



**WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS**

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**WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS ANNOUNCES
2025 POLA NIRENSKA DANCE AWARDS RECIPIENTS**

The annual awards recognize members of the D.C. dance community who have made outstanding contributions to the art form

(Washington, D.C.) – **Washington Performing Arts**, in association with the Pola Nirenska Awards Committee, announced today the recipients of the **2025 Pola Nirenska Dance Awards**. Continuing a years-long tradition that celebrates trailblazing members of the dance community, the 2025 honors are being bestowed upon **Orange Grove Dance Company Artistic Directors Colette Krogol and Matt Reeves for Outstanding Achievements in Dance**, and **Karen Bernstein and Andy Torres for Lifetime Achievement in Dance**.

The Pola Nirenska Awards committee includes co-chairs Jane Raleigh and Stephen Clapp, and members Jenny Bilfield, Rima Faber, Vincent Thomas, and Honorary Member Douglas H. Wheeler.

*“The legacy of the Pola Nirenska Dance Awards reflects the talent and depth of the dance community in Washington. We are so grateful for the vision of Dr. Jan Karski, husband of Pola Nirenska in establishing a fund at Washington Performing Arts that would provide not only recognition but also resources for artists to invest in their work,” said Jenny Bilfield President & CEO of Washington Performing Arts. “We appreciate the distinguished committee, helmed by Stephen Clapp and Jane Raleigh, for their thoughtful stewardship of a process that culminated with the selection of **Orange Grove Dance Company Artistic Directors Colette Krogol and Matt Reeves for Outstanding Achievements in Dance**, and **Karen Bernstein and Andy Torres for Lifetime Achievement in Dance**.”*

Named after the illustrious D.C. modern dance teacher and choreographer and supported by her late husband **Dr. Jan Karski**—a Holocaust witness and World War II hero—the Pola Nirenska Dance 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, reflecting the organization’s commitment to sustain and nurture performing artists.

Acclaimed directors, choreographers, filmmakers, and mixed media designers **Colette Krogol** and **Matt Reeves** have created dances together for over 15 years through their founding and directing of **Orange Grove Dance**. Lauded for their versatility and vision as artists, Krogol and Reeves redefine the possibilities of dance as a communicative form of art that can meet audiences well beyond the confines of traditional stage venues.

*“We are deeply honored to receive the Pola Nirenska Dance Award and to be welcomed into its legacy of trailblazers and visionaries,” said **Krogol** and **Reeves**, Founders and Artistic Directors of **Orange Grove Dance**. “The D.C. and greater DMV dance community has not only embraced our work, but has given it a home, one built on generosity, curiosity, and the shared belief that dance can shape the way we see and feel the world. We are profoundly grateful to Washington Performing Arts, the selection committee, and to every artist, collaborator, and audience member who has made this community a place where our artistry can truly live and grow.”*

As a principal dancer in six professional dance companies over the years, **Karen Bernstein** has worked with over 40 choreographers (including Twyla Tharp, Murray Louis, May O’Donnell, Hannah Kahn, Ohad Naharin, Anna Sokolow, Elisa Monte, Matthew Diamond, Senta Driver, Doug Varone, Jan Van Dyke, and Eric Hampton) and has performed both nationally and internationally. As a member of Washington Performing Arts’ teaching artist roster, the Karen and Alvin Dance Duo have performed in school districts throughout the Washington Metropolitan area.

*“I came to WDC 50 years ago to start my dance career. I have worked with many exceptional artists throughout these years as a performer, teacher, and art administrator. I continue to be amazed at how rich and diverse our dance community is,” said **Bernstein**. “Pola Nirenska was an important part of the local dance world. Early in my career, I had the privilege of working with her, as well the pleasure of working with Kathy Brewington and Washington Performing Arts throughout my career. Being added to the impressive caliber of past winners of this Lifetime Achievement Award, is truly an honor.”*

Choreographer, director, and teacher, **Andy Torres**’ work has explored the intersections of movement, storytelling, and community. Known for blending formal rigor with emotional honesty, Torres has created dances that balance athletic precision with a deeply human core.

*“I’m thankful to be honored in the name of Pola Nirenska, as our lives have many parallels,” stated **Torres**. “Like Pola, I wanted to dance more than anything in the world and I wouldn’t let anybody stop me. Many thanks to Washington Performing Arts for this prestigious award.”*

ABOUT THE 2025 POLA NIRENSKA DANCE AWARDS RECIPIENTS

Outstanding Achievements in Dance

ORANGE GROVE DANCE

Orange Grove Dance (OGD) continually redefines creative ingenuity through its interdisciplinary approach to dance and art-making. Known for innovative performances that blend movement, design, film, and technology, the company consistently expands the boundaries of contemporary dance. The imagistic gravity of the work compels audiences beyond the confines of traditional stage venues and reflects the extraordinary influence of dance in everyday life. Under the direction of Artistic Directors **Colette Krogol** and **Matt Reeves**, OGD’s acclaimed canon of works is recognized for its powerful imagery and choreography, which engages audiences in a world that is relevant, mysterious, and absorbing; a world constructed within time elusive performance landscapes in which mythopoetic tropes and reality collide.

