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## **WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS ANNOUNCES 2020 POLA NIRENSKA AWARDS RECIPIENTS**

**Recognizing members of the dance community who have made outstanding contributions to the art form, with special consideration to those based in the D.C. region**

(Washington, D.C.) – **Washington Performing Arts (WPA)**, in association with the Pola Nirenska Awards Committee, announced today the **2020 recipients of the Pola Nirenska Awards**, celebrating trailblazers and leaders of the dance community. This year’s awards are bestowed upon **Anuradha Nehru** for Outstanding Achievements in Dance—including a monetary prize to advance her work in the D.C. area—and upon **Carol Foster** and **Beatrice Davis-Williams** for Lifetime Achievement in Dance.

“We are so proud to link the mission of our organization to the legacy of Pola Nirenska, and to recognize and support the work of dance artists, leaders, and educators who have made their own, indelible contributions to our community and well beyond,” stated Jenny Bilfield, President and CEO of Washington Performing Arts.

Named after the illustrious D.C. modern dance teacher and choreographer, and supported by her late husband, Dr. Jan Karski, the Pola Nirenska Awards honor individuals who have made an impact on the field of dance locally and oftentimes nationally. Each year, award recipients are chosen by a committee of arts professionals and granted by Washington Performing Arts. The awards reflect WPA’s commitment to sustain and nurture performing artists and their art forms.

“I am deeply honored and humbled by the Outstanding Achievements in Dance Award,” Ms. Nehru said. “For an Indian classical dancer in the United States to be recognized in this way is testimony to the legacy of Pola Nirenska and of Washington Performing Arts’ commitment to diversity in the arts.” She is founder and artistic director of the Kalanidhi Dance School, as well as a founding member of the Indian Dance Educators’ Association.

Ms. Foster added, “I was thrilled to hear the news that I am a recipient of the Pola Nirenska Lifetime Achievement Award. Any acknowledgment of what we give and do for our young people over the years is such a heartfelt gesture. I am one of many who have tried to make a difference through the art of dance. Therefore, I accept this Award for myself and on behalf of those unsung as of yet.” She is founder of the D.C. Youth Ensemble and a recently retired educator of 37 years in the D.C. Public Schools System.

Ms. Davis-Williams echoed her peers: “I am honored to be a recipient of the Pola Nirenska Award and would like to thank Washington Performing Arts for this recognition. I am blessed to join the past and future honorees of such a prestigious acknowledgment. I am truly overwhelmed.” She is the founding owner and Executive Director of the Davis Center Dance Studio in Washington, D.C.

## **ABOUT THE 2020 POLA NIRENSKA AWARDS RECIPIENTS**

### **For Outstanding Achievements in Dance: Anuradha Nehru**

**Anuradha Nehru** is the founder and artistic director of the Kalanidhi Dance School and Company. An award-winning Kuchipudi dancer, teacher, and choreographer, Ms. Nehru has taught dance for more than 25 years in the United States and many of her students have become outstanding young classical dancers in their own right and are now dancing professionally. As a choreographer, Ms. Nehru’s quest is to constantly find new ways to create fresh and relevant works that connect with contemporary audiences. She believes in staying true to the depth and beauty of the Indian classical dance style, while pushing its boundaries to explore new avenues of creative expression.

Her ability to transcend artistic genres is best exemplified in her collaboration with Opera LaFayette in three different operatic works. The first in 2013 was *Lalla Roukh*, a 19th century French opera situated in India, which was praised for bringing beauty, grace, and the flavor of India to the production. The second, *Les fêtes de l’Hymen et de l’Amour* in 2014, and the most recent, *The Enchanted Forest* in 2017, were also received with critical acclaim. Her other major productions include *Rasa*, *Transcending Traditions*, the historical ballet *Bhagmati*, *Why We Dance*, *Poetry of Love*, and *Bhoomi*.

Ms. Nehru has been recognized by the Governor of Maryland for her dedicated service to the arts and has been supported by the Maryland State Arts Council. She is a recipient of the Master/Apprentice grant from the Maryland State Arts Council and of a Teacher Recognition Certificate from the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts. In 2016, she received the Montgomery County Executive’s Outstanding Artist Award for Excellence in the Arts and Humanities.

Ms. Nehru is a founding member of the Indian Dance Educators' Association (IDEA), a non-profit umbrella organization of Indian dance professionals established to serve classical dancers and dance lovers. She served as the organization's chairperson for two terms.

