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DANCE COMPANY

ANGELS IN AFRICA

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A WELCOME FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

WELCOME

Dear friends,

Welcome to Angels in Africa, the closing season of WGRUV Dance Company's 2026 year.

More than thirty years ago, as a young artist, I danced Martha Graham's Diversion of Angels. I could never have imagined that one day I would watch my own company bring it to life in South Africa, with live music.

This year, that dream came true. The work had its South African premiere at SANDT's Legacy of Dance Gala in Cape Town, in the very year the Martha Graham Dance Company celebrates its centennial. Now we share it with you.

My deep thanks to Lorenzo Pagano and Martha Graham Resources for entrusting this masterwork to us.

Alongside it, we are honoured to be the first company since The Washington Ballet to perform Jessica Lang's Reverence, and to share Prayer, a work Lex and I created from a place of deep conviction.

Between the dances, the Musicians of Africa remind us that music and movement have always belonged together.

Each of these works, in its own way, is about love: love for the art form, for one another, and for the One who first loved us.

Our dancers have given themselves to this season with discipline, joy and generosity, and I could not be prouder of them.

To our patrons, partners, families and friends, thank you. Your support makes all of this possible.

May this performance lift your heart and leave you with a glimpse of beauty and hope.

With gratitude,

Holly Gruver

Artistic Director & Founder, WGRUV Dance Company

MUSIC ENSEMBLE

16 Waltzes, Op. 39, No. 15 Composed by Johannes Brahms

Performed by the MUSICIANS OF AFRICA

REVERENCE

CHOREOGRAPHY BY JESSICA LANG

STAGED BY CLAUDIA MCDONALD



Reverence is a 20-minute ballet for eight dancers, created by Jessica Lang for The Washington Ballet under Artistic Director Julie Kent. It received its world premiere on October 24, 2019, at Sidney Harman Hall in Washington, D.C.

Set to Robert Schumann's Symphonic Studies, Op. 13, the ballet explores the richness and emotional depth of classical ballet through Lang's distinctive choreographic language.

The choreography moves between stillness and fluidity, as four couples create shifting formations, intimate partnerships, turns, lifts and embraces. Circles and circular formations serve as a central motif, giving the work a sense of continuity and interconnectedness.

Lang described Reverence as "my definition of ballet", a work meant to be experienced rather than explained. The title reflects a deep respect for the form itself: its history, musicality, physical language, and the relationships between dancers.

Reverence remains part of The Washington Ballet's repertoire. WGRUV is the first company to license and perform the work since its premiere.

DANCERS
Chloe Gruver, Mariana Goncalves, Saili Gruver, Jenna Groves, Ruan Galdino, Vinicius Vasconcelos, Javier Monier Jr., Marlon Sales

COSTUMES
Bronwyn Monier

LIGHTING
Simon King



Claudia McDonald holds a B.F.A. in Dance from Fordham University/ The Ailey School. She was a founding member of Jessica Lang Dance, both as a dancer and rehearsal director. She has also performed with the Mark Morris Dance Group in The Hard Nut, Romeo & Juliet: On Motifs of Shakespeare, and L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato as well as in Mr. Morris' production of Orfeo ed Euridice at the Metropolitan Opera.
Ms. McDonald currently teaches at the Mark Morris Dance Center.









MUSIC ENSEMBLE

Moon River Music by Henry Mancini · Lyrics by Johnny Mercer

Performed by the MUSICIANS OF AFRICA

PRAYER

Music: Prayer by Reinhardt Buhr



CHOREOGRAPHY BY LEX & HOLLY GRUVER

Prayer was born out of the music of South African looping artist Reinhardt Buhr.

His musical phrases build in pace and intensity, each one answering an impulse of weight and conviction.

The movement vocabulary of Power mirrors Buhr's musical progression - showing how the deepest influence in our lives also shapes everything we do.

For Lex and Holly, that influence is the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, surrounds us and goes before us as we give our lives to following Christ.

Prayer is where that relationship lives and breathes, and the dancers carry the sense of being moved by Someone greater than themselves. At the same time, every viewer is invited to find a place in the piece, and to ask what is moving them.

Originally created for Letters of Reflection (2025).

