

COMMUNITY VOICES FEBRUARY 1, 2017 4:41 PM

## Dance performance at MDC is a highlight of Black History Month



< 1 of 4 >



BY DOROTHY JENKINS FIELDS  
*Special to The Miami Herald*

So, we are kicking off the 31st year of Black History Month.

In 1975, President Gerald Ford issued a statement on Black History Week, urging all Americans to recognize the important contributions made to our nation's life and culture by black citizens.

In 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, which noted that "February 1, 1986 would mark the beginning of the sixtieth annual public and private salute to Black History."

Since 1986, every American president has issued an African American (Black) History Month proclamation.

National, state, and local programs have been instrumental in showcasing the black experience from ancient times to the present. Universities and colleges, grades K-12 and religious, civic, social and community groups have participated through lectures, conferences and the visual and performing arts. Music and dance performances are especially popular.

In 1926, historian and writer Carter G. Woodson, known as the "Father of Black History Month," established the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), "to promote, research, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history, and culture to the global community."

Each year, ASALH selects the national theme; this year's theme is "The Crisis in Black Education."

The South Florida branch was chartered Oct. 6, 2016. Organized at the Old Dillard Museum in Fort Lauderdale, its mission is to bridge the university and community.

The state is presenting a variety of activities during "2017 Black History Month, A Recognition of the Role of African Americans in Shaping Florida History."

Another highlight will be a dance performance by Miami Dade College's New World School of the Arts students, focusing on African-American life, history and culture. Peter London, a professor at Miami Dade College and founder of the Peter London Dance Company, choreographed the students' performance, which will take place at 11 a.m. Friday

Later in the month, the company will perform at various sites throughout South Florida, including St. John’s on the Lake in Miami Beach, the Coral Gables Museum and the annual Chocolate Nutcracker produced by Ashanti Cultural Arts in Broward County.

The company also developed a partnership with Broward County Schools, which includes a season at the Miramar Cultural Center/Arts Park. This summer, London will teach a master class there.

The PLGDC season will end with the annual Victoria London Choreographers Showcase at the Adrienne Arsht Center in mid-December. This showcase celebrates the cultural influence of the African drum from West Africa to the New World, honoring Victoria London, the late Honorary Consul of Romania, and a major PLGDC benefactor.

A native of Trinidad & Tobago, Peter London began training at age 6 in West African religious and secular dance and music. Later, he studied at the Juilliard School in New York and toured with the Jose Limón and Martha Graham dance companies. He also was a faculty member and choreographer at the Alvin Ailey School in New York.

His former students, including Robert Battle, artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, credit London with helping them develop their careers. “As a former student of Peter London, I can say, without doubt, that he is a great teacher, coach and mentor. He is truly a great asset and treasure to the world of dance,” Battle said.

London is passionate about providing creative opportunities and professional work for South Florida dance artists.

“I believe Miami is blossoming into one of the finest millennial cities in which to work and play,” he said.

*Dorothy Jenkins Fields, Ph.D., is a historian and founder of the Black Archives, History and Research Foundation of South Florida Inc. Send feedback to [djf@bellsouth.net](mailto:djf@bellsouth.net).*

---

## IF YOU GO

### Peter London’s Black History Month Dance Celebration

**What:** Students from Miami Dade College’s New World School of the Arts will perform a program focusing on African-American life, history and culture. Peter London is the choreographer.

**When:** 11 a.m., Friday, Feb. 10

**Where:** Wolfson Auditorium, Miami Dade College, Room 1261, 300 NE Second Ave., Miami.

**Cost:** Free



## MORE COMMUNITY VOICES

---

## SUGGESTED FOR YOU

