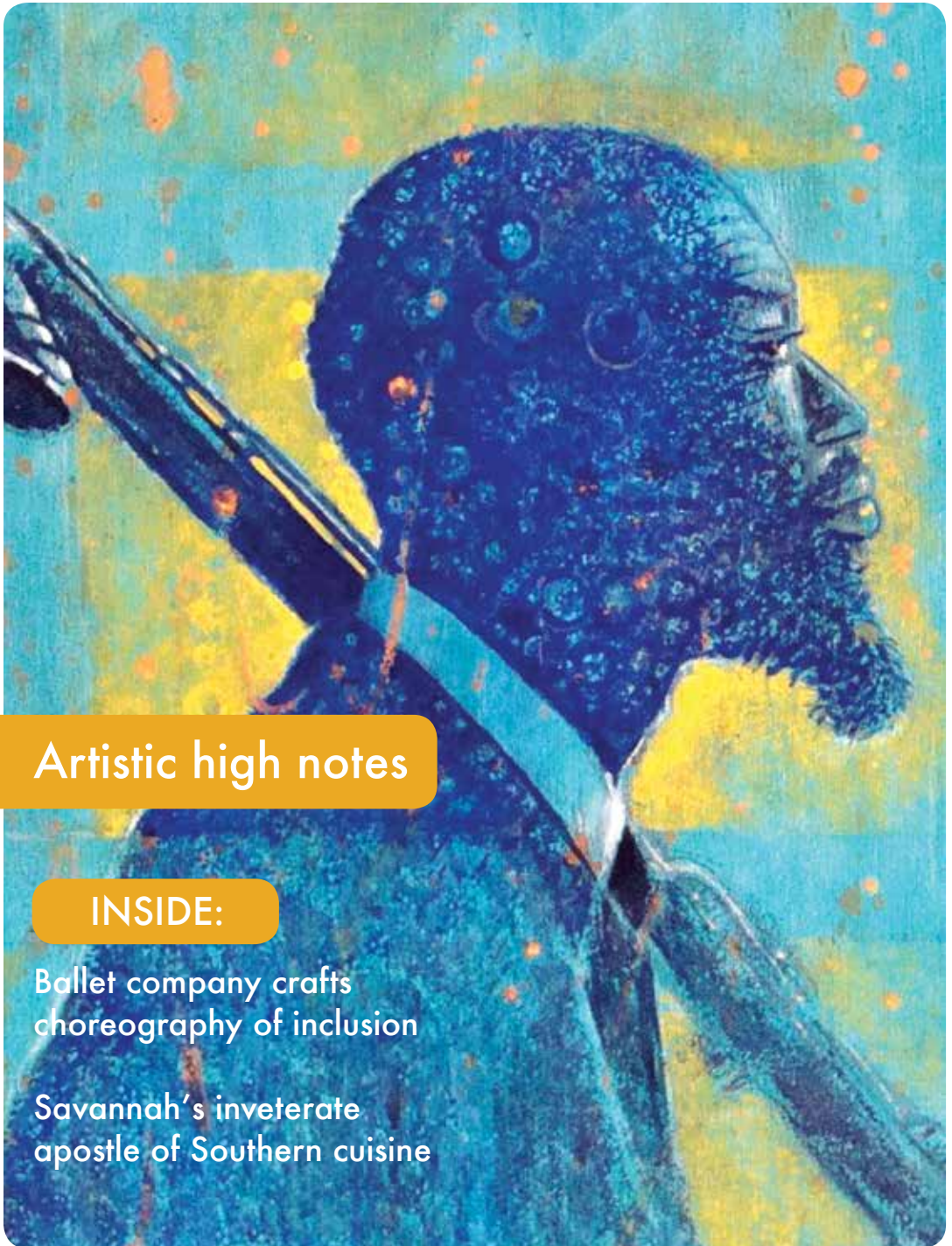


unity



African-American History Month
February 2016 Edition No. 77

Celebrating Food, Art & Culture



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National ballet company crafts choreography of inclusion

Nearly a decade ago, an act of Congress bestowed a coveted title upon American Ballet Theatre. On that day in April 2007, ABT became "America's National Ballet Company."

Seven years later, the New York City-based ABT, which was founded in 1940, launched a multifaceted initiative to diversify ballet nationwide by increasing the number of dancers and teachers of color.

