

AUDITORIUM THEATRE

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SOUTH CHICAGO DANCE THEATRE DEBUTS WORLD PREMIERE OF DYNAMIC DANCE CONCERT *MEMOIRS OF JAZZ IN THE ALLEY* IN ONE PERFORMANCE ONLY, SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 2023

Interdisciplinary performance event features live jazz score by popular saxophonist Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few, with futuristic retro projection design by Rasean Davonté Johnson

(May 8, 2023) Through the 1960s and '70s, Jazz in the Alley on Chicago's South Side was a hotbed for jazz and a meeting place for some of the country's prominent musicians, visual artists, poets, activists, and organizers, all under the passionate direction of its co-founder, the late musician and educator Jimmy Ellis. This historic happening comes alive as **South Chicago Dance Theatre** (SCDT) makes its debut at the **Auditorium Theatre** (Chicago's landmark stage at 50 E. Ida B. Wells Drive) with ***Memoirs of Jazz in the Alley***, in one performance only Saturday, June 10, at 7:30pm. Notably, SCDT is under the leadership of high energy Executive Artistic Director **Kia S. Smith** – Ellis' daughter and uniquely qualified to tell this distinct Chicago story!

In its World Premiere presentation, the dynamic dance concert will feature a company of 20 SCDT artists accompanied by Chicago favorite **Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few** performing a live score of newly arranged jazz standards including John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" and Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia." Completing the evening-length interdisciplinary work will be a series of complementary video projections created by prolific Chicago scenic designer **Rasean Davonté Johnson**.

Smith has called *Memoirs of Jazz in the Alley* an homage to the sounds and people of Jazz in the Alley, a work of historical fiction tracing the experiences of imagined characters found in an online gallery of photos taken by Ellis, her father. *Memoirs* employs sound, projection design, color, and movement to reimagine the Jazz in the Alley tradition through a futuristic retro lens, honoring the past with elements and ideas of the current time.

“Jazz in the Alley was many things to the artists and community members who contributed to its presence in the alleys on 50th Street and Champlain, known as Chicago’s Black Belt, more than fifty years ago. It was a cultural happening, and a major influence on the development of the jazz art form that is unique to Chicago,” said Smith. “*Memoirs of Jazz in the Alley* is the first evening length work I’ve choreographed, and as I’ve been attending performances at the Auditorium Theatre since I was a little girl, I’m beyond honored to be presenting this World Premiere, and the debut of South Chicago Dance Theatre, at this historic venue.”

“Kia Smith and South Chicago Dance Theatre have been on our radar since the company’s inception only six years ago,” added Auditorium Theatre CEO **Rich Regan**. “Smith’s preternatural poise and choreographic skills have quickly caught the attention of Chicago’s dance community; we’re proud to be debuting this special Chicago work before it tours, and then hosting the company again to close our 2023-24 dance season next year.”

South Chicago Dance Theatre (SCDT) is a multicultural organization seamlessly fusing classical and contemporary dance styles as well as preserving historic dance work. With cultural diplomacy at the heart of the organization, SCDT creates, performs, and teaches dance on a local, national, and international platform. Since the 2017 launch, the Main Company has toured regionally, nationally, and internationally and commissioned the choreographic work of renowned artists. Its collaborative initiatives have included music ensembles, television, opera, art museums and public schools through a range of collaborations and performances. Prioritizing intergenerational learning and exchange, SCDT’s seven core programs include the Main Company and Emerging Artist Program, the Choreographic Fellowship, the School, the Education and Community Programs, the South Chicago Arts Administration Fellowship, the annual South Chicago Dance Festival, and the Choreographic Diplomacy™ Program. *The art of dance empowers our community to resist oppression and foster collective healing.*

South Chicago Dance Theatre presents *Memoirs of Jazz in the Alley* at the Auditorium Theatre in one ‘don’t miss’ performance only, Saturday, June 10, at 7:30pm. Tickets start at \$25 and are now available at [AuditoriumTheatre.org](https://auditoriumtheatre.org), by calling 312.341.2300, or at the Box Office at 50 E Ida B Wells Drive in Chicago, IL. [Click here for phone and in-person hours.](#)

Memoirs of Jazz in the Alley ARTISTIC TEAM

Kia S. Smith (Director + Choreographer)

