

mandell PRESENTS



Ladies of Hip Hop  
Black Dancing Bodies Project: *Speak My Mind*

Thursday, October 10, 2024 | 7:00 PM | Mandell Theater

## Ladies of Hip Hop

### Black Dancing Bodies Project: *Speak My Mind*

Thursday, October 10, 2024 | 7:00 PM | Mandell Theater

Run time approximately 90 minutes.

There will be no intermission.

Artist discussion immediately following the performance, facilitated by Jeanette Lloyd

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

**CHOREOGRAPHER/DANCERS:** Imani Arrington, Iman Brooks, Cocoro Carr, Esita 'Flyya' Calhoun, Dionne Eleby, Alora Tonielle Martinez, Reyna Núñez, Charlene 'Chi-Chi' Smith, Nichole Rosa Vazquez, Kara Jenelle Wade

**ADDITIONAL DANCERS/CHOREOGRAPHERS NOT APPEARING TODAY:** Kemi Adebajo, LaTasha Barnes, Brat, Tomoe "Beasty" Carr, Miyabi Wright

**LIGHTING DIRECTOR / PSM:** Julie E. Ballard, OVERLAPLIGHTING

*This performance includes theatrical haze and flashing lights.*



The presentation of Black Dancing Bodies Project: *Speak My Mind* was made possible by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Dance Project, with lead funding from the Doris Duke Foundation and the Mellon Foundation.

### **Works & Process at the Guggenheim**

Black Dancing Bodies Project: *Speak My Mind* premiered at Works & Process Underground Uptown Dance Festival at the Guggenheim on January 13, 2024. It was commissioned by Guggenheim Works & Process, developed in Works & Process LaunchPAD residencies at Bethany Arts Community (2022, 2023, and 2024) and Catskill Mountain Foundation (2022), Office Hours Residency at The Kennedy Center, and Jacob's Pillow Lab, as well as iterative Works & Process presentations of *Speak My Mind* at the Guggenheim and Lincoln Center.

### **Rankin Scholar-in-Residence Series**

The artistic engagement of Ladies of Hip-Hop (LOHH) along with Founder and Executive Director Michele Byrd-McPhee is part of the 24/25 Rankin Scholars-in-Residence Series. The Rankin Scholar-in-Residence Series, named in honor of former Dean Marjorie Rankin and established through the continuing donations of her friends and colleagues, seeks to bring noted individuals to campus who excel in the multidisciplinary education championed by the Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design. The goal of the series is to inspire students, stimulate faculty, invigorate the professional field, and contribute to the Drexel community.

### **Mandell Presents**

Mandell Presents expands on the mission of Drexel's Department of Performing Arts to engage a broader University and community audience by bringing professional artists to campus who engage with provocative ideas and make social impact. Mandell Presents is funded, in part, by the Samuel P. Mandell Foundation. Additional presenting partners for the 24/25 season include Drexel Dance Program, Department of Arts & Entertainment Enterprise, Entertainment & Arts Management Program, Master's in Arts Administration Program, Music Program, and Music Industry Program.

## Program Notes

**The Black Dancing Bodies Project (BDB)** was launched in 2018 as an initiative to uplift and celebrate Black women in street and club dance culture. **BDB** is an ongoing street and club dance project addressing the erasure, miscoding, and intentional exclusion of Black women's work and voices. **BDB** has embarked on the journey to collect, preserve and tell the stories of these women through dance works, interviews and photo documentation; presented from the stage to the street.

Celebrating Black women in street and club dance culture; addressing the erasure and miscoding of Black women's contributions to American dance culture; BDB shares stories of Black women in dance presented from the street to the stage. Reclaiming Black women's stories, our gestures, our mannerisms, our hairstyles, our dances and our cultural norms. Our neck rolling, eye rolling, tongue popping, teeth sucking, hand clapping and finger snapping. We will be loud, expressive, gentle and soft. We will authentically ourselves.

