

UMassAmherst | Fine Arts Center

*Celebrating Pearl Primus*  
Thursday, October 14, 7 p.m. ET  
Bowker Auditorium



Presented by:

UMass Fine Arts Center, UMass Amherst Special Collections, and UMass Dance, in partnership with  
Five College Dance

## Land acknowledgement

In a year-long consultative and deeply collaborative process with respected advisors from local Tribal Nations, the UMass Native Advisory Council co-developed this campus Land Acknowledgement. This Acknowledgement affirms our campus connection and relationship to the land the campus is built upon and our continued connection to the Nations who were the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land. The University of Massachusetts Amherst acknowledges that it was founded and built on the unceded homelands of the Pocumtuc Nation on the land of the Norrwutuck community.

We begin with gratitude for nearby waters and lands, including the Kwinitekw -- the southern portion of what's now called the Connecticut River. We recognize these lands and waters as important Relations with which we are all interconnected and depend on to sustain life and wellbeing.

The Norrwutuck community was one of many Pocumtuc Indian towns, including the Tribal seat at Pocumtuc (in present day Deerfield), Agawam (Springfield), and Woronoco (Westfield) to name just a few. The Pocumtuc, who had connections with these lands for millennia, are part of a vast expanse of Algonquian relations. Over 400 years of colonization, Pocumtuc Peoples were displaced. Many joined their Algonquian relatives to the east, south, west and north— extant communities of Wampanoag, including Aquinnah, Herring Pond, and Mashpee, Massachusetts; the Nipmuc with a reservation at Grafton/Hassanamisco, Massachusetts; the Narragansett in Kingstown, Rhode Island; Schaghticoke, Mohegan and Pequot Peoples in Connecticut; the Abenaki and other Nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy extending northward into Canada; and the Stockbridge Munsee Mohican of New York and Massachusetts, who were removed to Wisconsin in the 19th century. Over hundreds of years of removal, members of Southern New England Tribes would make the journey home to tend important places and renew their connections to their ancestral lands. Such care and connection to land and waters continues to the present day.

Today, Indigenous Nations in southern New England continue to employ diverse strategies to resist ongoing colonization, genocide, and erasure begun by the English, French, Dutch, Portuguese and other European Nations, and that continued when Tribal homelands became part of the United States. Native Americans from Tribal Nations across the U.S. and Indigenous peoples from around the world also travel into these Pocumtuc homelands to live and work. This land has always been and always will be, Native Land.

We also acknowledge that the University of Massachusetts Amherst is a Land Grant University. As part of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, Tribal lands from 84 Native Nations west of the Mississippi were sold to provide the resources to found and build this university.

This Land Acknowledgement is the first step in the university's commitment to practice intellectual humility whilst working with Tribal Nations toward a better shared future on Turtle Island. We aim to foster understanding, deep respect, and honor for sovereign Tribal Nations; to develop relationships of reciprocity; and to be inclusive of Native perspectives and thriving Native Nations far into the future. Members of Massachusetts-based Tribal Nations who are kin to the historic Pocumtuc contributed their insights in composing this acknowledgement -- namely Tribal representatives from Mashpee, Aquinnah, and Stockbridge Munsee. As an active first step toward decolonization, we encourage you to learn more about the Indigenous peoples on whose homelands UMass Amherst now resides on and the Indigenous homelands on which you live and work.

*My career has been a quest...a search for roots. The journey has taken me deep into the cultures of many people in many countries of the world.*

*Dance has been my vehicle. Dance has been my language, my strength. In the dance I have confided my most secret thoughts and shared the inner music of all mankind. I have danced across mountains and deserts, ancient rivers and oceans and slipped through the boundaries of time and space.*

*Dance has been my freedom and my world. It has enabled me to go around, scale, bore through, batter down or ignore visible and invisible social and economic walls.*

*Dance is my medicine. It is the scream which eases for awhile the terrible frustration common to all human beings who because of race, creed or color, are "invisible." Dance is the fist with which I fight the sickening ignorance of prejudice. It is the veiled contempt I feel for those who patronize with false smiles, handouts, empty promises, insincere compliments. Instead of growing twisted like a gnarled tree inside myself, I am able to dance out my anger and my tears.*

