



**WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS**
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**Washington Performing Arts announces
2017 Pola Nirenska Award recipients**

Annual awards honor those who have made outstanding contributions to dance, with special consideration for given to the community of dance in Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C. – [Washington Performing Arts](http://WashingtonPerformingArts.com), in association with the Pola Nirenska Award Committee, today announced the recipients of its 2017 Pola Nirenska Awards to **Vincent Thomas**, **Suzanne Farrell**, and **Carla Perlo**. Named after the noted D.C.-area teacher and choreographer, the awards honor those who have made outstanding contributions to dance. According to the *New York Times*, “Miss Nirenska was a major force in dance in Washington, as a teacher, as director of a company whose dancers included Liz Lerman and Sharon Wyrick (later choreographers in their own right), and as a creator of impressively fashioned dances filled with often raw emotion.” The award presentation for Carla Perlo took place at her retirement celebration from Dance Place on June 24, 2017, while the presentation for Ms. Farrell will take place on December 7, 2017. Mr. Thomas’s award presentation date will be announced at a later date.

With the support of donations by Dr. Jan Karski, the late Ms. Nirenska’s husband, the awards are granted by Washington Performing Arts, which hosts a committee that annually decides on the award recipients. Special consideration is given to members of the Washington, D.C. dance community. Prof. Karski and Pola Nirenska lived and worked in Washington during their later lives.

“Each year, we are honored to present these important awards recognizing exemplary leadership in dance and education. Ms. Nirenska’s life was dedicated to expanding the presence of dance performance and education in the D.C. area, and we’re thrilled to honor three individuals that share that commitment and passion,” says Kathy Brewington, Assistant Director of Education/Director of Gospel Programs at Washington Performing Arts. “Critical components of Washington Performing Arts’ mission are to provide lifelong learning opportunities through arts education, youth involvement, and community partnerships, and to support and nurture performing artists and their art forms. The Pola Nirenska Awards are one way for us to shine a spotlight on outstanding practitioners who lead the way within the D.C. dance community and beyond.”

2017 Pola Nirenska Award Recipients

- For Outstanding Achievement in Dance: Vincent E. Thomas (dancer, choreographer, founder of VTDance)
- For Lifetime Achievement: Suzanne Farrell (Founder & Artistic Director, The Suzanne Farrell Ballet) and Carla Perlo (Founding Director, Dance Place)

About the 2017 Pola Nirenska Award Recipients



For Outstanding Achievement in Dance: Vincent E. Thomas

Vincent E. Thomas, dancer, choreographer and teacher, received his MFA in Dance from Florida State University and a BME in Music from the University of South Carolina. He has danced with Dance Repertory Theatre (FSU), Randy James Dance Works (NY/NJ), EDGEWORKS Dance Theater (D.C.), and Liz Lerman Dance Exchange (MD). His choreography has been presented at various national and international venues including DUMBO Festival (NY), Velocity Festival (D.C.), Modern Moves Festival (D.C.), Philly Fringe (PA), Edinburgh Fringe Festival (UK-Scotland), festivals in Barcelona and Madrid, Spain, Avignon, France, Athens, Greece, Bari, Italy, and Copenhagen, Denmark. He received rave reviews for his performance of “Come Change” (2012) and “iWitness” (2014) in the Edinburgh Fringe

Festival in Scotland. Vincent was the Movement Coach/Choreographer for Everyman Theater’s *Brother’s Size* by Tarell Alvin McCraney in Baltimore, MD (2012), Mosaic Theatre’s *Unexplored Interior* by Jay Sander in Washington, D.C. (2015), and Everyman Theater’s *Los Otros* by Michael John LaChiusa and Ellen Fitzhugh (2017). His work “We Hold These Truths...” was selected for the 2012 National ACDFFA Festival at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He is a 2012-13 American Dance Institute Incubator Artist (MD), a 2014-2015 NextLook Artist for the Clarice and Joe’s Movement Emporium, a 2016 Baker Artist Award finalist, an Urban Bush Women BOLD Facilitator, faculty member for the Urban Bush Women Summer Institutes (NY), and Professor of Dance at Towson University (MD).