ABT's Project Plié (www.abt.org/education/projectplie) combines training and support of students and dance teachers from communities previously underrepresented in U.S. ballet companies with a nationwide network of ballet companies committed to diversity.

"The scope of Project Plié is extremely far-reaching," says Mary Jo Ziesel, ABT's director of education, "as each partner company and Project Plié partner teacher is doing great work locally underneath the Project Plié umbrella."

Partner companies are Ballet Austin, Ballet Memphis, Ballet San Jose, Orlando Ballet, Oklahoma City Ballet, Richmond Ballet, St. Louis Ballet, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Ballet Met, San Antonio Ballet, Nashville Ballet, Washington Ballet and Cincinnati Ballet.

ABT awards scholarships to teachers and arts administrators of color. Its scholarships to students, such as African-Americans Erica Lall and Naazir Muhammad, are based on merit.

Naazir was discovered in Brooklyn Ballet's outreach program at age 6 and continued training there on scholarship. At 11, Ziesel says, he began training at the ABT Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School on full scholarship, working his way up through the Pre-Professional Division. He is in the ABT Studio Company for the 2015-2016 season.

Erica Lall, from Cypress, Texas, trained at the Houston Ballet Ben Stevenson Academy before attending the ABT Summer Intensive and Pre-Professional Division at the ABT JKO School. An award-winning scholarship recipient, she is in her second season with the Studio Company.



American Ballet Theatre scholarship recipients include Erica Lall and Naazir Muhammad. Photo by Rosalie O'Connor

Through its partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Project Plié conducts master classes for the clubs' members across the U.S.

Frank Sanchez, president and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of America, is on the Project Plié Advisory Committee. "Partnering with his organization has enabled us to fulfill one of the key components of the initiative on a national level: to identify talented young dancers for ballet training," Ziesel says.

A basketball court at a Boys & Girls Club near her home in San Pedro, California is where the famed Misty Copeland says she took her first ballet class. After years of intensive training and scores of performances, Copeland (<http://misticopeland.com>) eventually became ABT's female soloist in 2007 and the company's first African-American principal female dancer in 2015.



Misty Copeland, ABT's first African-American principal female dancer. Photo by Jade Young

"Other ballet companies and schools do have diversity initiatives, but American Ballet Theatre was the first to create a diversity initiative with a national scope," notes Ziesel. "We are making a tremendous impact with our network of partner companies, partner teachers, and Boys & Girls Clubs across the United States. This vast network is what it takes to make a change in the art form as a whole."

Immersed in the details of family narratives



"There is a real trend for creating a family story," says genealogist Kenyatta Berry. Photo courtesy of Jason Winkler

Kenyatta D. Berry's path to "Genealogy Roadshow" – like the family stories she's helped people explore – was both unexpected and life changing.

President of the Association of Professional Genealogists in spring 2013, Berry agreed to meet with members of the show's production company in Los Angeles. She expected to provide names of APG members who might become part of the show. Once at the meeting, Berry learned she was in a room with casting directors who, before the meeting ended, viewed her as a potential member of the "Roadshow" on-air team and encouraged her to audition.

Months later, she was told, "PBS loves you and they want you on the show." She accepted the offer and in just a few months, Berry and her fellow cast members appeared in the program's premiere broadcast.

Ancestry.com notes that studies rank genealogy as the second-most-popular hobby in the U.S. "There is a real trend for creating a family story," says Berry, who's in her third season on "Genealogy Roadshow" (www.pbs.org/genealogy-roadshow/home). "It's not about names, dates and places, it's about a family story, the context of a person's life."



Kenyatta Berry, Joshua Taylor and Mary Tedesco take a break from filming "Genealogy Roadshow" at the Franklin Institute. Photo courtesy of Daniel Burke

And as Berry knows from personal experience, "When you start digging, you have to be emotionally and mentally prepared for what you might find out."

Genealogy has been part of Berry's life since the 1990s when she was studying Internet law at Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing. "I was dating someone whose family had an unusual surname and started researching his family," she recalls. "I just became obsessed with it."

A native of Detroit who now lives in Santa Monica, California, Berry works independently with 20 to 30 genealogic clients each year.