*Dance has been my teacher, ever patiently revealing to me the dignity, beauty and strength in the cultural heritage of my people as a vital part of the great heritage of all mankind.*

*I dance not to entertain but to help people better understand each other. Because through dance I have experienced the wordless joy of freedom. I seek it more fully now for my people and for all people everywhere.*

--Pearl Primus 1968

### **About the program**

Tonight's program features a screening of the documentary, *Pearl Primus, "Omowale," Child Returned Home*, by Stan Sherer, followed by a panel conversation with Sherer, dance artists Michael Manswell and Kim Bears, dance scholar M'bewe Escobar, and scholars Peggy Schwartz, and Murray Schwartz. Former UMass dance professor Paul Dennis moderates the conversation.

**Pearl Primus** (born November 29, 1919, Port of Spain, Trinidad—died October 29, 1994, New Rochelle, New York, U.S.) was an American dancer, choreographer, anthropologist, and teacher whose performance work drew on the African American experience and on her research in Africa and the Caribbean. Primus's family moved to New York City when she was two years of age. Intending to become a physician, Primus received a degree in biology and premedical sciences from Hunter College (1940) in New York City. While taking health education courses at New York University, Primus sought employment at a laboratory but was deterred by racial discrimination. She was later hired in the dance unit of the National Youth Administration and soon received a scholarship from the New Dance Group, where she studied modern dance and with which she made her debut in 1943. The following year she gave a solo recital, which led to several Broadway engagements.

Primus's first major choreographic work, "African Ceremonial" (1944), attested to her early studies of her black heritage. In 1948 she received a Rosenwald Foundation scholarship to travel to Africa to study dance, which would become the first of many research trips. Her dances, notably "The Wedding" (1961) for Alvin

Ailey's company, reflect her travels to such countries as Senegal, Nigeria, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. Though most of her other dances are based on early West Indian forms, she choreographed several pieces about American life, including "Strange Fruit" (1945), a reference to the practice of lynching; "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1944), based on a poem by Langston Hughes; and "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore" (1979), about the racially motivated bombing of churches in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1960s. Her performances could also be playful, as in "Haitian Play Dance" (1947).

Primus formed her own company in 1944. In addition to choreography, she was the director of the Performing Arts Centre in Liberia (1959–61) and earned a master's in education (1959) and a doctorate in anthropology (1978) from New York University. She held several academic appointments in her late career, notably serving as director of the Cora P. Maloney College at the State University of New York at Buffalo (1984-86) professor of ethnic studies at the University of Massachusetts [Amherst](#) (1984–90). Primus received numerous awards and honors, namely the National Medal of Arts (1991).

(britannica.com)

#### **About the panelists**

##### **Stan Sherer**

Stan Sherer has published five books of photographs, including *Long Life to Your Children! A portrait of High Albania and Founding Farms*. He was a Fulbright Scholar to Albania, a recipient of two Mass Foundation grants, and numerous other grants and awards. Sherer has exhibited his photographs across the United States and in Europe. Exhibits/USA traveled his exhibition *On the Land: Three Centuries of American Farmlife* throughout the United States for ten years. He has worked as a photojournalist and documentary photographer in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. His documentary films *The Brush Shop* and *The Gilded Cage: Northampton's Last Water-Powered Elevator* have been featured in the Northampton Film Festival and shown at several other venues. *Pearl Primus "Omwale" Child Returned Home* premiered at the 92nd Street Y in March 2020. Stan Sherer holds a BA from the City University of New York and an [MFA](#) ~~master of fine arts~~ from the University of [Massachusetts Amherst](#).

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##### **Peggy Schwartz**

Peggy Schwartz's career spans more than forty years. She developed a rhythm and movement program for the pilot program for Head Start in Berkeley, California (1960s). She was the founding Chairperson of the Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts Dance Department (1970s). She joined the Five College Dance Department (FCDD) first at Hampshire College (1983) and then the University of Massachusetts Amherst (1991). She served as chair of the FCDD and director of the dance program at UMass Amherst and was the founder and artistic director of the Sankofa Dance Project: Celebrating African Roots in American Dance. Peggy has published, lectured, conducted workshops and consulted in dance education, curriculum design, national standards in arts education, and the work of Pearl Primus. A founding member and board member of NDEO and Founding Associate Editor of the JODE, she served as the national representative to daCi and was a guest artist at the Rubin Academy of Music and Dance in Israel, the Claremont Colleges and New York State Summer School of the Arts.

