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Contact: Mallory McFarland | Morahan Arts and Media
mallory@morahanartsandmedia.com | (646) 241-0899

COLLAGE DANCE COLLECTIVE ANNOUNCES DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR APPOINTMENT

Anne-Carolyn Bird Joins Collage Dance as New Development Director



collagedance.org

September 28, 2023 (Memphis, TN) — [Collage Dance](http://collagedance.org) – recently named one of the 50 largest ballet companies in the nation by Dance Data Project, is pleased to announce the appointment of **Anne-Carolyn Bird** as its new **Development Director**. In this role, Bird will support Collage in its on-going mission to evolve the landscape of dance in the American South, cultivate diverse dance students for its Conservatory, and present engaging, cutting-edge programming to bring the community together through the power of ballet.

Anne-Carolyn Bird comes to Collage most recently from Ballet Memphis. Before she moved to Memphis, she lived in Washington, DC, where she worked for Washington National Opera (WNO) at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts and stewarded the WNO Board of Trustees. She founded initiatives at WNO to build staff connection and morale, and to codify and implement policies on safety and anti-harassment. Bird was a

founding member of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and fostered the formation of a new DEI Committee on the WNO Board of Trustees.

Her background in dance includes studying ballet and dancing with Chicago City Ballet and Ballet West, and her lifelong interest in the performing arts eventually led her to a fulfilling career as an opera singer. She performed with many top opera companies and music festivals around the world, including Washington National Opera, Nashville Opera, Tanglewood Music Festival, the Spoleto Festival, Santa Fe Opera, Cleveland Orchestra's Blossom Festival, and spent ten seasons on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera. Bird holds degrees from the University of Georgia and New England Conservatory.

Derwin Sisnett, Chair of the Board of Directors, shares, "I am thrilled to have Anne-Carolyn Bird join Collage Dance as its new Development Director. She brings an immense treasure trove of knowledge and experience working in the arts, providing Collage a unique perspective as a cross-disciplinary leader who has a strong vision of how an organization should evolve and what it needs for that growth in order to best represent and welcome the communities we aim to inspire and empower. I deeply look forward to working with Anne-Carolyn as we enter Collage Dance's fourteenth season, and continue to expand Collage's reach throughout the country with our professional company and dance education programs."

Anne-Carolyn Bird shares, "Collage Dance represents everything an arts organization should be: visionary, accessible, forward-looking, and exceptional. I am honored to support Marcellus, Kevin, and the entire Collage family as they share the joy of dance with the people of Memphis and move forward in their mission to change the dance landscape through meaningful and impactful programming."

Collage Dance recently hosted the **2023 Memphis Dance Festival** for its third year in a row on National Dance Day, Saturday, September 16, 2023 at the Collage Dance Center. The free, family-focused community event – recognized as the preeminent dance festival in the region – welcomed 2,750 attendees of all ages (in comparison, 2,500 individuals attended the event in 2022) who came to experience and meet some of the best dance makers and musicians in the nation, including New York City Ballet, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, SOLE Defined, Nashville Ballet, Ballet Memphis, Rebirth Brass Band, Lil Buck, and more.

Coming up on [Sunday, October 29, 2023 at 2:00pm](#), Collage Dance presents its **13th Annual Gala Fundraiser**, a fall brunch benefiting the Collage Dance Conservatory. With a VIP hour at **1:00pm**, this grand event at the **FedEx Event Center at Shelby Farms** features performances by Collage Dance Collective and students from the Collage Dance Conservatory, in addition to appearances by acclaimed jazz artist and Memphis-native **Wendy Moten**, soul singer **Talibah Safiya**, **Carl Caspersen Jazz Trio**, and **Ensemble X**, plus delicious cuisine by Chef Melissa Swearing.

Collage Dance's fourteenth season is made possible through generous support from the Mellon Foundation, The Hyde Family Foundation, SouthArts, ArtsMemphis, Tennessee Arts Commission, Shubert Foundation, and the International Association of Blacks in Dance.