"A lot of my (independent work) is going to take more time, it's going to be more challenging," Berry explains. Sometimes, there are no court records to research. Other times, "The issue becomes, 'Oh, you had a court case. Oh, your ancestor had a 70-page will.'" Both situations require time and effort.

Through her independent projects and her work on "Genealogy Roadshow," she is able to "educate people about the things we don't talk about."

One such opportunity arose on an early 2015 episode of "Genealogy Roadshow" when Berry helped mystery writer Gail Lukasik delve into her family background. "Gail had lived her whole life as a white woman," Berry says, and had discovered through personal research that her mother was listed as "colored" on her birth certificate. With a copy of the document in hand, Lukasik confronted her mother, who denied – then admitted – she was of mixed race. Since Lukasik knew of her mother's mixed heritage, she turned to Berry for help in researching the mystery of her maternal grandfather.

Berry succeeded in helping Lukasik explore her grandfather's story. However, for her, "What made this my all-time favorite story on 'Genealogy Roadshow' was that we really got to address the issue of 'passing' (when a black person identifies himself or herself as white)." The third season of "Genealogy Roadshow" will allow Berry and the rest of the program's team to address these and other intriguing family issues.



Kenyatta Berry and Jennifer Berry take a break from filming "Genealogy Roadshow" at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Photo courtesy of Daniel Burke

Artistic high notes

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The three artists featured in this African-American History Month edition of *Unity* express their creativity through their love for music, nature and unusual materials.

Hampton Olfus Jr.

Hampton Olfus Jr.'s parents introduced him and his siblings to the arts at an early age. A native of Washington, D.C., he was also fortunate to grow up in a community that promoted community development through arts and education. Olfus started drawing at the age of 3 and attended summer art programs where he learned to paint with oils. He sold his first piece at age 12. Olfus studied art history, drawing, painting, advertising and illustration while attending Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland.



"The I-niversal"
by Hampton Olfus Jr.

Olfus works in acrylics, pencil, watercolor, mixed media, and pen and ink. Many are detailed with textured backgrounds he calls "underpainting." He wants his viewers to relate to his work, such as "The I-niversal," on more than just a visual level. This acrylic painting on canvas with textured underpainting was inspired by an art exhibit called "Quantum Physics and the God Particle."

"The connection of self to the universe is something most artists feel while in the flow of creating," says Olfus. His appreciation for jazz began with the albums

his dad played at home. Reflecting on Thelonius Monk's piano-playing style prompted Olfus to create "Monk," using a limited palette of acrylics, collage and a textured background on canvas. Olfus' love of jazz is also conveyed in his acrylic-on-birch panel



"Monk" by Hampton Olfus Jr.

titled "Blue Dolphy Street," pictured on the cover of *Unity*. It is his rendition of jazz artist Eric Dolphy's iconic profile photograph. His piece is a contrast of textures, shapes, colors and tonalities also using a limited palette.



"Five Musicians" by Hampton Olfus Jr.

Olfus created "Five Musicians" while working with a group of watercolors. Once again, his inspiration was music. He used thin acrylic glazes in this bright, abstract expressionist piece.

Olfus has exhibited nationally and internationally, and garnered numerous awards. He says art is an integral part of his life.

Jessica Ferguson

During her 20-plus years in the accounting industry, Jessica Ferguson's artistic talent manifested itself in her job as a cost analyst. Instead of creating plain spreadsheets, Ferguson's presentations were full of color and unusual font sizes, and she used artistic layouts to make them attractive. Her creative sense extended to the decoration of her home office and small apartment in college.



"Metal Coral" by Jessica Ferguson



"Coral" by Jessica Ferguson

However, she says, her "analytical left brain trumped her creative right brain" until she paid a visit to a local home improvement store. While there, Ferguson purchased shiny dryer ducts and later manipulated them into different shapes that turned into a piece resembling a flower. The more she

hammered, twisted and bent the aluminum material, the more her creativity grew. Satisfied with her creation, she mounted the exquisite piece on a small block of wood, painted it bright bronze and silver, and named it "Metal Coral."

Another piece, "Coral," is mounted on a larger, stained wooden canvas placed vertically from the upper left corner to the right lower corner. Ferguson says since "Coral" was vertical, she wanted to create "Metal Flow" even larger and show more movement by mounting the large aluminum piece horizontally on a 7-foot-tall wooden door.

