



**9TH ANNUAL DANCE PARADE
GRAND MARSHALS ANNOUNCED:
LEGENDS OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE & BALLET,
INDIAN BHANGRA
AND THE PHYSICALLY INTEGRATED/DISABILITY
DANCE COMMUNITY**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New York, March 18th 2015 – Four Grand Marshals will cut the ribbon at 1pm on Saturday May 16th, 2015, releasing 10,000 dancers down Broadway as part of New York City’s 9th Annual Dance Parade and Festival. The four Grand Marshals span the diversity of dance – they are the renowned Creole-American ballet choreographer and dancer Carmen de Lavallade, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Artistic Director Robert Battle, Dancing Wheels founder Mary Verdi-Fletcher, and pioneer of Indian bhangra dance in North America, DJ Rekha.

While the parade celebrates more than 75 styles of dance, this year, we honor especially the genres of contemporary ballet, Physically Integrated Dance, and dance in the Indian bhangra dance music community. Dance Parade’s Curatorial Committee chair DJ McDonald explained that the honorees were selected for the “uniqueness impact, and perseverance, of their contributions to the reframing of the art of dance” throughout their formidable careers.

This year’s Dance Parade New York will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the monumental civil rights legislation embodied in the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ms. Verdi-Fletcher, whose physically integrated troupe was the first professional company in the US to bring the talents of dancers with and without disabilities to the stage, will lead the parade while dancing in her wheelchair.

Ms. de Lavallade will appear in the middle of the parade on a float with other famed ballet stars and friends who have supported her 65 year career in ballet, which saw her rise to overcome racial barriers and become the first African-American prima ballerina at the Metropolitan Opera.

Mr. Battle, who last year became just the third artistic director in the history of the world renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, was honored as one of the “Masters of African-American Choreography” by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and he received the prestigious Statue Award from the Princess Grace Foundation.

DJ Rekha (born Rekha Malhotra) is a London-born musician, DJ, producer, curator, and activist. She has been credited with pioneering Bhangra music in North America. Her unique music style fuses the Indian genre of bhangra music with international hip-hop and drum beats. Ms. Rekha will be playing a set at the post parade DanceFest in Tompkins Square Park and at the After Party at Drom.

ABOUT DANCE PARADE NEW YORK

Dance Parade is the world’s largest display of the diversity found in the field of dance. The parade covers 1.4 miles and features as many as 10,000 dancers and up to 70 vehicles and floats representing about 75 styles of dance. It begins at Broadway and E. 21st Street and flows down through Union Square and University Place. There is a grandstand at E. 8th St. & University Place, where major media and invited guests can get a clear view as dancers swing by. The procession cascades across St. Marks Place at Tompkins Square Park in DanceFest, an outdoor festival at the conclusion of the parade. DanceFest features five stages of continuous programming and free dance lessons from 3-7pm.

Dance Parade originated as a community response to 2006 lawsuit seeking to overturn New York City's 1926 Cabaret License Law, which has been used to restrict unlicensed social dancing in the city's bars and restaurants. When a New York State Supreme Court Judge ruled that social dancing was not considered "expressive activity" protected by the state constitution's freedom of expression amendment, dancers and dance groups got together to create a positive response to the decision. With this response, the Dance Parade New York was born.

Dance Parade New York is an entity of Dance Parade Inc, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose charitable mission is to promote dance as an expressive and unifying art form, while educating the public about opportunities to experience dance. The organization celebrates diversity by showcasing all forms of dance around the world through sponsorship of a yearly, citywide Dance Parade and Dance Festival. Additional programs include education outreach, residencies and artistic partnerships to aid in increased public awareness, and the showcasing of dance in multiple ways.

For our Media Kit including high resolution photos and more information about Dance Parade and our Education programs please visit: danceparade.org/media-downloads

ABOUT CARMEN DE LAVALLADE

Carmen de Lavallade began her performance career with the Lester Horton Dance Theater -- the first multi-race dance troupe in the United States. She persuaded a neighborhood friend named Alvin Ailey to join her in studying with Horton. While in Los Angeles, Lena Horne introduced the then 17-year-old de Lavallade to the filmmakers at 20th Century Fox where she appeared in four movies, including *Carmen Jones* (1954) with Dorothy Dandridge and *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959) with Harry Belafonte. During the filming of *Carmen Jones*, she met Herbert Ross, who asked her to appear as a dancer in the Broadway production of *House of Flowers*. Her dance career includes ballets created for her by Lester Horton, Geoffrey Holder, Alvin Ailey, Glen Tetley, John Butler and Agnes de Mille. She succeeded her cousin Janet Collins as principal dancer with the Metropolitan Opera, becoming the second black dancer to perform on that stage, and then rising to be its first prima ballerina of color. She was a guest artist with the American Ballet Theater. Ms. de Lavallade has choreographed for the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Philadanco, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and the productions of *Porgy and Bess* and *Die Meistersinger* at the Metropolitan Opera. Ms. de Lavallade also has had an extensive acting career as a member of the Yale Repertory Theatre and the American Repertory Theatre at Harvard, performing in numerous Off-Broadway productions, and as an instructor at the Yale School of Drama, where she taught many up and coming "super stars," including Meryl Streep and Henry Winkler. Her television and film credits include *The Cosby Show*, *Sherri with Sherri Shepherd*, *John Sayles' Lone Star*, and *Big Daddy* with Adam Sandler. Ms. de Lavallade and her husband, Geoffrey Holder, were the subjects of the film *Carmen & Geoffrey* (2005), which chronicled their sixty-year partnership and artistic legacy.