OGD enacts its mission (to bring dance, design, and film to all communities) through the artistic vehicle of its presentation, research, and educational programming. Beyond the companies films, performances, classes and workshops—a hallmark of this programming is the OGD Summer Intensive. The Intensive serves as a unique embodiment of the company’s priorities and mission to embolden interdisciplinary artists and designers through an affordable weeklong incubation with the company. The OGD Intensive allows artists to get inside of OGD’s creative processes while continuing the development and exploration of their own artistic voice.

In the past decade, Orange Grove Dances’s versatile and genre spiraling work has been produced and presented internationally in concert stages, museums, film festivals, underground tunnels, city streets, black box theaters, public parks, botanic gardens, and high-end hotels. OGD has been presented by The Edinburgh Futures Institute, The Voxel, The Kennedy Center, Dance Place, Maryland Theater for the Performing Arts, U.S. Botanic Garden, Museum of Zhang Zhidong, City of Alexandria’s Waterfront Park, CulturalDC, Dupont Underground, Joe’s Movement Emporium, and The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

Lifetime Achievement in Dance

Karen Bernstein began her professional dance career in the Washington Metropolitan area over 50 years ago. As a principal dancer in six professional dance companies, she worked with over 40 brilliant choreographers (including Twyla Tharp, Murray Louis, May O’Donnell, Hannah Kahn, Ohad Naharin,

Anna Sokolow, Elisa Monte, Matthew Diamond, Senta Driver, Doug Varone, Jan Van Dyke, and Eric Hampton) and performed both nationally and internationally.

Some highlights of her performing career include the duet company “Karen & Alvin” with Alvin Mayes for 14 years. Dance Place with Carla Perlo and Deborah Riley’s support was an integral part of “Karen & Alvin’s” success. As Associate Director of CityDance Ensemble, she and the ensemble performed in the Mussorgsky Theater, a cultural landmark since 1833 in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

As a Rehearsal Director of Dakshina/Daniel Phoenix Singh Dance Company, under the guidance of Lorry May, she restaged, notated, and rehearsed twelve Anna Sokolow works choreographed between the years 1936-1997. The company toured Germany, Italy, Belgium, India, and Africa with both Daniel Singh and Anna Sokolow’s choreography. Some highlights included performing Anna Sokolow’s work “Kafka” in Germany, “Magritte Magritte” in the Magritte Museum in Belgium, and Daniel Singh’s “Four Seasons” with live music in New York City.

Her education career includes teaching various dance techniques at universities and private studios. She traveled many times to India to teach dance workshops in ballet, modern, jazz, and partnering and support at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts. While in India, she also led professional development workshops in arts integration at local schools. In Russia, she taught workshops in modern dance technique and partnering and support.

Through her teaching carrier she worked hard to improve the arts in public and private schools. Together with the Washington Performing Arts Society, DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative, Maryland Department of Education, Young Audiences of MD, Arts Education of MD Schools Alliance, and Maryland Arts Council, she worked with professional dance artists and classroom teachers to increase student achievement by improving teaching methods in arts integration.

Andy Torres is a choreographer, director, and teacher whose work explores the intersections of movement, storytelling, and community. Known for blending formal rigor with emotional honesty, Torres creates dances that balance athletic precision with a deeply human core. His choreographic voice draws from contemporary dance, ballet, and improvisation, weaving together elements of theater, music, and visual art to create works that resonate on stage and in unconventional spaces.

Over the course of his career, Torres has choreographed for Spectrum Theater, Theatreworks USA, Harlem Children’s Theater as well as Thelma Hill Performing Arts Center, BalletMet, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, Symphony Space, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, earning recognition for his innovative approach to narrative and form.

As a director, Torres has guided multidisciplinary productions that expand the possibilities of dance in dialogue with film, spoken word, and live music. His directorial work demonstrates a commitment to expanding access to the arts, engaging audiences of all backgrounds, and fostering dialogue around contemporary issues.

In addition to his creative practice, Torres is a dedicated teacher who has taught at the National Academy of the Arts, Atlantic City Dane Theater, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, Ohio State University, and Alvin Alley Dance School. His teaching emphasizes both technical development and artistic voice, encouraging students to take risks, refine their craft, and discover their own unique movement language. Torres is passionate about mentorship and often works with emerging artists to help bridge the gap between training and professional practice.

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, Washington Performing Arts 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.

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: for six decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented 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 more.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events online and in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider

audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with three Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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