Revisiting the power, beauty, and interdisciplinarity of the choreopoem, a term first coined in 1975 by writer Ntozake Shange in a description of her work, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf"; Byrd-McPhee had the dancers spend time writing poems, led by the prompt, '*If I could speak my mind...what would I say...*' which served as a framework for new work in the **BDB** project; '**SpeakMyMind**'. In this choreopoem series, "SpeakMyMind", our voice, our expressions and our body language. We will be loud, rough and expressive. We will be gentle and soft, and tender. We speak our minds and be authentically ourselves.

### MUSIC CREDITS

"Journey's Prelude" by Louie Vega & Elements of Life featuring Ursula Rucker

"Stay with Me" by Platinum Pied Pipers

"Go On Girl" by Roxanne Shanté

"BAKWA LAH" by Major League DJz, Nvcho & Mathandos featuring C4 DJs

"Web" by The Roots

"Golden" by Jill Scott

"Va Te Lave Afro" by DJ Jack

### STORIES PERFORMED

'**SpeakMyMind**'

**Written & performed by:** Reyna Núñez

**Journey's Prelude**

**Artistic Director/Choreographer:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

Brief description of work: Using the mesmerizing words of poet Ursula Rucker and the thumping beats of NYC House music legend, Louie Vega, this piece is the opening of a full-evening length work on a journey through the celebration of Black girl magic to the endless journey of the "Strong Black Woman". LDC, gives flight Rucker's sultry voice and words of peace, love, truth, injustice, freedom, humanity, healing, and revolution.

'**SpeakMyMind**'

**Written & performed by:** Kara Jenelle Wade

**Video:** *Ladies of Hip-Hop Dance collective at Works & Process Bubble Residence*

Hand games are a cornerstone of connection, friendship, and community for Black girls. Through rhythmic clapping and catchy rhymes, we create spaces to bond and build friendships. These games hold the rhythm of shared stories and laughter. Here are three Black women over 40, from different parts of the country, who instantly connect through the shared memories of childhood hand games.

### **GirlHood**

**Artistic Director:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

**Choreographers:** LOHH Dance Collective

"GirlHood" is a work that delves into the blackberry rich tapestry of experiences woven by Black girls as they navigate the terrain of childhood. This immersive piece serves as a heartfelt tribute to the enduring spirit of intergenerational connectedness shared among Black girls across America. Through the lens of nostalgia and cultural significance, "GirlHood" beautifully captures the essence of youthful camaraderie by spotlighting the vibrant array of games that have been cherished for generations. The rhythmic symphony of double dutch, the dexterity of hand games, strategy of jax, and the calculated precision of hopscotch are all brought to life with an authenticity that resonates deeply with those who have engaged in these time-honored traditions.

### **GoOnGirl**

**Artistic Director:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

**Choreographers:** Michele Byrd-McPhee, Charlene "Chi-Chi" Smith, Tweetboogie

"GoOnGirl!" – a dance piece that draws inspiration from the high-energy 1980s Hip-Hop dance era. The spirit of the piece is a dynamic blend of the iconic "fly girls" – the charismatic dancers from the popular television show "In Living Color" – and the spirited drill teams often found within Black communities. This amalgamation brings forth an explosion of movement, rhythm, and camaraderie that is both visually striking and emotionally resonant. This performance serves as a homage to the past while paving the way for a future where dance remains a powerful means of self-expression, community bonding, and artistic innovation.

**Video:** Article 'In Reverence of Black B-Girls' by Shanna Collins.

### **'TORCHED'**

**Artistic Direction:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

**Movement Director:** Randi Freitas

**Choreographers:** Esita 'Bigirl Flyya' Calhoun, Nicholas 'Bgirl Nikki V' Vazquez

Black bgirls are rare as unicorns. This piece tells the story of an older B-Girl passing the torch to the next generation, showcasing the unique bond between two Black women in the world of breaking. It captures the special moments of mentorship and shared passion as they navigate the challenges of being Black B-Girls in America. The powerful impact of representation in a space where their presence is all too uncommon.