Her most recent theatrical work includes *Step-Mother* by Ruby Dee (2009), *Post Black* by Regina Taylor (2011), and the Broadway revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (2012). She is also a founding member of the dance company Paradigm. Lauded by numerous institutions, Ms. de Lavallade received the Dance Magazine Award (1964), an honorary doctorate of Fine Arts from the Juilliard School (2007), the Duke Ellington Fellowship Award and Dance USA Award (2010). In 1999 the Dance Heritage Coalition named her one of America's 100 Irreplaceable Dance Treasures.

For more information about Ms. de Lavallade, please visit carmendelavallade.com

ABOUT ROBERT BATTLE

Robert Battle became artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July 2011 after being personally selected by Judith Jamison, making him only the third person to head the Company since it was founded in 1958. Mr. Battle has a long-standing association with the Ailey organization; as a frequent choreographer and artist-in-residence at Ailey since 1999, he has set many of his works on Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and Ailey II, and at The Ailey School. Among his many honors and awards, Mr.

Battle has been honored as one of the “Masters of African-American Choreography” by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and received the prestigious Statue Award from the Princess Grace Foundation.

For more information about Mr. Battle, please visit www.alvinailey.org/about/people/robert-battle

ABOUT MARY VERDI-FLETCHER

Mary Verdi-Fletcher is the President/Founding Artistic Director of The Dancing Wheels Company & School. Ms. Verdi-Fletcher has been a pioneering force in the development and success of physically integrated dance for more than 3 decades. One of the world’s first and foremost professional wheelchair dancers, she has worked and studied with such esteemed artists as Donald McKayle, David Rousseve, Dianne McIntyre, Dennis Nahat, Keith Young, Ben Vereen, Christopher Reeve and many others. She has performed for audiences of more than 5 million since the inception of the Company and is responsible for the commission of over 60 works in the Company’s current repertory.

Seeing the need for training and career opportunities for dancers of all ability levels, Ms. Verdi-Fletcher created the multi-arts Dancing Wheels School in 1990. Attracting students from around the globe, the school is becoming the worldwide center for physically integrated dance. As an educator, Ms. Verdi-Fletcher has conducted master classes and lectures and has consulted with notable arts institutions across several continents.

Also a tireless arts administrator and advocate, Ms. Verdi-Fletcher has helped develop state and national programs for arts and disability service organizations and has worked to help to pass significant pieces of legislation. Her efforts have paved the way for others in their quest for full and equal access.

Ms. Verdi-Fletcher’s recent professional affiliations include Executive Committee Member for the Careers in Arts Summit, Program Committee Member for The Association of Performing Arts Presenters Annual Conference, Advisory Board Member for The Arc of Greater Cleveland and Board Member for Ohio Arts Presenters.

Mobility Works, is sponsoring Ms. Verdi-Fletcher’s troupe at the 9th Annual Dance Parade. Mobility Works provides mobility and independence to thousands of clients each year through wheelchair vans, scooter lifts, hand controls & the latest in adaptive technology. For more information on Mobility Works, please visit mobilityworks.com

For more information about Ms. Verdi-Fletcher:

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ABOUT DJ REKHA

One of the leading American exponents of bhangra music, DJ Rekha specializes in the style but also mixes dancehall, dub, and hip-hop into her DJ sets. Based in New York City, she hosts the long-running monthly club night Basement Bhangra, which began at S.O.B.'s in SoHo in 1997, and continues today at le Poisson Rouge . The popularity of the club night in New York and the uniqueness of her style there made her a minor media celebrity regularly featured in local publications such as New York Times, Time Out New York, The Village Voice, and New York Magazine, as well as on multiple episodes of NPR and in fashionable magazines such as The Fader and Urb. Born as Rekha Malhotra in London, England, in 1971, to parents of Punjabi descent, she was raised in Queens and Westbury, Long Island, and later moved to Brooklyn, which she now calls home. In 2007 she made her official album debut with Basement Bhangra, a DJ mix released by Koch Records.

For more information on DJ Rekha, please visit: www.djrekha.com