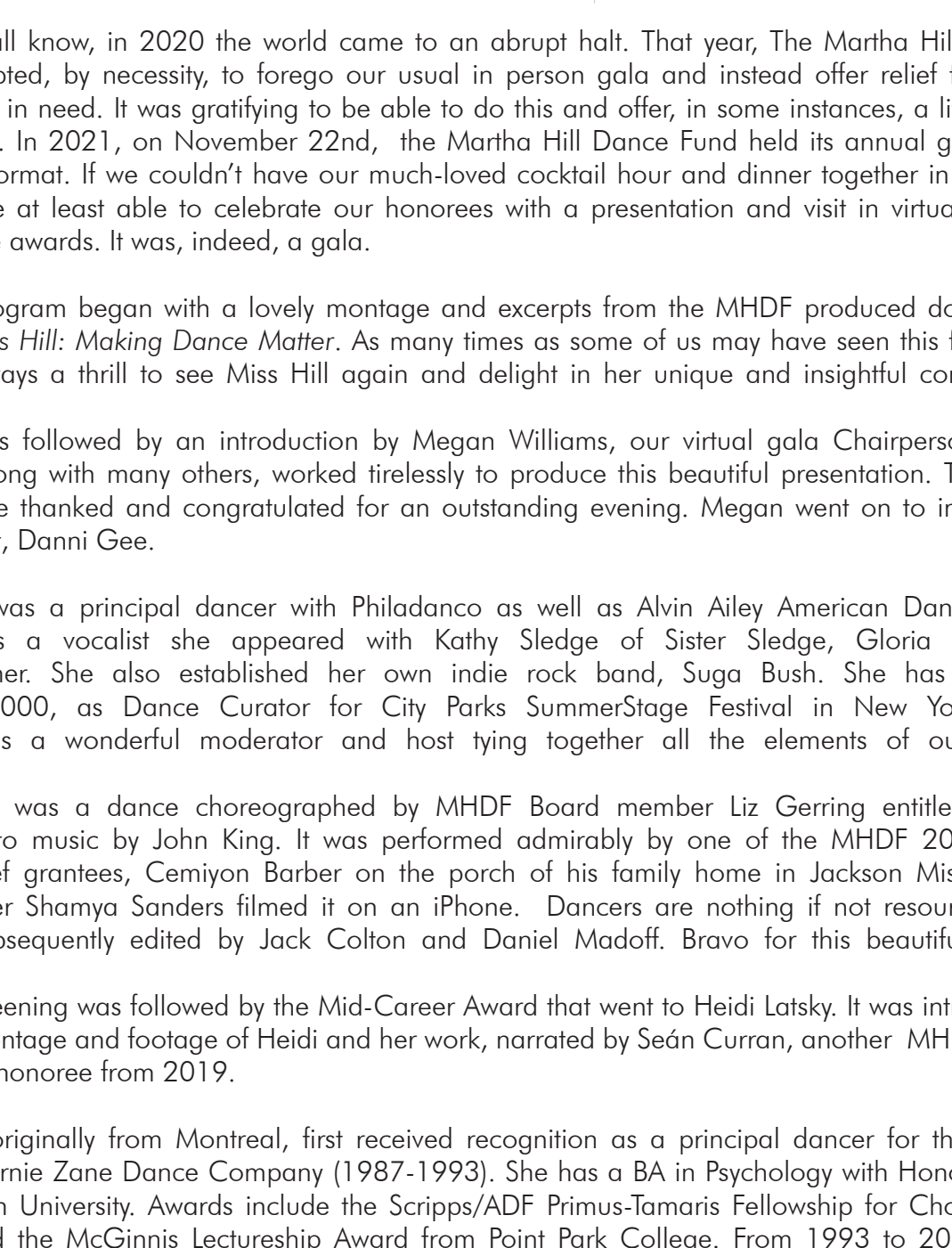


2021 VIRTUAL CELEBRATION



Javole Willa Jo Zollar, Heidi Latsky and Danni Gee

Screened by Megan Williams

As we all know, in 2020 the world came to an abrupt halt. That year, The Martha Hill Dance Fund opted, by necessity, to forego our usual in person gala and instead offer relief funds to dancers in need. It was gratifying to be able to do this and offer, in some instances, a lifeline to dancers. In 2021, on November 22nd, the Martha Hill Dance Fund held its annual gala in a virtual format. If we couldn't have our much-loved cocktail hour and dinner together in person, we were at least able to celebrate our honorees with a presentation and visit in virtual rooms after the awards. It was, indeed, a gala.

