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**NCCAkron Receives \$750,000 from The Knight Foundation
for New Initiatives of Multi-Year Strategic Plan**



Photos (L to R): 1. Christy Bolingbroke, Rashaun Mitchell, Ken Tabatchnick, Silas Riener, and Pamela Young. 2. Jessica Liu in performance at Akron Art Museum. 3. Alberto Ibarguen, Riener, and Mitchell. All photos by Mike Crupi.

AKRON, Ohio (February 4, 2021) — Kicking off its 5th anniversary year, **The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron (NCCAkron)** announces a \$750,000 award from **The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation** to support the implementation of its first strategic plan and associated initiatives. Between now and 2023, this substantial multi-year funding will support NCCAkron in its work to advance American dance by creating new opportunities and resources for artists and audiences.

NCCAkron's **Executive/Artistic Director Christy Bolingbroke** says: "At NCCAkron, we define our role in the ecology of the dance world as a hyperagent for dance. A hyperagent offers a boost to the community, finds new possibilities for others and helps to define ways of working. Hyperagents are not constricted by a limited or existing range of possibilities. In our first five years, we've hosted over 200 dance artists and have maximized ways of working within the rules and systems generally accepted in the dance ecology. Now, as we move into our fifth anniversary year, we seek to not only support artists but also challenge the status quo in the dance field. The generous support from the Knight Foundation gives us the necessary fuel to work towards furthering these changes, both in our Northeast Ohio home and across the country."

"The National Center for Choreography-Akron, one of only two in the U.S., is playing a key role in the transformation and increased relevance of dance across the country," said **Victoria Rogers, Knight's Vice President for Arts**. "We're excited to support the center's efforts to

grow its artistic programming, establish new partnerships to reach broader audiences, promote the use of digital technologies to make dance more accessible, as well as its focus on choreographers and dancers creating new, innovative works.”

The Knight Foundation award will support NCCAkron’s new partnership with **The University of Akron Press**, which seeks to decentralize narratives in dance in a way that is geographically equitable and culturally holistic. Books will focus on individuals, regions and genres of dance that have traditionally been left out of the predominantly New York-focused narrative currently driving the field. Choreographer **Hope Mohr** (San Francisco, CA) has authored the first title in this publication series: *Shifting Cultural Power: Case Studies & Questions in Performance*. Publication is anticipated in July 2021. This book, Mohr’s first, reflects on her ten years at the helm of the **Bridge Project** and the organization’s shift into distributed leadership. A second manuscript is near completion and will highlight women leadership in dance with essays uplifting stories from across the country. Tentatively titled *Women in Dance, Volume 1*, this manuscript is envisioned as the first of several books, addressing a distinct disparity: historically women comprise the majority of the dance workforce and the minority of its stories.

Pivoting residency support in 2020, NCCAkron initiated a **Satellite Residency program** — reaching beyond traditional residency parameters of time, space, and place to support artists wherever they are able to continue their choreographic research. Participating artists include **Charles O. Anderson** (Austin, TX); **Sean Dorsey Dance** (San Francisco, CA); **Dance Heginbotham** (New York, NY); **DANCE IQUAIL!** (Philadelphia, PA); **Liz Lerman** (Tempe, AZ); and **Movement Art Is** (Las Vegas, NV).

Managing Director of Dance Heginbotham Andrea Lodico says: "Dance Heginbotham was eagerly awaiting our return to NCCAkron as a company in fall 2020 to close out John’s three-year research residency. In a year defined by quick pivots and re-invention, DH jumped into the world of virtual dancemaking with our *24 Caprices* project and NCCAkron just as quickly shifted their support to a Satellite Residency -- and we are deeply grateful. The support from NCCAkron of *24 Caprices* this year has made a vital impact on our ability to continue to advance John’s vision, offer a platform for connection and collaboration, and provide more sustained employment for the artists of DH in a year of so much uncertainty to our field."

In addition to new program initiatives and implementing its strategic plan, NCCAkron is also using these Knight Foundation funds to envision how it can evolve its infrastructure and curatorial thinking to include even more artists and ensure programs reflect the artistic, racial, and geographic diversity of the dance field.

