LULA WASHINGTON
DANCE THEATRE

CELEBRATING 32 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN DANCE

"As a choreographer and company director, Lula Washington is doing something more than right."

— Anna Kleber, New York Times.

"The smart, strong and energetic Lula Washington Dance Theatre proved that American dance is alive, well and growing out west."

— Sheila Abreu, New Jersey Record.
The Lula Washington Dance Theatre (LWDT) has built an international reputation for the earthiness, vitality, energy, and humanism of its repertory — most of it by founder/artistic director Lula Washington.

The company is composed of well-trained athletic dancers, many from the inner city in Los Angeles and trained by Lula herself. These dancers bring a charisma and interpretative power to every dance.

The dances tell stories drawn from African-American history, culture and life. Nevertheless, they have a universal appeal, Lula’s work has won her adoring fans all over the world and across the United States. It is the nature of this repertory that has kept her dance company successful and in demand for more than three decades.

Lula provides the core works of the Company including powerhouse ballets like “We Were The Mask”; “Little Rock Nine” “The Movement”; “Ode To The Sixties”, “Global Village”, “The Bach Project”, and “For Those Who Live And Die For Us.” The company supplements Lula’s work with equally moving choreography such as “Feign” by Penne Harris, “Songs of the Disenherited” by Donald McKayle and “Love Is...” by Christopher Huggins.

LWDT has danced at the Hollywood Bowl; the Centric Center for the Arts; the Kennedy Center; the Joyce Theater; Jacob’s Pillow; the Maui Arts & Culture Center and many other venues.

The company is currently a participant in the first ever Dance South Touring Initiative. This program provides funding to presenters for residencies in Southern communities. LWDT has earned several National Dance Project tour grants and numerous NEA grants.

LWDT danced in Kosovo in 2008, and Indonesia in 2009. In 2010 LWDT toured to 18 cities in Russia. In 2011, the company toured for a month in China followed by a tour to Brazil. LWDT is loved by audiences who like energy and excitement on stage.
BEAUTIFUL VENUS & SERENA
by Tamica Washington-Miller

TWO SISTERS, TWO COMPETITORS. ONE MUST WIN. ONE MUST LOSE.

Where does competition end and sisterhood begin?

This work explores what it means for Venus and Serena Williams to be sisters/warriors on and off the court.

WE WORE THE MASK
by Lula Washington

A signature work that looks back to where America has been — while celebrating where America is today. It depicts the Masks that African-Americans once had to wear in order to survive.

Those masks are now removed. Performed with live drumming.

Premiered in 2007 at Lincoln Center Out of Doors. Toured in Russia, China, Brazil and Mexico with huge success.

In “We Wore the Mask” Ms. Washington displays a sure theatricality that is captivating.

— Reylun Sulcros New York Times
Los Angeles Times

LULA WASHINGTON: A life changed by dance. From creating steps for her dance troupe to moves for "Avatar's" Na'vi, the African American choreographer has done it all.

Lula Washington, above, and members of her dance troupe rehearse for a tour... (Boyd DeFratakha / Los Angeles Times) January 31, 2010 (By Debra Levine)

"There is no gum chewing allowed anywhere inside Lula Washington Dance Theatre," a sign warns on the dance academy's front door. Dwarfed by the big-box retail stores of Crenshaw Boulevard, the unassuming low-rise shell belies its explosive contents -- dance, music, kids, creativity. Enter the House That Lula Built, headquarters for Washington's school and touring modern dance troupe and a place where you'd better leave fooling around on the sidewalk.

Washington, 59, is Los Angeles' best-known African American choreographer, a community organizer and an advocate for the arts. She takes dancing dead seriously. Directing one of the few companies in the region that commands national attention, Washington is celebrating her troupe's 30th anniversary this year.

Over her career, she's seen the funding environment for the arts deteriorate to a climate that can be described only as hostile.

And yet she survives, initiating new projects as a concert dance maker and lately in film.

She's riding high since choreographing the movements for the Na'vi in "Avatar." And her company has bookings from New Mexico to New Jersey as well as L.A. dates this week at the Centricus Center for the Performing Arts and later this year at the Luckman Fine Arts Complex, the Hollywood Bowl (with trumpeter Terence Blanchard) and at downtown's Grand Performances.

Los Angeles Times

Lula Washington: A life changed by dance (continued from previous page)

That's a lot of hustle.

In 2004, as she received California First Lady Maria Shriver's Minerva Award for women's achievement, the choreographer said, "Dance, for me, is life. You came into this world moving. Dance can change your whole life."

Washington's resolve tone offers clues to her staying power; her softness belies strong drive. It manifests in her 13-member touring ensemble, a multicultural tribe of real movers. It's evident in her eye-popping choreographic melting of jazz, funk and African-derived movement fused in theatrical modern dance. And it explains how she's garnered top African American choreographers, notably Donald McKayle, Katherine Dunham, Donald Byrd, Louis Johnson, Rennie Harris and Christopher Huggins, to create dances for her troupe.