#### **For Lifetime Achievement in Dance: Carol Foster**

**Carol Foster**, an accomplished artist in her own right, devoted her life to helping the youths of the D.C. area fulfill their own gifts and thereby gave purpose and promise to an untold number of children. She founded The DC Youth Ensemble in 1980, a dance company comprised of outstanding young performers of all ages. Ms. Foster worked in the D.C. Public Schools System for 37 years and has recently retired. She worked as the Arts Coordinator for the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. In addition, she taught visual arts in D.C. Public Schools System and was on staff as Adjunct Professor of Dance at the University of the District of Columbia. Ms. Foster has worked as a choreographer, performer, writer, director and visual artist. She has been involved with a number of special projects/programs related to the arts and arts education that were funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. She gained national acclaim as a founding board member of the International Association of Blacks in Dance. Ms. Foster is also the recipient of the D.C. Mayor's Arts Award. She has given countless hours in community service and has offered advice and support to many aspiring arts students, instructors, future company directors, and more. Her favorite quote is an old African proverb that states "you must always proceed as though you cannot fail."

#### **For Lifetime Achievement in Dance: Beatrice Davis-Williams**

As founding owner and executive Director of the Davis Center Dance Studio, **Beatrice Davis-Williams** became a longstanding D.C.-area community leader that not only provided students with a strong foundation in the performing arts, but also taught them the importance of caring for others through ongoing community service projects. Her vision, perseverance, and passion for dance education as a mission led to the building of an invaluable institution that has consistently succeeded at giving young people easy access to dance and related arts.

Mrs. Davis-Williams served as a member of the dance faculty at Howard University for more than a decade, as a commissioner on the D.C. Commission for the Arts and Humanities, and on the board of numerous organizations.

Ms. Davis-Williams and the Davis Center students have performed at senior citizen centers, churches, schools, civic associations, the Ward 4 Holiday Party, the Cherry Blossom Festival, and numerous other events and venues.

The Davis Center has long stood out among Washington, D.C.-area dance schools because it not only provides its students with a strong foundation in the performing arts, but it also teaches them the importance of caring for others through ongoing community service projects.

### ABOUT POLA NIRENSKA



**Pola Nirenska** was a matriarch of modern dance in Washington, D.C. She helped elevate the art form as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher at a time when it was scarcely known by the general public. Born in Warsaw, Poland in 1910, Pola Nirenska trained at the Mary Wigman School in Dresden and toured the United States in 1932 with the Mary Wigman Dance Company. Ms. Nirenska moved to Vienna for further study with Rosalia Chladek, and then taught and performed in Italy. With fascism dominating continental Europe, she fled to Britain, where she danced for the troops while enduring the Blitz in London. She lost siblings and dozens of other family members in the Holocaust.

Ms. Nirenska moved to the United States in 1949 and was “discovered” by the pioneering American modern dancer and choreographer Ted Shawn. On the advice of choreographer Doris Humphrey, she moved from New York to Washington, D.C. She met Patrick Hayes, founder of Washington Performing Arts before her retirement in 1969. When she resumed choreographing in 1980, WPA presented her at the Hartke Theater at Catholic University and on May 19, 1988 at the Terrace Theater as part of the City Dance Festival, under the leadership of Doug Wheeler, President Emeritus.

Following her death, the annual Pola Nirenska Awards were established in 1993 by her husband, Dr. Jan Karski. The annual awards are presented by the Pola Nirenska Awards Committee and Washington Performing Arts.

#### **2020 Pola Nirenska Awards Committee Members:**

Rima Faber, Chair

Jenny Bilfield, Stephen Clapp, Jane Rabinovitz, Vincent Thomas

Honorary members: George Jackson, Sali Ann Kriegsman, Carla Perlo, Doug Wheeler

### ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, **Washington Performing Arts has engaged for more than half a century with artists, audiences, students, and civic life.** The city is truly our stage: in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we present a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, international genres, and dance.

Washington Performing Arts nourishes communities throughout the region by partnering with local organizations and other arts institutions, staging concerts and arts activities in the neighborhoods, involving internationally known main-stage performers in community programs, and presenting locally based artists to a wider audience. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing

presence in the lives of both young people and adults through sustained residencies and educational programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with two Mayor's Arts Awards from the D.C. Government. We embark upon our next half-century with the goals of expanding our commitment to excellence and rededicating ourselves to the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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