Our program began with a lovely montage and excerpts from the MHDF produced documentary *Miss Hill: Making Dance Matter*. As many times as some of us may have seen this footage, it is always a thrill to see Miss Hill again and delight in her unique and insightful comments.

This was followed by an introduction by Megan Williams, our virtual gala Chairperson. Megan, along with many others, worked tirelessly to see this beautiful presentation. They are all to be thanked and congratulated for an outstanding evening. Megan went on to introduce our host, Danni Gee.

Danni was a principal dancer with Philadanco as well as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. As a vocalist she appeared with Kathy Sledge of Sister Sledge, Gloria Gaynor, and Cher. She also established her own indie rock band, Suga Bush. She has served, since 2000, as Dance Curator for City Parks SummerStage Festival in New York City. She was a wonderful moderator and host tying together all the elements of our gala.

First up was a dance choreographed by MHDF Board member Liz Gerring entitled *Porch Dance* to music by John King. It was performed admirably by one of the MHDF 2020 Covid relief grantees, Cerniyon Barber on the porch of his family home in Jackson Mississippi. His sister Shonay Sanders filmed it on an iPhone. Dancers also face nothing in the PBS documentary was subsequently edited by Jack Colton and Daniel Madoff. Bravo for this beautiful work!

The screening was followed by the Mid-Career Award that went to Heidi Latsky. It was introduced by a montage and footage of Heidi and her work, narrated by Seán Curran, another MHDF Mid-Career honoree from 2019.

Heidi, originally from Montreal, first received recognition as a principal dancer for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company (1987-1993). She has a BA in Psychology with Honors from Carleton University. Awards include the Scripps/ADF Primus-Tamoris Fellowship for Choreography and the McGinnis Luteship Award from Point Park College. From 1993 to 2000, Ms. Latsky collaborated with Laurence Goldhaber in the duo Goldhaber & Latsky. In 2001 she formed her own company, Heidi Latsky Dance. From 1978-2005 Ms. Latsky held the Movement Department at The School for Film and Television where she developed her teaching practice. Latsky Method. In 2006 Ms. Latsky began an intensive period of creation with bi-lateral amputee, Lisa Bufano. This marked a significant shift of focus for the company. In 2009 Ms. Latsky was chosen by Creative Capital Foundation to receive an award for her evening length work *GIMP* which was the subject of a feature length documentary by Richard Move. In development since 2017, D.I.S.P.L.A.Y.E. is an immersive experience at the intersection of dance, fashion, and art, transforming each venue into a unique gallery space.

For her work that unites dance artists with physical disabilities with conventional dancers, for her ability to dismantle the definition of normal, for her redefinition of beauty and virtuosity and for bringing thought provoking work to broad audiences, the Martha Hill Dance Fund Mid-Career Award went to Ms. Latsky.

Our Lifetime Achievement Award was then presented to Javole Willa Jo Zollar first with a montage of her life and work as narrated by Vincent Thomas.

Javole Willa Jo Zollar, founder of Urban Bush Women, is originally from Kansas City, Missouri. She trained with Joseph Steward, a student of the legendary Katherine Dunham as well as Dianne McIntyre. Ms. Zollar holds a B.A. in dance from the University of Missouri at Kansas City and an M.F.A. in Dance from Florida State University. In 1984 Ms. Zollar founded Urban Bush Women as a performance ensemble dedicated to exploring the use of cultural expression as a catalyst for social change. In addition to 34 works for UBW, she has created works for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Philadanco, among others. In 2005, she was designated a Master of Choreography by the John F. Kennedy Performing Arts Center. In 2006 she received a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie) for her work as choreographer/creator of *Working with These Southern Dances*. She was also featured in the PBS documentary *Free to Dance*. Other awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a *Dance Magazine* Award, and a Bessie Lifetime Achievement Award. Her company has toured five continents and has performed at venues including Brooklyn Academy of Music, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and The Kennedy Center. Ms. Zollar is a Distinguished Professor at Florida State University.

For her lifetime dedication to using the power of dance and artistic expression to celebrate the voices and advancement of Black women, communities of color, and artists of all diverse backgrounds as well as promoting civic engagement and community organizing, the Martha Hill Dance Fund Lifetime Achievement Award went to Javole Willa Jo Zollar.

Danni Gee then led a wonderful, spirited group discussion with honorees Ms. Zollar and Ms. Latsky talking about their work, their career paths, teaching and mentoring and the future of this art form dance, which we all love.