Beyond the concert stage, Washington's brand is deeply associated with community involvement. The school's annual Kwanzaa Celebration, now a Levitt Park Village holiday tradition, provides a robust outlet for neighborhood kids to channel energy while building self-esteem.

Every December for 19 years, Washington has unleashed a pageant of dance virtually on a packed house of baying parents. The engaging performers, many with talent to burn, range from tap-dancing tots to the school's Youth Dance Ensemble on pointe to some serious senior citizens in dashikis and turbans. Directing this wild cabaret is Tamica Washington-Miller, Washington's daughter and prodigal, who coaches from the wings as the three-hour show builds to its blistering finale: a squadron of percussionists propelling a half-hour of African dance.

A relative latecomer to dance, Washington grew up the oldest of eight kids in Watts' Nickerson Gardens housing project. Only after she saw a UCLA performance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at age 22 did the one-time nurse conceive of a career in dance. She committed to her career with the spiritual support of two men: her husband, Erwin, a playwright and journalist who is now the company's executive director; and McKayle, a choreographer who was then working in film and television. He has since contributed several of his works to Washington's troupe, adding historical weight to the repertory.

Friends in high places sing her praises. Among them is "Avatar" filmmaker James Cameron. Seeking a movement language for his imagined world on the moon Pandora, he hired Washington to create a proprietary way of moving for the 10-foot-tall, blue-skinned members of his cast.

Cameron's producer-partner Jon Landau says in a telephone interview: "Since our early days (developing "Avatar") in 2006, we thought about bringing in a movement expert. But we wanted more than motion. We wanted emotion. Lula had the most insight into the motivation behind movement."

In her first meeting with the director, Washington offered Cameron the "third eye" greeting, a light finger touch to the forehead by the Na'vi. Her familiarity with ritual got her the gig.

"We wanted movements that were original but had a touchstone of the familiar," Landau says. "She said, 'This gesture here is a sign of aggression; this gesture here is a sign of acceptance.' A rod means something across cultures. We wanted to lose the rod and find other ways to express those emotions."
Love Is... by Christopher Huggins

September 4, 1957 Nine Negro students risked their lives by enrolling in the all-white segregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Little Rock Nine
A hard-hitting work that tells the story of nine students whose courage changed America.
Commissioned in 2007 by the University of Arkansas at Conway

Lula Washington was born near Little Rock in 1950

An examination of love in four sections
*“At First Sight”*  
*“Fleeting”*  
*“Pain”*  
*“The Same Old Story”*

“Love Is...” mesmerized audiences in Russia, China, Brazil and in each US city where it has been performed.

Commissioned for Lula Washington Dance Theatre’s 30th Anniversary. Funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

photos by Brenda Aikman
ANGELITOS NEGROS
From Songs of the Disinherited By Donald McKayle

A revisiting of the 1960’s to music by James Brown; Jimi Hendrix; the Beatles, Janis Joplin, Chuck Barry, Peter, Paul & Mary, and others. From Free Love to Social Protest—the 1960’s Cultural Revolution gets revisited in this high energy work.

Commissioned in 2007 by Lincoln Center Cut of Doors under the direction of Jenneth Webster.

Funded by the California Community Foundation; First Impressions Performances; and the National Endowment for the Arts.

LULA WASHINGTON DANCE THEATRE
repertory
Global Village
by Lula Washington

THE HEALERS
By Lula Washington

Set to a score by Phillip Glass and Senegalese drums, "The Healers" explores rituals of purification. The special souls in this work purify themselves in a quest for spiritual healing and purity in pursuit of a oneness with the earth.

It is a reminder that purity and being rooted in the earth is the beginning of healing...LIFE.
—Lula Washington

LULA WASHINGTON
DANCE THEATRE
repertory

A 16-minute work that premiered in China in 2011, "Global Village" pulses to the funky, driving, Afro-beat music of Nigeria’s Fela Kuti.

It draws on African; Chinese; Native American; Brazilian; Russian and African-American movement idioms to celebrate cultural diversity.

Performed by the full company, this 16-minute work is a perennial crowd favorite.
Reign

By Rennie Harris

This is a work that represents my personal struggle with love. I fell from the grace of Heaven and although my heart hurts, I know I will one day return.

So, until then, I will continue to create work about love. The love of family, friends, lovers, husbands, wives, humans.

These relationships are designed to ultimately bring us back to God and the glory of Heaven.

— Rennie Harris

Commissioned by Lula Washington Dance Theatre for its 30th Anniversary.

This blistering master work, Reign, choreographed by hip-hop guy Rennie Harris, rained down on Henan Province in June, performed by Lula Washington Dance Theatre during the Los Angeles-based modern dance company's three-week tour of China.

I saw Reign perhaps eight times and its syncopated, aerobic body logic never failed to mesmerize. And the Washington dancers -- on whom Harris created the ecstatic piece -- own it, they work it so hard. They kill in this piece.

— Debra Levine, arts * meme