##### **Murray Schwartz**

For over forty years, Murray Schwartz has taught Shakespeare, psychoanalysis and Holocaust literature. His writing spans a wide range of interdisciplinary interests and includes essays on

Shakespeare's last plays, the work of Erik Erikson, applied psychoanalysis, modern poetry and trauma studies. He has also co-edited several anthologies, including *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays* (1980), *Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Aging* (1985). He is president of the PsyArt Foundation and edits the online journal, *PsyArt* ([www.psyartjournal.com](http://www.psyartjournal.com)). Murray was dean of the colleges at SUNY/Buffalo (1979-83), dean of Humanities and Fine Arts at UMass Amherst (1983-91), provost of the Claremont Graduate University (1991-97) and academic vice president at Emerson College (1997-99). He is a scholar member of the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, and has participated in studies of the effects of the September 11, 2001 attacks, and the writing of psychoanalytic history. Murray retired from Emerson College in 2015.

#### **Kim Bears**

Kim joined PHILADANCO in 1981. Ms. Bears-Bailey is an associate professor of dance at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. A 1992 Bessie Award recipient, (The New York Dance and Performance Award), Kim represented PHILADANCO at the 1988 American Dance Festival as a soloist where she performed two works by Dr. Pearl Primus. Kim is one of few artists granted permission to remount the works of many world-renowned choreographers including Talley Beatty, Pearl Primus, Gene Hill Sagan and Louis Johnson. Ms. Bears-Bailey produced, reconstructed and directed two evening length showcases; *Celebrating the Legacy of African-American Dance Pioneer Pearl Primus* and *Celebrating Master Choreographer Louis Johnson*, both with performances and panel discussions as part of An American Masterpieces project at the University of the Arts.

#### **Paul Dennis**

Paul Anthony Dennis, former associate professor of dance at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is the chair of the Dance Department at Hunter College. A former member of the Jose Limon Dance Company, Dennis is a respected scholar researching the relationship between dance and movement to neurodegenerative diseases. Dennis earned his BFA at the Juilliard School, and an MFA at Purchase College, Conservatory of Dance.

#### **Ninoska M'bewe Escobar**

Ninoska M'bewe Escobar is an artist-scholar and postdoctoral fellow in dance at the University of New Mexico. Her work investigates how bodies carry history and memory and how cultural heritage and social experiences shape identities and artistic practices. Her research argues for Pearl Primus's value to the project of Black dance in the twenty-first century in the contexts of her politics, feminism and relevance to the contemporary moment of artist-led actions for anti-racist justice and democracy in the United States. She is a former lead national facilitator of the humanities curriculum *Revelations: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, which utilizes Alvin Ailey's signature ballet *Revelations* to engage educators and students in examining societal issues impacting their lives and communities.

#### **Michael Manswell**

Michael Manswell is an award-winning dancer, singer, choreographer, and teaching artist. Michael began his creative journey as a storyteller at arts festivals and later studied music with Lindy-Anne Bodden-Ritch and Tom Cultice at Brooklyn College. As a singer, he has toured Europe, the UK, and the Caribbean and has performed as a soloist in productions of opera and oratorio including *Dido and Aeneas*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Beethoven's 9th Symphony*, *Messiah*, *Missa Criolla*, and *Missa Luba*. He studied dance at the Trinidad Dance Theater (TDT) with Eugene Joseph where he trained in modern, ballet, jazz, ballroom, and folkloric styles. Michael worked with Geoffrey Holder on *Douglas II* and *La Valse des Bakas* for TDT and toured with the company in North America and the Caribbean.

**Upcoming Events:**

**SUGAR SKULL! A Día de los Muertos Adventure!**  
**Sunday, October 17, 2021, 3 p.m. ET Virtual Ticketed Event**



**Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company: Afterwardsness**  
**Sunday October 24, 2021, 7:30 p.m. ET SOLD OUT!**  
**Monday October 25, 2021 7:30 p.m ET SOLD OUT!**  
**Totman Auditorium**



For more information about these and all UMass Fine Arts Center Events and to get your ticketing link please visit:

[fineartscenter.com](http://fineartscenter.com)

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