Vincent E. Thomas founded *VTDance* as an outlet for performance projects including solo, group, and collaborative choreographic endeavors. *VTDance* is multi-dimensional. The work builds on the use of contemporary dance, improvisation, text/movement, a variety of sound sources, and collaborations with other artists, including dancers, musicians, poets, visual artists, and others. These ideas coupled with witty, poignant, athletic, and gestural movement are the rich palette for *VTDance*.



For Lifetime Achievement: Suzanne Farrell

Suzanne Farrell is one of George Balanchine's most celebrated muses and remains a legendary figure in the ballet world. In addition to serving as Artistic Director of her own company, she is also a repetiteur for The George Balanchine Trust, the independent organization founded after the choreographer's death by the heirs to his ballets to oversee their worldwide licensing and production. Since 1988 she has staged Balanchine's works for such companies as the Berlin Opera Ballet, the Vienna State Opera Ballet, the Royal Danish Ballet, the Paris Opera Ballet, the Kirov Ballet, the Bolshoi Ballet, as well as American companies, including those in Boston, Miami, Seattle,

Cincinnati, Fort Worth, and New York. She was born in Cincinnati, and she received her early training at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

Ms. Farrell joined Balanchine's New York City Ballet in the fall of 1961 after a year as a Ford Foundation scholarship student at the School of American Ballet. Her unique combination of musical, physical, and dramatic gifts quickly ignited Balanchine's imagination. By the mid 1960s, she was not only Balanchine's most prominent ballerina, she was a symbol of the era, and remains so to this day. She restated and re-scaled such Balanchine masterpieces as *Apollo*, *Concerto Barocco*, and *Symphony in C*. Balanchine went on to invent new ones for her—*Diamonds*, for example, and *Chaconne* and *Mozartiana*, in which the limits of ballerina technique were expanded to a degree not seen before or since. By the time she retired from the stage in 1989, Ms. Farrell had achieved a career that is without precedent or parallel in the history of ballet.

During her 28 years on the stage, she danced a repertory of more than one hundred ballets, nearly a third of which were composed expressly for her by Balanchine and other choreographers, including Jerome Robbins and Maurice Béjart. Her numerous performances with Balanchine's company (more than two thousand), her world tours, and her appearances in television and movies have made her one of the most recognizable and highly esteemed artists of her generation. She is also the recipient of numerous artistic and academic accolades. Since the fall of 2000, Ms. Farrell has been a full-time professor in the dance department at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida.



For Lifetime Achievement: Carla Perlo

Carla Perlo has made a lifetime commitment to the fields of dance, youth education and community revitalization through the arts. She is co-founder, visionary leader and CoDirector of Dance Place, as well as a faculty member and artist-in-residence. In 2013, she opened "Studio 21," a gallery and workshop space for the visual arts as an extension of Dance Place's arts campus and programming. As a dance artist, choreographer and teacher, Ms. Perlo has had an active career for over thirty years, including solo and ensemble performance. After touring nationally and internationally with Perlo/Bloom & Company from 1980 – 1986, she formed Carla & Company to focus on community performances for a wide variety of audiences. Carla retired the company in 2011 to focus on long range planning for Dance Place (including a \$5 million capital campaign). Ms. Perlo is a passionate and engaging speaker about the arts who receives constant requests for mentorship and guidance from the non-profit, artistic and education sectors. Ms. Perlo has served on grants panels for the National Endowment for the Arts, Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, New England Foundation for the Arts, Massachusetts Arts Council, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the Maryland State Arts Council. Recent speaking engagements include serving as the Keynote Speaker at Arizona Commission on the Arts, Cultural Alliance annual meeting, Kennedy Center's DeVos Institute, Station North's Artists & Neighborhood Change conference, panelist for the International Conference on Cultural Diplomacy and as a panelist at the national Grantmakers in the Arts Conference. She serves on the selection committee for the U.S. Department of State's DanceMotion USA international tour and the National Performance Network's Performing Americas international exchange program. She was engaged by the Brooklyn Academy of Music to serve as the national coordinator for DanceAfrica America from 1990-1994 and program consultant for their youth program "Ignite" in 2012. In 2013 Ms. Perlo was honored to receive the DC Mayor's Arts Award for "Excellence in Service to the Arts." Other awards include Washingtonian Magazine's Washingtonian of the Year (1997), WETA's Hometown Hero (2001), Metro