Saili Gruver & Ruan Galdino / Chloe Gruver & Javier Monier Jr.
Chloe Gruver / Saili Gruver
Nicola Tolmay / Nicola Tolmay
Lisa Stapelberg / Jenna Levin
Vuyelwa Phota / Vuyelwa Phota
Understudy: Gemma Bisseker

INTERVAL • 15 MINUTES





“Prayer” Premiere 2025

MUSIC ENSEMBLE

The Eye is on the Sparrow

Words by Civilla D. Martin • Music by Charles H. Gabriel
Arranged by Musicians of Africa, after the 2CELLOS version

Performed by the MUSICIANS OF AFRICA, featuring:



SHARON PAUL VOCALIST

A South African singer and vocal coach with over two decades of professional experience performing, collaborating and producing with artists across and beyond South Africa. She holds a jazz performance degree (2006) and a postgraduate music education certificate (2007) from the University of Cape Town, where she sang lead with the Afro jazz band Ntsako, led by Themba Ndala, and performed at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival.

She was a backing singer for the late Afro-pop star Labelle, performed at the Standard Bank Joy of Jazz in 2016 with The Afrikaan Child, and is a lead vocalist with the SAXOKAY Afro Jazz band. Alongside performing, she coaches young musicians across Johannesburg.



EMMANUEL PAUL JAZZ BASSIST

A South African-based bassist and sound engineer whose sound blends jazz, African rhythms and contemporary influences, inspired by Fela Kuti, James Brown and the Yellowjackets.

He studied music performance at Central Johannesburg College, earned a certificate in Sound Engineering, and pursued Jazz Studies at Tshwane University of Technology.

He went on to lead The Afrikaan Child at the Standard Bank Joy of Jazz Festival in 2016, and continues to shape the evolving landscape of African jazz through performance and collaboration.



SIZEKILE SHUBA CELLIST

A South African cross-sectoral cultural strategist, cultural entrepreneur, performing cellist, vocalist, composer/ songwriter and independent researcher. A BCom Finance graduate of the University of Johannesburg, she works across orchestral management, creative production, music education, cultural policy and governance. She is the Founding Managing Director of That Orchestra Chic Consulting and the Founding Executive Director/ Programme Convenor of Arts In Action Foundation.

A participant in Designing Futures 2025–2026, she undertook an EU-funded research and creative exchange in Antwerp, Belgium, in 2026. Her leadership philosophy centres on recognising and cultivating human potential across professional, personal and social relationships. Her practice is anchored in a philosophy she has developed and continues to refine: BUSINESS Is Art – ART is Business: Mastering the DUAL Reality.



PHAKAMANI "PK" PEGA VIOLINIST

He is a Berklee College of Music graduate, whose violin journey began at the Welcome Soweto school of Music when he was 12. Later he joined the National School Of Arts(NSA).
His starring role in the South African film 'Mozart-The music of the Violin', opened new doors, setting him on a path to go study in the United States.

Phakamani moves fluidly between musical worlds with a voice distinctly his own. From Classical to jazz, fiddle and folk, fusion to worship atmosphere. Equally at home composing, teaching, collaborating and leading, he certainly brings an original flavor to the team.
Beyond music, PK is also a mobile software developer, bringing the same creativity to code as he does to the violin.















Martha Graham in Deaths and Entrances. Photo: Cris Alexander

MARTHA GRAHAM

Martha Graham is regarded as one of the founding figures of modern dance. In 1926 she founded the Martha Graham Dance Company in New York, now the oldest dance company in America, and over seven decades she created more than 180 works. In 1976 she became the first dancer to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Graham believed movement should reveal the inner life of the human spirit. Her technique grows from the breath, through the principles of contraction and release, spiralling around the spine and drawing strength from the floor. Taught today on every continent, it continues to shape contemporary dance throughout the world.



LORENZO PAGANO

RÉGISSEUR · DIVERSIONOF ANGELS

An award-winning contemporary performer working across concert dance, theater and opera. He joined the Martha Graham Dance Company in 2012 and became Guest Artist and Assistant Rehearsal Director in 2023.

He has danced the repertory's iconic male roles and originated roles in works by Lucinda Childs, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Hofesh Shechter and others.

As a Martha Graham Center régisseur, he has restaged works for the Joffrey Ballet, The Juilliard School and Rome Opera Ballet School, and he now directs Graham 2.

He was in the original cast of the musical GATSBY (2024) and performed with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in 2024/25.

He has partnered Paris Opéra Étoiles Aurélie Dupont and Eleonora Abbagnato. His honours include the Italian International Dance Award (2016) and the Premio Nazionale La Sfera d'Oro (2022). WGRUV was honoured to host him in South Africa to stage Diversion of Angels.



Left: Peggy Lyman and Takako Asakawa · Photos courtesy of Martha Graham Resources.



