

arts  
at Williams

THU | OCT 28 | 7PM | MST

CENTERSERIES PRESENTS

A.I.M

BY KYLE

ABRAHAM

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PHOTO BY PAULA COURT

'62

# **WILLIAMS CENTER**SERIES

PRESENTS

## **A.I.M by Kyle Abraham**

### A Lecture Demonstration

Artistic Director  
Kyle Abraham

Dancers  
Tamisha A. Guy, Dorchel Haqq,  
Claude Johnson, Catherine Kirk,  
Jae Neal, Donovan Reed,  
Gianna Theodore

Rehearsal Director  
Matthew Baker

Production Manager & Lighting Supervisor  
Dan Stearns

General Manager  
Hillary Kooistra

Executive Director  
Sydnie Liggett

The CenterSeries performances are made possible in part by the W. Ford Schumann '50 Endowment for the Arts and the Lipp Family Fund for the Performing Arts.

*The performance runs 75 minutes. There is no intermission.*

**PROGRAM**

***Big Rings***  
(excerpt)

Music..... “Good Ass Intro” by Chance the Rapper;  
with additional composition, arrangement,  
and editing by Zach Berns  
Choreography .....Keerati Jinakunwiphat

Performed by  
Tamisha A. Guy, Claude Johnson, Catherine Kirk, Jae Neal,  
Donovan Reed, Gianna Theodore

**Introduction**

Rehearsal Director Matthew Baker and Company

**Gesture and Improvisation Demonstration**

Catherine Kirk and Company

***The Quiet Dance***  
(excerpt)

Music..... “Some Other Time” composed by  
Leonard Bernstein, arranged by Bill Evans  
Choreography .....Kyle Abraham

Performed by  
Catherine Kirk (soloist), Tamisha A. Guy, Claude Johnson,  
Donovan Reed, Gianna Theodore

**Phrase Building and Variation Demonstration**

Tamisha A. Guy and Company

***Requiem: Fire In The Air of The Earth***  
(excerpt)

Music..... “Requiem in D Minor” by  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; untitled  
commissioned score by Jlin  
Choreography .....Kyle Abraham in collaboration with A.I.M

Performed by  
Dorchel Haqq, Claude Johnson

## ***Our Indigo: If We Were a Love Song***

(excerpt)

Music.....Nina Simone

Choreography .....Kyle Abraham in collaboration with A.I.M

Performed by

Jae Neal, Donovan Reed

## **Phrase Building and Variation Demonstration**

(continued)

Catherine Kirk, Gianna Theodore

## ***Drive***

(excerpt)

Music.....Theo Parrish and Mobb Deep, with

additional sound editing by Sam Crawford

Choreography .....Kyle Abraham in collaboration with A.I.M

Performed by

Company

## **ABOUT THE COMPANY**

Founded in 2006 by choreographer Kyle Abraham, A.I.M by Kyle Abraham is a Black-led contemporary dance company that provides multifaceted performances, educational programming, and community-based workshops. The mission of A.I.M by Kyle Abraham is to create a body of dance-based work that is galvanized by Black culture and history. The work, informed by and made in conjunction with artists across a range of disciplines, entwines a sensual and provocative vocabulary with a strong emphasis on music, text, video, and visual art. While grounded in choreographer Kyle Abraham's artistic vision, A.I.M draws inspiration from a multitude of sources and movement styles.

Since A.I.M's founding, Artistic Director Kyle Abraham has made more than 15 original works for and with the company. In 2018, A.I.M began commissioning new works and performing existing works by outside choreographers to expand its repertoire and offer a breadth of dance work to both the dancers and audiences. The repertory now includes works by Trisha Brown, Andrea Miller, Bebe Miller, Doug Varone, and A.I.M dancer and early-career choreographer Keerati Jinakunwiphat.

A.I.M's audience base is as diverse as A.I.M's movement vocabulary, which ranges from hip-hop to formal ballet technique. As Abraham says, "I'm interested in a really wide range of folks from the brother who owns the corner store to the woman who has never even heard of a corner store. I want those people to interact, and I want them to be sitting next to each other sensing the other person's experience. And then, I want them to stick around for the post-performance discussion and hear the other person's perspective and learn more about each other. That's what is most exciting for me."

## SCHOLAR NOTES

### *Kyle Abraham: Always In Motion*

In the rather cozy custom followed by both practitioners and fans of modern dance, the leading choreographers of the art form are, in conversation, often referred to by their first names (regardless of whether or not one has met the dancemaker in question). Akram; Bebe; Bill; Camille; Doris; José; Mark; Martha; Merce; Paul; Pina; Ruth; Ted; Trisha; Twyla: in this partial list, some names are perhaps more distinctive, some more common, but those in the know, *know*—immediately—who is being referred to. (I'd argue that while of course everyone knows who Alvin was, he's usually invoked by his *last* name.)