### **'SpeakMyMind'**

**Written & performed by:** Charlene "Chi-Chi" Smith

**Video:** *Ladies of Hip-Hop Dance collective in a Works & Process Bubble Residence*

The act of reflection was a deeply emotional and challenging process...taking the time to truly see ourselves, to look, look again.. As Black women, we navigate a world that rarely mirrors our complexities, our beauty, or our struggles. We don't fit the narrow, often unattainable standard of beauty that society holds up, and our diverse experiences are often flattened into monolithic narratives. This moment demanded that we slow down, sit with our reflections, and face the vulnerability of truly witnessing ourselves, our individuality, our shared struggles, our beauty and the untold, often unknown histories that shape us. This moment was about breaking through the layers we've had to build, to confront our softness, and the joy the often lays beneath. This process wasn't easy, but it was a powerful reminder of the importance of being seen, first by ourselves...

## Emergence

**Choreographer:** Oluwatoyin “Toyin” Sogunro

This work embodies grace, strength, and resilience, exuding confidence, dignity, and power of Black women. Through dance, the work communicates the depth and complexity of the female experience, celebrating the multifaceted roles women play and highlighting their innate beauty and strength. The performance evokes emotions of admiration, empowerment, and reverence for the feminine spirit, in all its forms.

## ‘SpeakMyMind’

**Written & performed by:** Iman

## ‘Chill, That’s My Jam’

**Choreographers:** LOHH Dance Collective

“*Chill, That’s My Jam* transports us back to the laid-back era of Hip-Hop, with infectious Dilla-esque beats that embody the antithesis of mainstream radio rap, this piece invites to unwind, vibe, and just chill.

## ‘SpeakMyMind’

**Written & performed by:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

## ‘ByrdHouse’

**Choreographer:** Michele Byrd-McPhee

**Freestyles & Choreographic elements by:** LOHH Dance Collective.

A house piece showing the power and joy of being powerful women. Exploring the roots of house music and its intricate polyrhythms provides valuable context for understanding the dynamic energy and cultural significance of "Ladies of the House." While house music did gain significant prominence in Chicago, its origins indeed trace back to New York City, particularly in the vibrant club culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s. New York City's nightlife, with iconic venues like the Paradise Garage and The Loft, played a crucial role in the development and popularization of house music.

## About the Artist



Ladies of Hip-Hop (LOHH) is an all-female intergenerational dance collective that creates dance works illuminating the strength, power and diversity of women in Hip-Hop. Ever present in the work are the freestyle, cipher, and call and response aspects of the origins of street and club dance culture, while exploring performance across cultural and theatrical spaces.

Under the direction of founder Michele Byrd-McPhee, LOHH interweaves the embodied experiences of women, creating a communal fabric that paints a picture of a more global women experience. Through their work, LOHH is reclaiming and transforming spaces, not only in the realm of dance but also within the broader cultural landscape.

The driving force behind LOHH, Byrd-McPhee is a street dance activist and creative visionary who works to decolonize hip-hop culture along gender, sex, and cultural and socio-historic racial lines. She situates Black dance forms, theories, dance techniques and the value of the lived artistic experience within spaces that

honor and acknowledge cultural roots along with the many creative pioneers who have shaped them.

LOHH infuses their work with a spirit of liberation, asking audiences to celebrate the strength, resilience, and creativity of women from all walks of life, while sparking important conversations about gender equality and representation. Through women-powered workshops, performances, public talks, and professional development training, LOHH is educating and cultivating Hip-Hop’s next generation of women leaders.



