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Thank You New Yorkers for Dance!

Thank you to everyone who was able to join us for our annual event. It was a beautiful evening celebrating the artists, advocates, educators, and supporters who keep our city's dance ecosystem thriving.

The evening opened with an embodied land acknowledgment led by Cliff Matias of Redhawk Native American Arts Council, featured powerful performances by Tabula Rasa Dance Theater and Kayla Hamilton with Nicole Y. McClam, and closed with an energetic dance party led by DJ Kevin Gotkin.

It was especially meaningful to uplift this year's Dance Advocate Award recipient Courtney Washington and Dance Catalyst Award recipient Sara Nash, presented by last year's honorees, Phil Chan and Leah Krauss.

Becoming a New Yorker for Dance is one of the simplest and most impactful ways to keep this momentum going. If you feel inspired to join us in this charge, we wholeheartedly welcome you to [make a gift](#) to support our work promoting fair labor practices, addressing wage inequities, and improving working conditions for dance workers. \$5, \$50, \$500... It all makes a difference.

Thank you to all who continue to uplift and invest in this work. Your support fuels a more connected, equitable dance ecosystem.

[CHECK OUT EVENT PHOTOS](#)

Honorees



Courtney Washington | Dance Advocate Award

Courtney Washington (she/her) is a powerhouse dancer, creative director, and cultural architect whose influence reverberates across NYC's dance and ballroom scenes. As founder of the Masterz at Work Dance Family, Courtney has transformed passion into legacy—leading her company to stages including Times Square's Trans Day of Visibility, Lincoln Center, Jacob's Pillow, the Guggenheim's Works & Process, the Hudson Valley Dance Festival, and Fire Island Dance Festival with Dancers Responding to AIDS.

A trailblazer in ballroom culture, Courtney is the creator of the legendary House of Juicy Couture and a five-time Mother of the Year in the House of Balenciaga. Her creative genius has illuminated screens as assistant choreographer on HBO's *Legendary* (Season 1) and choreographer for Netflix's *Survival of the Thickest* (Season 2).

Courtney's excellence has been celebrated through the Avis Pendarvis Award for Greatness (2022), Teresa Mizrahi Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Ballroom Community (2021), Black Pride Council Visionary Award (2017), and a Proclamation from the NYS Senate (2020) recognizing her impact on artistic and LGBTQ+ communities. An award from her son, Alex Mugler (MoMA PS1), is a testament to her cross-generational influence.

Known for her unapologetic voice, fierce leadership, and dedication to visibility, Courtney continues to move culture forward.

[@motherbalenciaga](#)
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About the Dance Advocate Award

The Dance Advocate Award honors individuals who have demonstrated unwavering commitment to the advancement of an equitable and thriving dance industry by advocating for investment, recognition, and visibility for the artform.



Sara Nash | Dance Catalyst Award

Sara Nash (she/her) is a nationally recognized arts leader with 20 years of proven success leading national and international programs. She is currently the Interim Executive Director at Dance/USA.

Sara served as the National Endowment for the Arts' Dance Director for nearly seven years, where she led all aspects of the agency's grantmaking for dance. She was the Program Director for Dance at the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) for seven years, where she oversaw the National Dance Project, the New England Dance Fund, and the Regional Dance Development Initiative in Chicago. At Mid Atlantic Arts, Sara managed the US Artists International program, and as Senior Producer at Dance Theater Workshop (now New York Live Arts), she oversaw the international program, the Suitcase Fund, and developed creative residency programs for artists. Sara's international experience includes working at Tanec Praha, a contemporary dance festival in Prague, and at

the British Council in London.

She frequently serves as a speaker, and panelist for organizations including the Association of Performing Arts Professionals, the Japan Foundation, and the National Performance Network. She earned her BA in theater and dance from Mary Washington College and grew up dancing in her home state of Virginia.

About the Dance Catalyst Award

The Dance Catalyst Award recognizes individuals who have played a pivotal role in driving change in the field of dance through generative ideas, practices, or technologies within institutions that will continue to transform and bolster the impact of the art form.