And so it is with Kyle. For those new to his work, we are gathered here to celebrate the dancer and choreographer Kyle Abraham, whose company, A.I.M. by Kyle Abraham, is presenting excerpts of works from the group's repertoire tonight. (For the record, as there is more than one Mark, for example, in the modern dance world, so too is there more than one Kyle—hello, Mr. Marshall!)

At only 44 years old, Abraham (now I revert to his surname, the more journalistically-traditional custom) achieved that first-name familiarity relatively early in his career. In addition to years of toil, trial, and sweat—the stocks-in-trade of all performers—Abraham's star became more visible as he began receiving prominent notice and then amassing notable prizes, some which came with hefty sums of money. The trajectory is dizzying to review: in 2009 he was listed as one of Dance Magazine's annual "25 to Watch;" in 2010 he received a "Bessie" award for Outstanding Performance, and a Princess Grace award for choreography; in 2012 he was a United States Artist Ford Fellow, and the annual Jacob's Pillow Dance Award recipient; in 2013 he was named one of that year's MacArthur fellows; in 2016 he received a Doris Duke Artist Award.

The recognition of Abraham's choreographic brilliance has also earned him commissions to create works for several companies, including a few iconic modern dance groups: indeed, the houses of Martha and Paul now boast works by Abraham. One commission in 2018 was particularly noteworthy because it came from one of the *ballet* world's biggest institutions, the New York City Ballet. While it was interesting that NYCB had commissioned a postmodern choreographer such as Abraham, what was more important was that NYCB had sought work from a Black choreographer. As dancer/journalist/consultant Theresa Ruth Howard pointed out in a 2018 *Dance Magazine* article, "in its 70-year history, NYCB has only commissioned four Black choreographers" prior to Abraham's assignment. The piece, *The Runaway*, which featured NYCB principal Taylor Stanley and included music by Jay-Z and Kanye West, was a hit; for his second NYCB commission, Abraham used the medium of film—as many choreographers were forced to do during the height of the covid-driven shutdowns. Shot in black and white, Brian Seibert of *The New York Times* called the film, *When We Fell*, "among the most beautiful dance films of the pandemic."

Thus dancing, and the composing of dances, are clearly Abraham's superpowers, forces he uses, when he's in the position to do so, for the greater good in the dance world: now,

when his work is requested by another company, he stipulates that at least one work of a female or non-binary choreographer must also be shown on that program.

But Abraham's home base is his own company, named – another tradition in the modern dance world – after him. Tonight's lecture-demonstration presented by members of A.I.M. will, as Rehearsal Director Matthew Baker explains, offer a “peek into the repertory and some of the processes used in creating material.” Four excerpts of works by Abraham and one by company member Keerati Jinakunwiphat will be shown, with the company speaking about and demonstrating the artistic process between the sections.

Abraham's movement palette incorporates many genres, chiefly modern dance, hip-hop, breaking, and ballet. They are organically woven together into what Abraham has called a “postmodern gumbo.” This concoction is further seasoned by certain striking qualities which infuse Abraham's own dancing—he is, by the way, simply put, a gorgeous dancer—and are now hallmarks in his choreography. The physicality is both luxurious and intimate, at once loose and intense, what I've described as hyper-tactile movement performed with a hushed precision, enigmatic, as if protecting deep secrets; often, too, Abraham's works demand an emotional largesse from his dancers.

“Kyle's work straddles the body, mind, and spirit,” Baker noted in an e-mail, going on to note that performing it “allows the artist to...[incorporate] a more full sense of self to an audience.” Longtime company member Catherine Kirk told me that Abraham's elegiac 2011 *The Quiet Dance* is a work she can “relate to narratively, very deeply,” and that performing in and sharing it with an audience can be “a really cathartic experience.”

A.I.M.'s company statement affirms its mission to “create a body of dance-based work that is galvanized by Black culture and history.” Some of that work tackles, poignantly, some of the painful experiences of Black lives, such as police brutality and mass incarceration, but there are also pieces that celebrate joyous aspects of Black life, such as Abraham's irresistible 2017 *Drive*. Kirk relishes dancing in this club beat-pulsing work which for her is like a “celebration” that shows “Black people living and thriving...and enjoying each other” as well as both the “individuality” and the “community” of the performers.