While operations and most Akron-based activities occur in NCCAkron’s offices and dance studios on the University of Akron campus, NCCAkron is a completely separate, discrete 501(c)3 nonprofit. The NCCAkron team works to dismantle the systems of white supremacy that exist in the dance and nonprofit spaces through programs, artist support, and day-to-day work. Simultaneously, the team understands that the proximity to and working relationships with longstanding, institutionalized organizations add a risk of potential culpability in perpetuating

systemic inequities. Leveraging these relationships while being a catalyst for change is one step NCCAkron takes as a hyperagent for dance.

NCCAkron's Programs Manager Kat Wentz, an Ohio native who became NCCAkron's second full-time employee in fall 2020, says: "I love that NCCAkron encourages dance artists to build administrative habits that reflect their artistic practices. At the same time, we acknowledge we do our work in dialogue and alongside less nimble institutions built on systems of oppression and inequity. Continuing to seek out how NCCAkron can be an advocate for inclusion from the gaps within the system remains one of our strategic challenges."

NCCAkron Board President John Michael Schert says: "In just five years, NCCAkron has become an anchor institution for American dance by disrupting old models of supporting choreographers and partnering with dance artists to meet their evolving needs and those of the field at large. This award from the Knight Foundation allows us to deepen our partnerships with artists, evolve our governance structures, and expand our programs to truly advance 21st century dance practices in the United States."

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About NCCAkron

The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron supports the research and development of new work in dance by exploring the full potential of the creative process. In addition to offering studio and technical residencies to make new work, activities focus on catalyzing dialogue and experimentation; creating proximity among artists and dance thinkers; and aggregating resources around dance making. For more information, visit nccakron.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Knight Foundation is a national foundation with strong local roots. It invests in journalism, in the arts, and in the success of cities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers. Its goal is to foster informed and engaged communities, which it believes are essential for a healthy democracy. For more information, visit knightfoundation.org.

Artist Biographies

Charles O. Anderson (Austin, TX) is artistic director of Charles O. Anderson/dance theatre X, an afro-contemporary dance theatre company, which he founded in Philadelphia in 2003. Born and raised in Richmond, VA, Charles earned his BA in Choreography and Performance from Cornell University and his MFA in Dance from Temple University. He has performed in the companies of Ronald K. Brown, Sean Curran, Mark Dendy and Miguel Gutierrez among others. His work has been presented nationally and internationally and has earned recognition by numerous grants and organizations such as the Pew Fellowship in the Arts, one of "25 to Watch" by Dance Magazine, and one of "12 Rising Stars in the Academy" by *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education Magazine*. Anderson is currently based in Austin, Texas where he is Head of the Dance Program and an associate professor of African Diaspora Dance Studies at The

University of Texas at Austin. Anderson also serves on faculty of the American Dance Festival six week school in Durham, NC. charlesoanderson.me

Sean Dorsey (San Francisco, CA) is an award-winning choreographer, dancer and writer. Recognized as the U.S.' first acclaimed transgender modern dance choreographer, Dorsey has toured his work to 30 cities. SF Weekly named Sean Dorsey Dance as "San Francisco's Best Dance Company", and Dorsey was named in Dance Magazine's 25 To Watch. He was awarded a Dance/USA Artist Fellowship, 5 Isadora Duncan Dance Awards, and the Goldie Award for Performance. Dorsey has also received support from the National Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, National Performance Network, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. He has worked for equity for transgender and gender-nonconforming artists for 20 years, and he is a leading national advocate for Trans Equity in dance. Dorsey's program TRANSform Dance provides trans-supportive education, engagement, and advocacy to forward trans equity and justice. seandorseydance.com