When the discussion concluded the program turned to honor the José Limón Dance Company, now in its 75th anniversary year. This was complemented by an excerpt from the Limón dancework, *There is a Time*, premiered in 1956. It is always a joy to see this work especially when mastered so sensitively by the current company members.

The evening's formal program ended with Vernon Scott, MHDF Board President, giving a congratulations to the honorees, a summary of the Board's recent activity, and heartfelt thanks to all those who participated in making the evening happen. Lastly, thanks were given to all those donors and supporters who contributed.

Interview with MHDF Board Member Allen Maniker MD

by Barrie Raffel

January 2022



Allen Maniker

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in the suburbs of Detroit. I went to Southfield High School and then attended the University of Michigan for one year.

When and how did you begin dancing?

I started dancing in the high school musicals. They needed boys so I auditioned and that's where I started studying dance more seriously. One of the musicals, *Camelot*, was choreographed by Carolyn Dorfman, a classmate of mine who greatly influenced me. I started taking modern classes outside of school with Harriet Berg. People like Christopher Pilafian and Shelley Washington, who were also from Detroit, came to work with us there. I also began taking ballet classes and the summer before I attended the University of Michigan I went to Wolf Trap in Washington DC where the Limón Company and Twyla Tharp were there. Danny Lewin, Lisa Steinberg, and Laura Glenn were some of my teachers. They influenced my decision to try to get into Juilliard. It was the summer when Danny was heading the Limón company, Twyla had just choreographed *Dance Coupe*, and the summer of the Watergate hearings so it was kind of a big summer.

What was your pathway to Juilliard?

I began college at the University of Michigan as pre-med but I was also taking an equal number of dance classes. They needed male dancers to perform in the dance ensemble. We rehearsed and then performed on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and that Monday, I got a D on my Chemistry test. That was the turning point where I felt I had to make a decision. I figured medical school would always be there but dance was something I needed to do now while I was young. I auditioned for Juilliard with something I choreographed with a teacher in Michigan to a Haydn piece. I had been studying dance for about 5 years at that point and I loved Juilliard. I saw so many people come to New York without the school of a school and saw them disappear into the wild so I was thankful that Juilliard gave me the basis to move into the dance world. I worked as an apprentice for a couple of summers with Jeffrey while I was in school and I took only three years to finish (1974-1977) as I had credits from the University of Michigan. The first professional work I did while still at school was working with Wendy Hillin in Baroque dance.

After school you danced with a variety of companies, can you tell us a bit more about those years?

When I graduated Miss Hill called me and told me that Barbara Betsabee de Rothschild (co-founder of Bat-Dor) was in town staying at the Pierre and to call her as she was auditioning for Bat-Dor. I called her and a few weeks later I got a telegram telling me that a place in New York City was waiting for me at JFK for my flight to Israel. I gave up the loss of my apartment, put my things in storage and showed up at JFK saying "I think you have a ticket to Israel." I knew one person in the company, Andy Miller, a Juilliard classmate, so at least I had a connection there. The company had many ballets by incredible choreographers such as Lar Lubovitch, Arin Alley, Paul Taylor and Doris Haim. We had wonderful tours and I got to see a good portion of the world. After a year I came back to New York and started dancing with Joyce Trisler full time. I also danced with Sophie Maslow and a season as a guest with the Alley company. Through Joyce Trisler's company, I got to perform in Michigan where all my family showed up. We also had a European tour and went to the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Cyprus, Germany, Portugal, Luxembourg - one of those great State Department things. When Joyce died Alvin invited the entire company to join the Alley company as guests for that season.