DC Dance Awards' Special Recognition (2002) and Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington's Outstanding Founders Award (2003) and the Alan M. Kriegsman Award (2006).

About Pola Nirenska



Pola Nirenska was a matriarch of modern dance in Washington, D.C. She helped elevate the art form as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher at a time when it was scarcely known by the general public. Born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1910, Pola Nirenska trained at the Mary Wigman School in Dresden and toured the United States in 1932 with the Mary Wigman Dance Company. Nirenska moved to Vienna for further study with Rosalia Chladek, and then taught and performed in Italy. With fascism dominating continental Europe, she fled to Britain, where she danced for the troops while enduring the Blitz in London. Nirenska lost siblings and dozens of other family members in the Holocaust.

Nirenska moved to the United States in 1949 and was “discovered” by the pioneering American modern dancer/choreographer Ted Shawn. On the advice of choreographer Doris Humphrey, Nirenska moved from New York to Washington, D.C. The annual Pola Nirenska Awards were established in 1993. The annual awards are presented by Washington Performing Arts, which hosts the selection committee of dance professionals.

Pola Nirenska Memorial Awards Committee members this year included Dr. Rima Faber (Committee Chair), Douglas H. Wheeler, (Washington Performing Arts President Emeritus), Stephen Clapp, Tony Gittens, and Meg Booth. Honorary Members are George Jackson, Sali Ann Kriegsman, and Carla Perlo.

About Washington Performing Arts

One of the most established and honored presenters of music and dance in America, Washington Performing Arts recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Throughout its history, Washington Performing Arts has been a leader in serving artists, audiences, students, and civic life, generating ideas that have moved it above and beyond the typical role of a presenter. Washington Performing Arts was among the first independent arts presenters to become a non-profit institution; the first to provide musical performances in the DC Public Schools; the first to recognize the art of gospel music on main stages in the region; and the first to take advantage of Washington's position as an international capital to partner with embassies for both concerts and school-based programs, among numerous other milestones.

Truly, all of Washington is the stage for Washington Performing Arts. All across the city—and beyond—Washington Performing Arts presents performances unavailable under any other auspices. From the most famous names in jazz and global art forms to the most distinguished symphony orchestras, classical soloists, and dance ensembles, Washington Performing Arts stages concerts in venues from concert halls to clubs and public parks. Special events have reached tens of thousands of people through broadcast and online distribution, and neighborhood partnerships present homegrown performers to a wider audience. In schools, in summer camps, in youth competitions, and in myriad other settings, Washington Performing Arts is a leader in arts learning—for students in grades K-12 to senior citizens—and is as committed to education as to performance.

From its beginnings, Washington Performing Arts has promoted the value of concerts as singular events, as well as establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through sustained residencies and educational programs. Washington Performing Arts nourishes communities throughout the region by partnering with local organizations and with other arts institutions, staging concerts and arts activities in the

neighborhoods, employing local artists, and involving internationally known main-stage performers in community programs. Washington Performing Arts stands alone among performing arts presenters in the United States for its integration of educational, community-based, and public performance programs. These achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts from President Obama, and two Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We embark upon our next half-century with the goal of expanding our activities and a commitment to excellence, tying these three areas together even more closely, and rededicating ourselves to the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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