FOLLOWING ITS SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIERE

DIVERSION OF ANGELS

STAGED BY LORENZO PAGANO
REHEARSED BY HOLLY GRUVER

Shaped by a lifelong relationship with the Graham technique, Holly Gruver is honoured to share Martha Graham's Diversion of Angels with South Africa. The work premiered in South Africa in October 2026 at SANDT's Legacy of Dance Gala, Artscape Opera House, Cape Town, with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra and Graham dancer Lorenzo Pagano. Recognised there among the country's leading contributors to the arts, WGRUV marks this as a milestone in its mission to create hope through soulful storytelling.

Premiere: August 13, 1948, Palmer Auditorium, New London, CT

Choreography & Costume Design
Martha Graham

Staged by
Lorenzo Pagano

Music by
Norman Dello Joio*

Lighting after
Jean Rosenthal

"It is the place of the Rock and the Ladder, the raven, the blessing, the tempter, the rose. It is the wish of the single-hearted, the undivided: play after spirit's labor: games, flights, fancies, configurations of the lover's intention: the beloved Possibility, at once strenuous and tender: humors of innocence, garlands, evangels, Joy on the wilderness stair; diversion of angels." - **Ben Belitt**

The dance follows no story. Its action takes place in the imaginary garden love creates for itself. The ballet was originally called Wilderness Stair. Martha Graham once described Diversion of Angels as three aspects of love: the white couple represents mature love in perfect balance; red, erotic love; and yellow, adolescent love.

White Couple
Chloe Gruver & Vinicius Vasconcelos / Saili Gruver & Javier Monier Jr.

Red Couple
Saili Gruver & Marlon Sales / Chloe Gruver & Marlon Sales

Yellow Couple
Nicola Tolmay & Ruan Galdino / Jenna Levin & Ruan Galdino

Fourth Man
Javier Monier Jr., Understudy: Lex Gruver

Chorus
Vuyelwa Phota, Jenna Levin / Nicola Tolmay,
Mariana Goncalves, Jenna Groves / Lisa Stapelberg,
Understudy: Gemma Bisseker

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Presented by arrangement with Martha Graham Resources, a division of the Martha Graham Dance Company.









ARTISTS OF THE COMPANY



RUAN GALDINO
FIRST ARTIST



LEX GRUVER
FIRST ARTIST



MARLON SALES
FIRST ARTIST



JAVIER MONIER JR.
FIRST ARTIST



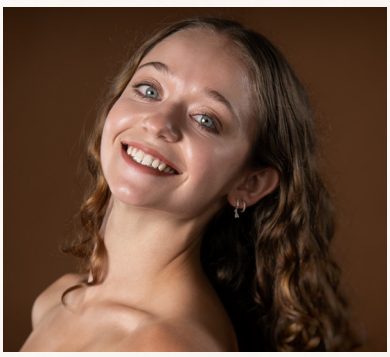
VINICIUS VASCONCELOS
FIRST ARTIST



SAILI GRUVER
FIRST ARTIST



CHLOE GRUVER
FIRST ARTIST



NICOLA TOLMAY
FIRST ARTIST



MARIANA GONCALVES
FIRST ARTIST



LISA STAPELBERG
FIRST ARTIST



VUYELWA PHOTA
ARTIST



JENNA GROVES
ARTIST



JENNA LEVIN
ARTIST



GEMMA BISSEKER
AD HOC ARTIST APPRENTICE

TRAINING TEAM

BALLET



LEX GRUVER
BALLET



STELLA PIKE
BALLET



JAVIER MONIER JR.
BALLET



SHANNON GLOVER
BALLET



BURNISE SILVIUS
BALLET



DEAN BARRETT
RESIDENT PIANIST



HOLLY GRUVER
CONTEMPORARY/
CONDITIONING



TOMMY GRUVER
RESIDENT
PERCUSSIONIST

WELLNESS



REBECCA MACCOURT
PHYSIOTHERAPIST

MEG DRESSELHAUS
PHYSIOTHERAPY



MARCO MARUGGI
CHIROPRACTOR

JEN STEELE
BIOKINETICS

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Costumes - *Kirsten Bailes, Bronwyn Monier*



AUDITIONS

Join WGRUV Dance Company for the **2027-2028** season!
We're looking for dancers to be part of our project-based company.
Applicants should bring solid classical ballet training alongside contemporary dance experience.

For more details or to apply, reach out to Holly
at **info@wgruvdance.com** or visit us on **www.wgruvdance.com**



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& **W**orld-class Excellence



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GRUVY FACTS:

WGRUV is pronounced:

Double-U Groove





Thank you for buying this program.

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Proceeds fund their shoes, costumes, training and care.
We greatly appreciate you for being part of the show.