Presenters & Performers

Cara McManus | Tabula Rasa Dance Theater
Cliff Matias
Felipe Escalante | Tabula Rasa Dance Theater
Kayla Hamilton
kevin gotkin
Leah Krauss
Nicole Y. McClam
Phil Chan

Thank you for being New Yorkers for Dance

We extend our deepest gratitude to the generous patrons and partners whose support has made this evening and our continued work possible. Your commitment to our mission is invaluable, and we are honored to be in community with you.

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Become a New Yorker for Dance

As we enter another year of service in dance, we hope you will join us in advancing our mission and help generate pathways toward an accessible, equitable and thriving dance ecology in New York City.

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Presenter & Performer Bios



Cara McManus is originally from Massachusetts. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from the Ailey-Fordham B.F.A. Program with degrees in Dance and Comparative Literature, then joined Graham 2 and then the Martha Graham Dance Company, where she remained for five years. She has also danced with the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, and earned an M.A in English Literature from the City College of New York, where she now teaches as Adjunct Faculty in the English Department. Currently, she performs with Tabula Rasa Dance Theater, CRDance, Lydia Johnson Dance, and as a freelance artist, while teaching the Graham Technique at the Martha Graham Center, Peridance, and the Ailey School. [@caramcmanus6](#)



Cliff Matias (he/him) is an International Treaty Chief of the Kichiwa/Taino Nations, Cliff Matias has been the cultural Director of Redhawk Native American Arts Council since 1994. An activist, cultural, teaching and performing artist, he also served as the New York City Cultural Director of Title 9 Native American Education. He has been contracted as cultural interrupter for the National Museum of the American Indian in NYC and was a featured artist in the museum's production "A Native American Thanksgiving". As the leader of the Redhawk Dance troupe, he has presented dance, music and educational workshops for schools, universities, public and private organizations around the world. Since 2005, he has taught a cultural diversity workshop through the opening doors program at Kingsborough Community College and a cultural dance workshop each semester at Barnard Columbia University. In addition, Matias is a champion hoop dancer, Northern men's traditional dancer and a Samoan Fire knife dancer. [@cliffnativenc](#)



Felipe Escalante (he/him) is the Artistic Director of Tabula Rasa Dance Theater. Born in Querétaro, México, and a protégé of Guillermina Bravo, he trained at the National Center of Contemporary Dance.

A current Dance/NYC grantee, Escalante is known for his fearless, socially charged choreography that merges emotional depth with striking visual design. Supported by the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers Fund, his more than twenty works confront themes such as migration, incarceration, and gender-based violence.

His acclaimed Oedipus Rex (2022) fused lasers, A.I., and electronic music—praised for its "startling inventiveness" and "beacon of hope." [TabulaRasaDanceTheater.com](#) | [@tabula.rasa.dance.theater.ny](#)



Kayla Hamilton (she/they) was born and raised in Texarkana, Texas, where she grew up surrounded by cows, football fields, and elders in the church. Those early experiences shaped her core values of care, listening, and community—principles that continue to guide her work today.

She is the Founder of Circle O, a platform that gathers artists, organizers, and communities to create, share resources, and practice collective care. Kayla also directs the Access. Movement. Play. (A.M.P.) Residency at Movement Research and co-facilitates How We Move, both of which center multiply marginalized Disabled artists. In addition, she serves as Co-Director of Angela's Pulse/Dancing While Black, where she works to deepen understanding around disability and build infrastructures that support innovation in Black dance and disability artistry.

While she's known more for her creative problem-solving than public speaking (wink), Kayla thrives in collaboration and excels at building systems that make space for others to flourish.