A Chicago native, Kia Smith trained intensely on scholarship at The Hyde Park School of Dance, The Joel Hall Dance Center, ETA Creative Arts Foundation, StoryCatchers Theatre, and received scholarships to attend the American Dance Festival in 2008 and 2009. She holds a BFA in Dance from Western Michigan University and an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she was an Advanced Opportunity Program Fellow. Smith is the Founder and Executive Artistic Director of South Chicago Dance Theatre, and the company’s Resident Choreographer. In 2018, she received the inaugural Young and Ambitious Entrepreneurship Award from the Metropolitan Board of the Chicago Urban League and was chosen by the NYC-based Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation as a member of the national Observership class. In 2021, Smith received a 3Arts Make A Wave award and was an Ann & Weston Hicks Choreographic Fellow at the renowned Jacobs Pillow. She was a 2022 Chicago Dancemakers Forum Lab Artist Awardee and a participant in the Artist in Residence “AIR” Program at the Cliff Dwellers Chicago. As a freelance choreographer, her recent and upcoming commissions include Madison Ballet (2021), Chicago Repertory Ballet (2022), Houston Contemporary Dance Company (2023), Chicago Opera Theater (2023), Ruth Page Civic Ballet Training Company (2022), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (2023), Giordano Dance Chicago (2023), and Western Michigan University (2023).

Isaiah Collier (Bandleader + musician)

Isaiah Collier's musical journey began on the South Side of Chicago. Born into a musically inclined family, Collier sought to command his own space and develop a deeper connection to the music. He began at piano but soon became a multi-instrumentalist, most recognized for his work as a saxophonist, in addition to being a drummer as well. Collier has played at venues and festivals around the world including the Jazz Showcase, Dizzy's Club Coca Cola, Lithuania Jazz Festival, The White House, Chicago Jazz Festival, New York Winter Jazz Festival, Hyde Park Jazz Festival, Sons D'hiver Festival (Paris), the Logan Center, the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, and the U.S. Embassy (Paraguay). Collier is also a former fellow of the prestigious Dave Brubeck Institute in Stockton, California and one of the last musicians to work with the late, legendary Rudy Van Gelder. His most well-known work is with his group, Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few. Recent projects include *"Return of The Black Emperor"* (2017), *"The Unapologetic Negro"* (2019), and *"Cosmic Transitions"* (2020), recorded at Van Gelder's studio.

Rasean Davonté Johnson (Scenic + Projection Designer)

Rasean Davonté Johnson is a Chicago-based video artist and designer of projections, scenery, and sound for theater, film, and installations. Through his eightinfinitystudio practice, Johnson's theater work includes collaborations with numerous institutions including Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Manual Cinema, Chicago Opera Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, ArtsEmerson, the McCarter Theatre Center, Yale Repertory Theatre, The Studio Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Berkshire Theatre Group, Everyman Theatre, The Ningbo Song and Dance Company, Yale Opera, Teatro Vista, Timeline Theatre Company, The Hypocrites, Porchlight Music Theatre, Halcyon Theatre, Redtwist Theatre, and many more. Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, he is a graduate of The Ohio State University where he studied primarily as actor, director, and cinematographer in film. He received his MFA from the Yale School of Drama in Design as a student in the projection program, and has lectured at Yale University, Columbia College Chicago, Syracuse University, Boston University, The Theatre School at DePaul, and the Ohio State University. He is a proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 and a Lecturer at The David Geffen School of Drama at Yale.

SPECIAL THANKS

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ABOUT THE AUDITORIUM THEATRE

The **Auditorium Theatre**, located at 50 E. Ida B. Wells Drive at Roosevelt University in Chicago, is an Illinois not-for-profit organization committed to presenting the finest in international, cultural, community, and educational programming to all of Chicago and beyond as The Theatre for the People. The organization is also committed to the continued restoration and preservation of this National Historic Landmark that originally opened in 1889. Its 2023-24 season launches with Deeply Rooted Dance Theater November 3, 2023.

For more information on the Auditorium Theatre and the 2023-24 season, please visit AuditoriumTheatre.org.

Photo credits:

Kim Davis and Isaiah Collier, credit: Michelle Reid

Taylor Yocum, credit Michelle Reid

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