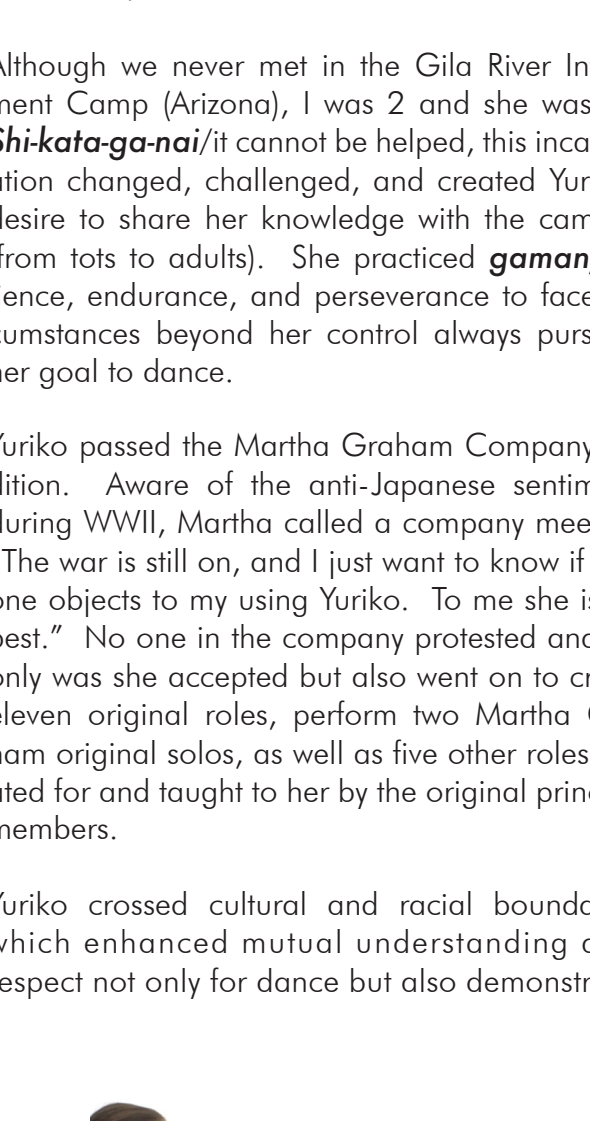
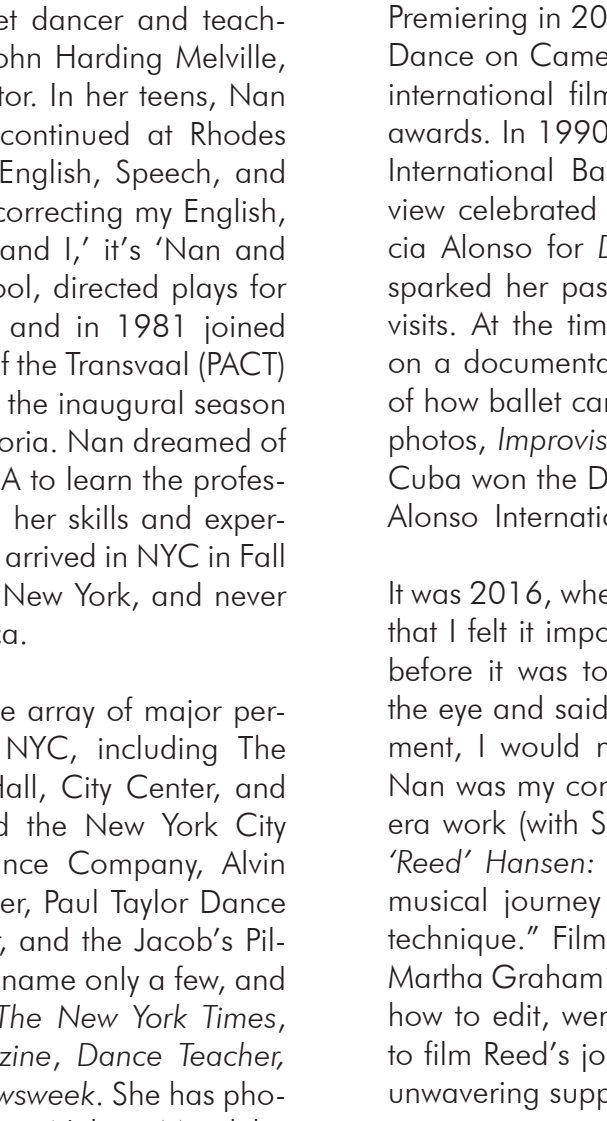


Photo: John Duddy

What prompted you to shift careers and did you have a particular interest in neurosurgery?

Joyce Trisler died my second year working with her and I was really unsure of what to do next. I just didn't see the next step and thought that I would take a class in something. I looked into a French course at Hunter but it was full - they said Biology was open, so I took that as a sign. I continued to dance some while taking pre-med courses before I graduated. I knew one person in the company, Andy Miller, a Juilliard classmate, so at least I had a connection there. The company had many ballets by incredible choreographers such as Lar Lubovitch, Arin Alley, Paul Taylor and Doris Haim. We had wonderful tours and I got to see a good portion of the world. After a year I came back to New York and started dancing with Joyce Trisler full time. I also danced with Sophie Maslow and a season as a guest with the Alley company. Through Joyce Trisler's company, I got to perform in Michigan where all my family showed up. We also had a European tour and went to the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Cyprus, Germany, Portugal, Luxembourg - one of those great State Department things. When Joyce died Alvin invited the entire company to join the Alley company as guests for that season.