And then there are the dances Abraham has made that speak to the universal experiences of simply being human, some heartbreaking, some luminous, some funny. In a recent virtual conversation with Bebe Miller, Abraham mused about whether, as Black choreographers, they are given a “sense of freedom to say, I just want to make a dance, and this dance is going to be about”—here Abraham paused, and looked around, as if seeking anything arbitrary for a potential topic—“Cheetos!”—without it being parsed/questioned: “Black people must eat a lot of Cheetos!” Can he, when he chooses to, make work and let it be just “about the work?”

—Janine Parker is an Artist-in-Residence in Dance.

## ABOUT KYLE ABRAHAM

Rebecca Bengal of *Vogue* wrote, “What Abraham brings ... is an avant-garde aesthetic, an original and politically minded downtown sensibility that doesn’t distinguish between genres but freely draws on a vocabulary that is as much Merce and Martha as it is Eadweard Muybridge and Michael Jackson.”

In addition to performing and developing new works for his company A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, Abraham has been commissioned by a variety of dance companies. Most recently, Abraham received two international commissions from the Royal Ballet. Abraham’s work, *Optional Family*, a *divertissement* premiered in May 2021 as part of their 21st Century Choreographers program. He was also commissioned to be the first Black choreographer to create a one-act ballet for the Royal Ballet, set to premiere in spring 2022.

Additionally, Abraham premiered *When We Fell* in 2021, his third creation for New York City Ballet, which *The New York Times* reviewed as “among the most beautiful dance films of the pandemic.” Previously, Abraham collaborated with NYCB Principal Dancer Taylor Stanley on *Ces noms que nous portons*, a Lincoln Center and NYCB commissioned solo; choreographed *Unto The End, We Meet*, commissioned by the National Ballet of Cuba, and choreographed the music video for Sufjan Stevens’ *Sugar*. He premiered *to be seen*, a new solo for American Ballet Theatre Principal Dancer Calvin Royal III, for the 2020 virtual Fall For Dance Festival. *The New York Times* raved on “how skilled he has become at mingling the ballet vernacular with other forms, from hip-hop to West African movement” and his unique talent for “finding the person within the dancer and the bodies within a body.”

In fall 2019, he choreographed *Ash*, a solo work for ABT Principal Dancer Misty Copeland; *Only The Lonely*, a newly commissioned work for Paul Taylor American Modern Dance; and *The Bystander*, a new commission for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago to rave reviews. Abraham premiered the Bessie-nominated *The Runaway* for NYCB’s 2018 Fall Fashion Gala, which was recognized as one of the “Best Dance of 2018” by *The New York Times*. In 2016, Abraham premiered *Untitled America*, a 3-part commissioned work for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; toured *The Serpent and The Smoke*, a pas de deux for himself and acclaimed Bessie Award-winning and former New York City Ballet Principal Dancer Wendy Whelan as part of *Restless Creature*; and choreographed for the feature-length film, *The Book of Henry*, for acclaimed director Colin Trevorrow.

In 2012, Abraham served as a choreographic contributor for Beyonce’s 2013 British *Vogue* cover shoot, named the 2012 Jacob’s Pillow Dance Award recipient, 2012 USA Ford Fellow, and the New York Live Arts Resident Commissioned Artist for 2012–2014. Later that year, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater premiered Abraham’s *Another Night* at New York City Center.

Abraham has also received a prestigious Bessie Award for Outstanding Performance in Dance for his work in *The Radio Show*, and a Princess Grace Award for Choreography in 2010. The previous year, he was selected as one of *Dance Magazine*’s “25 To Watch” for 2009, and received a Jerome Travel and Study Grant in 2008.



His choreography has been presented throughout the United States and abroad; at Fall for Dance Festival at New York City Center, Lincoln Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Joyce Theater, The Los Angeles Music Center, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Théâtre de la Ville, Sadler's Wells, Maison de la Danse, Tanz Im August, On The Boards, Danspace Project, Dance Theater Workshop, Bates Dance Festival, Harlem Stage, Montreal, Ottawa, Italy, Germany, Sweden, France, Jordan, Ecuador, Dublin's Project Arts Center, The Okinawa Prefectural Museum & Art Museum located in Okinawa Japan, The Andy Warhol Museum, The Byham and The Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA.

In 2011, *OUT Magazine* labeled Abraham as the "best and brightest creative talent to emerge in New York City in the age of Obama".

## **COMPANY CREDITS**

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For more information, to get involved, or purchase your A.I.M merchandise, please visit <http://aimbykyleabraham.org>. Follow A.I.M on Instagram @aimbykyleabraham.



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