She's currently practicing talking to her younger self as a form of healing and staying connected to the dreams that brought her this far. Looking ahead, she hopes to better manage her time—and to make more room for joy, rest, and fun beyond work. [www.circleo.org](#) | [@circleo_org](#)



Kevin Gotkin (they/them) has been dialed into disability worlds since 2012 as an access ecologist, teacher, writer, artist, and scholar. Before joining the NYU Center for Disability Studies as a Postdoctoral Fellow in September 2025, they led disability economic justice initiatives as Artist-Organizer with Creatives Rebuild New York. From 2016–2019, they helped cultivate a broad platform for disability artistry across the public, cultural, and philanthropic sectors in New York City as Co-Founder of Disability/Arts/NYC with Simi Linton. Kevin received their Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 2018 and was a Visiting Assistant Professor in NYU's Department of Media, Culture, and Communication from 2018 to 2021. Their performance and curatorial work includes collaborations with Lincoln Center (2021–2024), the Critical Design Lab (2022 United States Artist Award), and the REMOTE ACCESS party collective. They write the weekly newsletter [Crip News](#). [@who_girl](#)



Leah Krauss (she/her) has served as a Senior Program Officer at [Mertz Gilmore Foundation](#) since 2009, working to promote a healthy and sustainable dance ecosystem. She leads grantmaking strategies that draw on diversity for new talent and fresh narratives; value differences as a source of creativity and aesthetic excellence; and expand the variety of dance styles available to New Yorkers. From 1998 to 2009, Leah served as a senior program officer at the New York Community Trust where her areas of responsibility included arts and culture, arts-in-education, and historic preservation.

Before working in the philanthropic sector, she earned a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania and then worked both as a corporate attorney and with the sex crimes unit of the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. She was also an ardent volunteer with Lawyers for the Arts for seven years. Currently, Leah's volunteer activities include mentoring young people from backgrounds underrepresented in arts leadership; working with families of special education students to obtain IEP eligibility; and serving as an advisory board member for Dance/NYC. In her free time, Leah takes art history courses, scours the city's flea markets and consignment shops, unwinds with yoga, and enjoys time with her family.



Nicole Y. McClam, CMA, MFA, (she/her) teaches at Queensborough Community College, where she delights in the awesomeness of dance with her students. She was a long-time member of Deborah Riley Dance Projects (2002–2011) and currently performs with Circle O and danceTactics. She's proud to have been fired from Dakshina and BosmaDance because she's remained besties with the dancers hired to replace her. Though she choreographs reluctantly, her work has been presented in Washington, DC, Maryland, New York, and Texas. Nicole is a book reviewer for the Journal of Dance Education and contributed a chapter in *Dancing Across the Lifespan* (2022) called "A Letter Re-Membering Ballet Class." A DC native with four degrees, she enjoys knitting, researching zombies, vegan desserts, and nonsensical conversations with her teen. [@nicoleyvette77](#)



Phil Chan (he/him) is co-founder of [Final Bow for Yellowface](#) and the President of the Gold Standard Arts Foundation. He is a graduate of Carleton College and an alumnus of the Ailey School. He has held fellowships with Dance/USA, Drexel University, Jacob's Pillow, Harvard University, the Manhattan School of Music, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, NYU, and the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris. As a writer, he is the author of *Final Bow for Yellowface:*

Dancing between Intention and Impact and *Banishing Orientalism*, and has served as the Executive Editor for FLATT Magazine and contributed to *Dance Europe Magazine*, *Dance Magazine*, *Dance Australia*, and the *Huffington Post*, and currently serves on the Advisory Board of *Dance Magazine*. He served multiple years on the National Endowment for the Arts dance panel and the Jadin Wong Award panel presented by the Asian American Arts Alliance. He was a Benedict Distinguished Visiting Professor of Dance at Carleton College, and was named a Next 50 Arts Leader by the Kennedy Center. His recent projects include directing "Madama Butterfly" for Boston Lyric Opera (garnering "Best of 2023" in *The Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Broadway World*), and staging a newly reimagined "La Bayadere" for Indiana University. His dances are currently in the repertory at Ballet West and Oakland Ballet, where he serves as Resident Choreographer. He is currently a CBA fellow at NYU and visiting faculty at Harvard University. [@Philschan](#) | [@FinalBowForYellowface](#)