



NEWS

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Penn Live Arts Receives Grant from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage to Support Three-Year Residency with Noted Choreographer Rennie Harris and his Company, Rennie Harris Puremovement

(Philadelphia – September 14, 2023) — Penn Live Arts (PLA) has received a \$360,500 grant from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage (the Center) in support of a three-year residency with Rennie Harris and his company, Rennie Harris Puremovement (RHPM). The grant includes both project funding and an additional 20% in unrestricted, general operating support. Beginning in September 2023, the residency will provide the hip-hop choreographer with a platform to explore his artistic vision and to generate new work commissioned by Penn Live Arts.

Following successful collaborations with Harris and RHPM in 2022 (*LIFTED*) and 2023 (*Rome & Jewels*), the three-year residency will explore pressing social issues such as gun violence, a thematic focus in PLA's 2023-24 season, allowing Harris to respond through his own creative process and engage multiple communities by using hip-hop as a language of reflection, resistance and renewal.

"We're thrilled to have the opportunity to deepen the artistic work we've already begun with Rennie Harris," says Penn Live Arts Executive and Artistic Director Christopher Gruits. "This new, extended relationship allows us to support the vision of a globally significant Philadelphia artist and partner in the creation of new work, while elevating important and relevant issues for our community. We are deeply grateful to the Center for making this residency possible."

The first year of the Rennie Harris residency will mine the choreographer's catalogue with the presentation of the acclaimed *Students of the Asphalt Jungle*, *March of the Antman* and *P-Funk* alongside current repertoire *A Day in the Life* and *The Word* to explore gun violence and gangs (March 22–23, 2024). The second and third years will explore what new work looks like for Harris, expanding his artistry in a new direction and collaborating with a lighting design artist to create and debut Harris' own visual artwork. RHPM company members will also participate in programs at PLA's partner schools in West and North Philadelphia, inviting young people to observe their own communities and respond creatively using a range of artistic media including writing, visual art and hip-hop movement vocabulary.

"I'm so pleased to have this opportunity to spend three years working with the Penn Live Arts team," says Rennie Harris. "Creating at home in Philadelphia grounds and inspires me, and I look forward to this journey that will bring new work to life and have a meaningful impact in my home community."

"We are delighted to welcome Rennie Harris to Penn for this exciting residency," said Penn Provost John L. Jackson, Jr. "Our campus will be energized and educated by his unique art practice, which fuses contemporary dance and music to urgent social issues and a strong commitment to Philadelphia. This generous funding from the Center will enable him – and Penn Live Arts – to engage students and audiences across the city, while thoughtfully developing those programs over a span of three years."

About Rennie Harris and RHPM

Dr. Lorenzo (Rennie) Harris is considered the pioneer of “street dance” and is described as the most respected hip-hop choreographer in America. Born and raised in an African American community in North Philadelphia, Harris has been teaching workshops and classes at universities around the country since the age of 15 and is a powerful spokesperson for the significance of “street” origins in any dance style. In 1992, Harris founded Rennie Harris Puremovement, a street dance theatre company dedicated to preserving and disseminating street dance culture through workshops, classes, lectures, lecture demonstrations, residencies, mentoring programs and public performances. Coining the term street dance theatre and hip-hop concert dance, Harris founded his company based on the belief that hip-hop culture is the most important original expression of a new generation. With its roots in the inner-city African American and Latino communities, hip-hop can be characterized as a contemporary indigenous form, one that expresses universal themes that extend beyond racial, religious and economic boundaries, and one that (because of its pan-racial and transnational popularity) can help bridge these divisions. Harris’ work encompasses the diverse and rich African American traditions of the past, while simultaneously presenting the voice of a new generation through its ever-evolving interpretations of dance. Harris is committed to providing audiences with a sincere view of the essence and spirit of hip-hop rather than the commercially exploited stereotypes portrayed by the media. Visit RHPM.org for more information.

About Penn Live Arts

Penn Live Arts (PLA), headquartered at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, is the leading presenter of innovative and transformative performing arts experiences in Philadelphia. A vital resource for the performing arts at the University of Pennsylvania, PLA is an artistic crossroads joining Penn and the greater Philadelphia region through world-class music, dance, theatre, and film on campus and at venues throughout the city, serving an annual audience of over 80,000. Penn Live Arts emphasizes artistic and intellectual excellence and diversity in its offerings; prioritizes broad inclusiveness in the artists, audiences and groups it serves; and expands arts access by actively engaging a wide range of audiences and inclusive communities from campus, the West Philadelphia neighborhood and the surrounding region.

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