From The Horses Mouth, 2013

spine that was giving him back pain but rather the tumor. When I was proven right, the surgeon said "You need to go into Neurosurgery". In the NY Times there was a Want - Ad section that listed a new program in Neurosurgery in Newark, at the NJ Medical School and they were looking for neurosurgery residents. I interviewed and was accepted and so, I got my first job in the NY Times! I completed seven years of training there and stayed on faculty for another 20 years rising to full Professor. I then got a notice that Beth Israel in Manhattan needed a new Chairman of Neurosurgery. I interviewed and came on as chairman. In a full circle, I ended up inheriting the job of the man I had been mentored by in medical school. I asked Miss Hill and she was thrilled to write me. "I was at that point that my relationship with Martha became much stronger. We kept in touch and Martha even came out to Detroit for my medical school graduation which was a great honor. Once in New York again, I sort of became her date when there were performances to attend or when she was being honored at various functions - she was constantly being honored. It also would have mattered what you go into and the faculty there is always in her closet and there were about 500 of her infamous hair ribbons all arranged by color; it was a moment of realizing "so that's where those hair ribbons live!" When she fractured her leg, Janet Soares, Evelyn Winter and I rushed looking after her. What amazed me with Martha was how she could make these incredibly smart artists in their own right stand up and pay attention. There was always a great deference and reverence given to her in all venues, whether with those of us from Juilliard or in the modern dance world or those in the ballet world such as Mr. Balanchine and Madame Danilova. They were always so respectful and deferential to each other which was very special to witness."

Young Dr. Maniker, 1988

Martha Hill has clearly impacted you, can you tell us about your relationship with her during school and after?

While a student at the school, I had a good relationship with Miss Hill. I worked in the office to make a few extra dollars so I saw her quite a bit but my relationship was no more special than with any of her other students. A few years out of school, when I needed a letter of recommendation for medical school, I asked Miss Hill and she was thrilled to write one. She had always felt, and I agree, that dance and medicine are very closely related, not only in the commitment, dedication and hard work required, but that both are aiming toward mastering an impossibility where one cannot really achieve perfection. We strive to learn and know more about the human body but there will always be more to learn. Dance there is always room to improve and to perfect. During one of my medical school admission interviews, one doctor asked me if Juilliard was disappointed that they wasted their time on me. I said, "not at all, a dance education is never wasted no matter what you go into and the faculty there is always in her closet and there were about 500 of her infamous hair ribbons all arranged by color; it was a moment of realizing "so that's where those hair ribbons live!" When she fractured her leg, Janet Soares, Evelyn Winter and I rushed looking after her. What amazed me with Martha was how she could make these incredibly smart artists in their own right stand up and pay attention. There was always a great deference and reverence given to her in all venues, whether with those of us from Juilliard or in the modern dance world or those in the ballet world such as Mr. Balanchine and Madame Danilova. They were always so respectful and deferential to each other which was very special to witness."

You have managed to stay very involved in the dance world, teaching at Montclair University, serving on the board, conducting interviews for Steps Beyond Foundation, etc. Do you find many connections between the work you do in the medical field to dance and movement? Are they intertwined for you?

Absolutely. In neurosurgery you use an operating microscope. You're maneuvering it and moving your hands and fingers and then you also need various details of your feet at the same time. My Soeurs, Evelyn Winter and I rushed looking after her. What amazed me with Martha was how she could make these incredibly smart artists in their own right stand up and pay attention. There was always a great deference and reverence given to her in all venues, whether with those of us from Juilliard or in the modern dance world or those in the ballet world such as Mr. Balanchine and Madame Danilova. They were always so respectful and deferential to each other which was very special to witness."

You've been conducting a lot of interviews of people involved with dance in recent years. Are there certain types of questions you feel get to the essence of a person and their work?

I don't feel my role is to do any "gotcha" moments or get people to reveal something of themselves that they wouldn't want to reveal. I want to make them comfortable or go into any unexpected avenues, but I'm interested in how they got into dance and want to find out how they have arrived at the point where they are. It's their inspiration, and when they see their future and their contribution to the world of dance. My thought process is about being prepared - reading and watching as much as possible about the individual and having the flexibility to go in the direction that they want to go. It's really a snapshot of a moment in time and a historical record. We're creating a snapshot of important artists of our time.

What are you finding is important to investigate more about today's dance world and what the MHDF might be able to provide that's different from when you were performing?

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