

# Did You Know There's A Festival Dedicated Entirely To Black Dance? Here's What You Missed

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Scott Robbins, Geek With A Lens

The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference and Festival of Blacks in Dance was presented by The International Association of Blacks in Dance (IABD) in partnership with the Collage Dance Collective. This four-day event was held in Memphis, TN from January 24-28, and attendees convened for this year's theme: *Can't Turn You Loose: A Love Letter to Black Dance*.



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Who are the organizations behind this convening? IABD is dedicated to preserving and promoting “dance by people of African ancestry or origin,” and strives to ensure that this art form is “revered, respected, and preserved in the consciousness and cultural institutions of all people.”

As “one of the largest Black-led performing arts organizations in the South”, Collage Dance is one of the small few professional ballet companies in the world that maintain a roster of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) dancers.



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Black people and dancing have a long and rich connection. According to the African American Registry, African dance traditions were brought over to the Americas as early as the 1500s with the slave trade. “In the west, these dance styles of hundreds of Black ethnic groups merged with white dances, forming the extension of the African aesthetic in the Americas. Dance has always been an integral part of daily life in Africa. In the Americas, it helped enslaved Africans connect with their homeland keeping their cultural traditions alive.”

Dance was even a form of resistance. Many slave owners attempted to prohibit their slaves from dancing. But of course, we figured out a creative workaround—“since lifting the feet was considered dancing, many dances included foot shuffling and hip and torso movement.”



Scott Robbins, *Geek With A Lens*

In her book on “the rise of social dance formations in African-American culture,” sociology professor Katrina Hazzard-Donald wrote, “like all social institutions, Black dance arenas reflect the history, sociocultural tenor, and power relations.”

Per the website, this year’s IABD Annual International Conference and Festival “continu[ed] its legacy as the broadest international gathering of Black Dance professionals, agents, artistic directors, artists, choreographers, company managers, executive directors, historians, presenters, scholars, [and] teachers.”



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As Collage Dance Founding Executive Director Marcellus Harper told ESSENCE, “Nothing pairs better with music than dance, so it’s only fitting that the birthplace of some of America’s most iconic music would be selected as the host of one of the most important international gatherings of dance.”



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“Co-hosting the 34th annual IABD Conference and Festival amplifies Memphis’ position as a cultural destination and a center for dance,” Harper added. “We’re honored to be gathered this [past] week with over 1,000 Black dancemakers who are collectively working to unleash the power of dance to positively uplift, inspire, and transform lives.”

TOPICS: black dance Memphis