About Anne-Carolyn Bird

Anne-Carolyn Bird brings more than 30 years of arts experience to her new role of Development Director of Collage Dance. During her career as an opera singer, she performed with many of the top opera companies and music festivals in the country, including Washington National Opera (WNO), Nashville Opera, Tanglewood Music Festival, Spoleto Festival US, Santa Fe Opera, Cleveland Orchestra's Blossom Festival, and ten seasons on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera. International performances included *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Opera Hong Kong and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra international tour of Osvaldo Golijov's *Pasion segun San Marcos*. Her most frequently performed role was Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, which she created in eight different productions at companies across the United States.

Upon retiring from performance, Ms. Bird began learning the "other side of the curtain" with jobs in the

administration of Virginia Opera and WNO at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, DC. At the Kennedy Center, Ms. Bird began as Executive Assistant to WNO General Director Timothy O’Leary and eventually took on responsibility of the stewardship of the WNO Board of Trustees. A strong proponent of fostering positive workplace culture, Ms. Bird founded initiatives at WNO to build staff connection and morale and to codify and implement policies on safety and anti-harassment. She was a founding member of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and fostered the formation of a new DEI Committee on the WNO Board of Trustees.

As a child, Ms. Bird studied ballet for 8 years and danced in the children’s corps of Chicago City Ballet and Ballet West. As a singer, her life in the arts came full circle when she performed as the Gypsy Singer in Pacific Northwest Ballet’s production of *Romeo et Juliette* in 2003.

Ms. Bird is featured on the Grammy-winning recording of Osvaldo Golijov’s *Ainadamar*, as well as the recordings of John Musto’s *Volpone* (nominated for a Grammy Award in 2010) and *Inspector*.

A graduate of the opera training programs at Tanglewood Music Center, Santa Fe Opera, and Wolf Trap Opera Company, Ms. Bird holds degrees from the University of Georgia and New England Conservatory. She lives outside Memphis, TN, with her husband, University of Memphis professor and operatic bass-baritone Matthew Burns, and their two children.

About Collage Dance

Collage Dance, recently named a “Southern Cultural Treasure” by South Arts and the Ford Foundation, and listed among the 50 largest ballet companies in the nation by Dance Data Project, is one of the largest Black-led performing arts organizations in the South and one of just a few professional ballet companies in the world with a roster of BIPOC dancers.

Working to inspire the growth and diversity of ballet, Collage Dance Collective showcases a repertoire of relevant choreography and world-class dancers representative of the communities we serve. The professional company has presented thirteen full-length seasons in Memphis, plus national and international touring presenting a diverse range of classical and contemporary choreography from George Balanchine, Nacho Duato, Ulysses Dove, Joshua Manculich, Amy Hall Garner, Kevin Iega Jeff and more.

The work of Collage Dance Collective has been featured in media outlets including *Huffington Post*, *Allure*, *Yahoo!*, *The Commercial Appeal*, *Afropunk*, *Dance Magazine* and *Pointe Magazine*.

Its institutional arm, the Collage Dance Conservatory, trains more kids of color in a classical art form than any other non-profit in the region. More than 1,000 students each week study dance through Collage’s in-school dance education programs and on-site at its new 22,500 square foot state-of-the-art facility, Collage Dance Center, opened in December 2020. The Conservatory’s unified curriculum coupled with a rigorous culture of excellence, hard work, and high standards provides students with a first-rate experience. Students are challenged, nurtured and prepared for the rigors of a professional career on or off the stage.

Collage Dance also runs the Collage Dance Continuum, which seeks to dramatically increase access to dance and movement classes for Memphians, regardless of age, ability, disability, or body type. The Continuum is a collection of community engagement initiatives, collaborative partnerships, adult CLASSES for beginner and intermediate adult dancers, and COURSES for adults with no previous dance training. The Continuum offers affordable classes in a non-competitive, affirming environment with master teachers at the top of their craft.

Learn more at www.collagedance.org.

Image at top of release courtesy Anne-Carolyn Bird