Ferguson, who lives in Lawrenceville, Georgia, discovers new ways of expression by creating lighting fixtures, decorative accessories and furniture pieces. She uses materials such as gutter guards, PVC pipes, metal washers and wood pallets. "All of these items have been turned into art," says Ferguson. "My home is a shrine to the beauty of the unlikely." Ferguson's fascination with, and love of, creating art from unusual items continues to flourish.



"Metal Flow" by Jessica Ferguson

Christa Forrest

Christa Forrest says her grandfather and her dad introduced her to art and music at a young age, and she's been creative ever since. As a child, Forrest spent countless hours marveling at the natural world and drew everything she saw. In later years, she attended the Fashion Institute of Technology to



"Pacific Gold" by Christa Forrest

pursue her dream of working in the fashion industry but ended up pursuing a career in finance out of economic necessity.

"Nature is the catalyst that drives me to create," says Forrest. "I am drawn to the natural elements of water and Earth and I enjoy using oil to capture my land and seascapes."

Torrey Pines in San Diego is a favorite family spot that inspired Forrest's oil painting titled "Pacific Gold." Forrest says this area epitomizes nature's abundance of color, space and expansion, and reminds us that humans are tiny fixtures amongst the vast universe.

"Reflections," says Forrest, "was inspired by water's movement, fluidity and color. When you look down at your reflection, it reveals a perfect example of a blurred flaw."



"Reflections" by Christa Forrest

She describes "Emergence" as the "wave's presence that emerges from beyond – building with forcefulness to the forefront until it ceases to exist – only to pull back and be reborn again."

Forrest has studied at the Art Students League and the Grand Central Academy in New York City. She has exhibited in various shows throughout Fairfield County, Connecticut.



"Emergence" by Christa Forrest

Inveterate apostle of Southern cuisine

Since the year 2000, Chef Joe Randall's Cooking School in Savannah, Georgia has instructed students from coast to coast. He teaches four classes almost every week with breaks at Christmastime, New Year's Day and Fourth of July week.



Pennsylvania native Joe Randall's cooking school in Georgia attracts a multitude of students. Photo by John Carrington Photography

Randall's students range in age from 30 to 70. "I get mothers and daughters that are traveling together," says Randall. "Groups that have been friends for 34 years." He's even schooled a bunch of Navy commanders who had once been shipmates.

His three-hour classes are "like a chef's table, a four-course meal. It's a demonstration dinner," he explains, not a course that prepares students to enter the foodservice industry.

Two of his most popular sessions are "Taste of Savannah," featuring foods of the Lowcountry, and this month's "Valentine's Date Night." The sole instructor at his school (his wife helps with cleanup and other tasks), Randall occasionally invites other chefs to lead sessions. A sampling of his classes is available at www.chefjoerandall.com.

A native of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Randall has been in the hospitality and food-service industry for 50 years. He worked his way up from Air Force flight line kitchens to executive chef at a dozen restaurants.

His earliest mentor was Chef Robert W. Lee, "one of the first African-American chefs of a major property in Pennsylvania," notes Randall. "There were a lot of Caucasians that didn't want to work for him," so he hired kitchen staffers from other places. "He ran that kitchen with an entirely African-American crew. I learned to cook Southern up north from all those wonderful cooks from cities such as Atlanta."

Working in Lee's kitchen "was a joy," says Randall. "He believed in what he did. He studied and he shared it."

Thanks to the tutelage of Lee and others, Randall can share his expertise in, and passion for, the cuisine he says has been universally badmouthed.

"In this country we have a habit of condemning something in order to legitimize something else. In the '70s and '80s, there was a clear push" to tie Southern cuisine to poor health. Yes, generations of Southern cooks used ingredients – pork fat, butter and others – to season food. But Southern dishes, and the people who cook them, have evolved.

"I don't know nothing about greasy food," Randall states emphatically. "We don't deep-fry nearly as much as we used to. I pan-fry most of my stuff."



Country Cornbread

Recipe by Chef Joe Randall

- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 cup buttermilk

Combine the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, sugar and salt in a large bowl. In a small separate bowl, combine the eggs and milk. Combine the liquid and dry ingredients.