*Thank you, Michele & Ladies of Hip Hop for spending time with Drexel students, faculty, and staff this week!*

## Rankin Scholar-in-Residence Series & Mandell Presents Sessions with Visiting Artist Michele Byrd-McPhee



*As a Westphal College 24/25 Rankin Scholar-in-Residence, Michele Byrd-McPhee spent the week of October 8-11 at Drexel and bring her dance company to perform at the Mandell Theater. The residency is a personal and professional homecoming for Michele, who is a 2009 alumna of Drexel's graduate program in arts administration and originally from Philadelphia. The Department of Performing Arts and Department of Arts & Entertainment Enterprise are thrilled to partner on this engagement.*

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### Michele Byrd-McPhee Guest Artist Class Visit: History of Hip Hop

Tue Oct 8 | 3:30 – 4:50 PM @ URBN Annex, Screening Room

Professor James McKinney hosts Michele Byrd-McPhee in MUSC-337 class, which will be opened to the entire Drexel community. Guests with Dragon Cards welcome, first come first served, while seats are available.

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### Rankin Scholar-in-Residence Keynote & Fall Dance Lecture: Michele Byrd-McPhee

Tue Oct 8 | 6:30 PM @ Mandell Theater

2023 Bessie Award Winner for Outstanding Service to the Field of Dance Michele Byrd-McPhee is a street dancer, an arts activist, and a tireless advocate for girls and women, who has worked for decades to re-contextualize spaces and conversations about hip hop culture along gender, socio-historical, and racial lines. The Founder and Executive Director of Ladies of Hip Hop (LOHH) will deliver this year's Fall Dance Lecture. This event is free and open to the public.

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### Community Dance Class: Strength, Stability, Social Dance for Seniors

Wed Oct 9 | 12:00 – 1:00 PM @ Dornsife Center, 3509 Spring Garden Street

Free Dance at the Dornsife class for West Philadelphia residents.

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### Michele Byrd-McPhee Guest Artist Class Visit: Arts Administration

Wed Oct 9 | 6:00 – 8:50 PM @ URBN Annex, Screening Room

Professor Julie Goodman hosts Michele Byrd-McPhee in conversation on her experience leading a professional dance collective. This meeting of AADM-505 Overview of the Arts, examining the role of culture in communities, will be opened to the entire Drexel community. Guests with Dragon Cards welcome, first come first served, while seats available.

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### Michele Byrd-McPhee + Community Engaged Movement Partnerships Touring Ensemble

Fri Oct 11 | 10:00 – 11:50 AM @ Forman Dance Studio

Professor Valerie Ifill hosts Michele Byrd-McPhee in DANC-131 ensemble class. Only students registered for the course.

## Faculty Collaborators

**Julie Goodman** ..... Department Head, Arts & Entertainment Enterprise  
..... Professor of Arts Administration and Museum Leadership;  
**Jennifer Morley** ..... Program Director, Somatics Coordinator, Associate Teaching Professor of Dance;  
..... Director, Drexel Pilates Training Program and Pilates Studio

**Britt Fishel**..... Dance Faculty; Assistant Director, Drexel Dance Ensemble and FreshDance  
**Dr. Miriam Giguere**..... Department Head, Performing Arts; Professor of Dance  
**Brea Heidelberg** ..... Program Director and Associate Professor of Entertainment & Arts Management  
**Valerie Ifill** ..... Director of Community Based Learning in Dance, Assistant Professor of Dance  
**Monika Julien**..... Assistant Teaching Professor of Music Industry  
**Rebecca Malcolm-Naib** ..... Ensemble Director, Drexel Dance Ensemble and FreshDance  
**James McKinney**..... Assistant Professor of Music and Music Industry  
**Pamela Yau** ..... Program Director & Assistant Teaching Professor of  
..... Arts Administration and Museum Leadership Graduate Program

**Mandell Presents**  
is a program of the **Drexel University**  
**Department of Performing Arts**  
in the **Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design**

**Jason Schupbach**  
Dean

**Dr. Miriam Giguere**  
Department Head  
Professor of Dance

**Caroline Leipf**  
Mandell Theater Managing Director

**Chris Tatora**  
Mandell Theater Technical Director

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**Asaki Kuruma**..... Costume Shop Manager  
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**Lauren Tracy**..... Event Supervisor & Performing Arts Ensembles Production Associate

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Abby Toll  
Lauren Tracy  
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**Audiences play their part in great performances and events...**

- Food and beverage are not permitted inside the theater.
- Noises and lights are distracting. Please turn off and silence all electronic devices.
- Photos, videos, and audio recordings are not permitted.
- Late seating is at the discretion of House Management.