John Heginbotham (New York, NY) was part of the Mark Morris Dance Group (1998-2012), and he founded Dance Heginbotham in 2011. Recent projects include John Adams' Girls of the Golden West, directed by Peter Sellars (San Francisco Opera 2017, Dutch National Opera 2019); Candide with the Orlando Philharmonic (2016) and The Knights (2018, 2019); and Daniel Fish's 2015 Bard Summerscape production of Oklahoma! (Off-Broadway 2018, Broadway 2019) which won the 2019 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. Heginbotham received the 2014 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship (2018), a City Center Choreography Fellowship (2017-18), and an NYU Center for Ballet and the Arts Fellowship (2016). He is the Director of the Dartmouth Dance Ensemble, and he is a founding teacher of Dance for PD, a collaboration between the Mark Morris Dance Group and the Brooklyn Parkinson Group. Danceheginbotham.org

Liz Lerman (Tempe, AZ) is a choreographer, performer, writer, educator and speaker, and the recipient of honors including a 2002 MacArthur "Genius Grant" and a 2017 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award. Key to her artistry is opening her process to various publics, resulting in research and outcomes that are participatory, urgent, and usable. She founded Dance Exchange in 1976 and led it until 2011. Her recent work Healing Wars toured the US. Liz teaches Critical Response Process, creative research, the intersection of art and science, and the building of narrative within dance at institutions such as Harvard, Yale School of Drama, and Guildhall School of Music and Drama. Her third book is Hiking the Horizontal: Field Notes from a Choreographer. As of 2016 she is an Institute Professor at Arizona State University. lizlerman.com

Hope Mohr (San Francisco, CA) is a choreographer, curator and writer. She trained at S.F. Ballet School and on scholarship at the Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown Studios in New York City. She performed in the companies of dance pioneers Lucinda Childs and Trisha Brown. Passionate about pursuing both community organizing and dance, Mohr earned a J.D. from Columbia Law School, where she was a Columbia Human Rights Fellow. She has held artist residencies at Stanford Arts Institute, Montalvo Arts Center, Crow's Nest, and the Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance. She was named to the YBCA 100 in

2015; and in 2014, DANCE Magazine editor-in-chief Wendy Perron named Mohr as one of the “women leaders” in the dance field. hopemohr.org and bridgeproject.art

Movement Art Is (Las Vegas, NV and Los Angeles, CA) was co-founded by Jon Boogz and Lil Buck. Lil Buck is a movement artist who began jookin at age 13. Named one of Dance Magazine’s 25 to Watch, he gained international notoriety after an impromptu piece with Yo-Yo Ma went viral. Since then he has collaborated with artists including JR, Damian Woetzel, the New York City Ballet, Madonna, Benjamin Millepied, and Spike Lee. Buck is an avid arts education advocate, recipient of the WSJ Innovator Award. He has collaborated with brands like Glenfiddich and Louis Vuitton, and launched a capsule collection with Versace. Jon Boogz is a movement artist, choreographer, and director who pushes the evolution of dance – sharing his art form with audiences of all backgrounds while inspiring and bringing awareness to social issues alongside collaborators and clients including Mikhail Baryshnikov, Naomi Campbell, and the TriBeCa Film Festival. MAI’s most recent critically acclaimed project is Color of Reality, a short film written, directed, and choreographed in collaboration with visual artist Alexa Meade. movementartis.com

Iquail Shaheed (Philadelphia, PA) is the founder and executive artistic director of DANCE IQUAIL!. As a native of Philadelphia, Shaheed trained at Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts and PHILADANCO before becoming a senior member of Danco II under Donald T. Lunsford II. Shaheed received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Ballet Performance from the University of the Arts, and a Master of Fine Arts degree from Purchase College – SUNY. As a professional dancer, Shaheed has worked with companies such as Compagnie Thor (Brussels), The Sean Curran Company, Ronald K Brown/ Evidence, and The Fred Benjamin Dance Company and has appeared in various Broadway productions. He is on faculty at The Ailey School, Steps on Broadway, and Harlem School for the Arts. Shaheed has received Lower Manhattan Cultural Council grant awards, The Caroline H. Newhouse Award, The Suzanne and Larry Engman Award, The Philadelphia Dance Award (Rocky), The Marion D. Cuyjet Award, NAACP ACT-SO National Silver Medal, and The Promising Artist Award. danceiquail.org