Place the butter in a 9-inch, cast-iron skillet and place in a preheated, 425-degree oven until the butter is sizzling. Pour the hot butter into the batter and stir well. Pour the batter into the hot skillet and bake 20 to 25 minutes or until a wooden toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Makes 8 servings

Ambassador of soul food has global appeal



Chef/restaurateur Tanya Holland has a global presence.
Photo by Lisa Keating

From California to Kazakhstan, Chef Tanya Holland has quite the following.

No matter where her foodie fans live, they all clamor for Holland's inventive take on classic soul-food fare. That's a huge thrill for this New Yorker with ties to the South, who thinks soul food doesn't garner the respect it deserves.

"I would like to see our genre of food celebrated in a national way," says Holland. "I would like to do for soul food what Mario Batali has done for Italian food."

Well, Holland is doing her part in spreading the good word about soul food. If you've perused a periodical in recent years – Food & Wine, The New York Times and The Oprah Magazine, for example – you've seen articles praising Holland's skills and the restaurant she owns, Brown Sugar Kitchen in Oakland, California.

And unless your home is devoid of a television or computer of some kind, you've likely watched her guest cooking segments on "The Chew," "The Talk" and the "Today" program, or perhaps her stint as a judge on "My Momma Throws Down."

Since age 7, Holland has witnessed the power food has to unite people of disparate backgrounds. At her childhood home in Rochester during the 1970s, Holland's Southern-born parents created a gourmet-cooking club and regularly fed couples in their culturally rich neighborhood "food from around the world."

"I saw that (frequent gathering)," she says, "as a way to bring people together."

A graduate of the University of Virginia who earned a bachelor's degree in Russian language and literature, Holland also received a grande diplôme from the Ecole de Cuisine La Varenne in Paris. She's cooked, or trained, at various restaurants in the U.S. and abroad.

With a background of such an international nature, it shouldn't be surprising to learn that Holland ended up in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, where she lectured and conducted cooking demonstrations. As part of "Taste of America: Soul Food," part of the U.S. State Department's annual Culinary Diplomacy Program, Holland visited Almaty, Astana, Pavlodar, Sairam and Shymkent in June 2015.

"I went there and had an amazing experience," says Holland. "It was great. It was so empowering and life changing." She hopes a visit to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan's neighbor to the west, is in her future.



Although she's a fierce advocate of soul food, Tanya Holland says one of her favorite dishes is pasta with a meaty red sauce and lots of Parmesan cheese.

A colorful coterie of talented cowboys and cowgirls

AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas – home of the Dallas NFL franchise – isn't the only place where you can find black cowboys. The country's most diverse roster of *real* cowboys saddles up for competitions and performances as part of the Cowboys of Color Rodeo (<http://cowboysofcolorrodeo.com>) based in Lancaster, Texas.

Cowboys and cowgirls, ranging in age from 15 to 70, compete in bull riding, bareback bronco busting, calf roping and steer wrestling. There's barrel racing for women, too (Women make up 15 percent of the rodeo's roster of 500 participants). They represent various ethnicities including African-American, Hispanic and Native American.

The rodeo's mission, says the legendary Cleo Hearn, owner-operator of Cowboys of Color, is to "educate you while we entertain you and tell you the wonderful things that people of color did for the settling of the West that many history books left out." Hearn, a veteran rider and one-time performer, began producing rodeos in 1971.

There's room for entertainers of all levels in the rodeo circuit out west. Danell Tipton, for example, is a two-time, world-champion bull rider who participates in Cowboys of Color rodeos. He's one of the organization's 30 participants who are members of the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association. Then there's Linda Brown, a relative newcomer, who competes as a barrel racer in about eight events each summer and wants to compete full time someday.

In 2016, Cowboys of Color Rodeo competitions and other events are taking place throughout the year.

For more information about the history of African-American, Hispanic and Native American cowboys, watch the "Cowboys of Color" video at <http://videos.oeta.tv/video/2365296083>.



Cleo Hearn owns Cowboys of Color Rodeo. Photo by Don Russell Photography



A Cowboys of Color Rodeo bull rider entertains the crowd. Photo by Don Russell Photography



Bronco busting is a crowd favorite at the Cowboys of Color Rodeo. Photo by Don Russell Photography