**Accessibility**

The Mandell Theater is wheelchair accessible. Mandell Theater has a limited number of Assisted Listening Devices (ALDs) available. Please inquire with Audience Services, 215.895.2787 or [dpaboxoffice@drexel.edu](mailto:dpaboxoffice@drexel.edu), about accessibility needs in advance of attending a performance. You may also see a House Manager the night of your event. Additional accommodations and services may be available through the Drexel Office of Disability Resources (ODR). ODR can be reached at 215.895.1401 (V), 215.895.2299 (TTY), or [disability@drexel.edu](mailto:disability@drexel.edu).

**Drexel University Land Acknowledgement Statement**

The land on which Drexel University stands and upon which we gather is part of the traditional territory of the Lenape called “Lenapehoking” (pronunciation: Lun-nah-pay-ho-king). It is here that the people called the 'grandfather tribe' and the 'peacemakers' have lived their lives, spoken their language, and held their ceremonies for thousands of years. Indeed, Lenape is translated as “real or original person.” During the colonial and early federal period, many were removed west and north, but some also remain in their homeland. The Lenape were subjected to 250 years of colonization that included cultural suppression and erasure, forced removal from this land and continue to experience systemic discrimination and marginalization.

Acknowledging this history, our privilege to be on this land, and the Lenape tribe's continued presence, is consistent with Drexel University's commitment to

diversity, equity, and inclusion. We openly recognize the Lenape tribe as the original inhabitants of eastern Pennsylvania, as well as their continuing presence and relationship with their territory. We acknowledge the Lenape people as the Indigenous stewards of their homelands as well as the spiritual keepers of the Lenape Sipu, or Delaware River, and Drexel University does hereby commit to actively supporting our Lenape community members in whatever way we are able, helping to maintain the Indigenous cultural identity of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey and southern New York. We hope that, by recognizing this Indigenous history, it will inspire you to think about your place on this land, engage in efforts to promote a community that values work towards decolonization and strengthening of Indigenous communities, here and elsewhere.



# Connect with Drexel Performing Arts

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DrexelPerformingArts.com for 24/7 online ticket reservations

Drexel Performing Arts Box Office hours  
Thursdays 3:00 – 7:00 PM

Audience Services  
215.895.ARTS (215.895.2787)  
dpaboxoffice@drexel.edu

Advance ticket registration recommended for all free and paid admission performances. Drexel Performing Arts Box Office located in Mandell Theater provides ticket services for Drexel Dance, Music, and Theatre Ensembles, and Mandell Presents, as well as audience services for all events at the Mandell and Black Box Theaters. Outside of live box office hours, please expect responses to email and voicemail within 72 hours.




## Support Great Performance

Performing arts are a vital part of the Drexel academia and student life. Donations support the operation of our performing arts venues, including the Mandell Theater and URBAN Annex Black Box Theater, as well as performing arts ensembles and programs.

*Celebrate 50 years of Mandell Theater with a gift to Drexel Performing Arts today!*

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DREXEL PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTS



24/25  
FALL  
AT THE  
MANDELL

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**DANCE LECTURE:  
MICHELE BYRD-MCPHEE**  
Tue Oct 8 | 6:30pm

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**THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF  
THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME**  
Nov 14-23

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**FUSION BAND &  
ROCK ENSEMBLE**  
Tue Dec 3 | 7:30pm

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**MEDITERRANEAN ENSEMBLE**  
Wed Dec 4 | 7:30pm

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**JAZZ ORCHESTRA & JAZZTET**  
Thu Dec 5 | 7:30pm

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**GOSPEL CHOIR**  
Sat Dec 7 | 7:00pm

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**CONCERT BAND**  
Sun Dec 8 | 7:00pm

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All-College Choir • Chamber Brass and Winds • Chamber  
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**Performing Arts**  
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