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GroundWorks DanceTheater Appoints Jenai Cutcher as Executive Director

Cleveland, OH - The Board of Directors of [GroundWorks DanceTheater](#) is pleased to announce the appointment of Jenai Cutcher to the newly created position of Executive Director. After an extensive search by Cleveland Executive Search firm HC Smith Limited, Cutcher was unanimously selected. She will begin transitioning into the role in July 2023.

"Last year we determined that in order to support the growth and reach of our programs, it was important to adjust our infrastructure," says GroundWorks DanceTheater Board of Directors President, Cynthia Dunn. "David Shimotakahara will continue in the role of Founding Artistic Director. This adjustment will allow David to have the necessary time to focus on the exciting opportunities to further develop the unique and creative work that defines GroundWorks."

Ms. Cutcher brings to GroundWorks DanceTheater her experiences in various artistic and executive leadership roles. She most recently served as Founding Executive and Artistic Director of [Chicago Dance History Project](#). There Cutcher created an original collection (20TB+) of oral history interviews and other A/V materials, chronicling the histories of dance in Chicago directly from those who lived them. She also advanced the mission of organization through fundraising and community engagement efforts while overseeing all aspects of the organization including board and staff management, development, finance, communications and DE&I implementation.

Cutcher received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English (Cum Laude, 2000) and a Master of Fine Arts in Dance and Technology (Presidential Fellow, 2009) from The Ohio State University. She is the author of four books on dance including 2012's "[Columbus Moves: A Brief History of Contemporary Dance](#)," and has worked as a journalist, documentarian, professional tap dancer, choreographer, and teacher as well as a consultant, trainer, and moderator in the areas of document preservation and oral history programming.

"I am thrilled to be joining GroundWorks DanceTheater and look forward to strengthening the company even further through this new leadership role," says Cutcher. "I am also very happy to be returning to my home state of Ohio."

Cutcher has also been honored with Chicago's Ruth Page Award (2019), an Ohio Humanities Council Fellowship (2011), and was named a 2013 Yale University Pierson College Fellow.

"I truly look forward to working side by side with Jenai as GroundWorks looks to its 25th Anniversary Season and an even brighter future," says Shimotakahara. "Jenai brings deep knowledge about the field of dance, great acumen as an arts administrator, and her warmth and skills as a communicator will not only benefit GroundWorks, but our entire arts community. I know she will generate new opportunities for GroundWorks, expanding and deepening the impact of our work on stage and in communities throughout Northeast Ohio and beyond."



ABOUT GROUNDWORKS DANCETHEATER

GroundWorks DanceTheater is a contemporary dance company founded in 1998 by Founding Artistic Director, David Shimotakahara. Entering its 25th Anniversary Year, GroundWorks is nationally recognized for its contribution to the art form and the enrichment of human experiences in collaboration with some of the most innovative voices in dance today. Work that is created, produced, and supported in Northeast Ohio. GroundWorks' collaborative philosophy informs its work, in the studio, on stage, and in community. It expands the ways dance is shared and engages with and enlivens the communities we serve. Fundamental to GroundWorks is the fostering of new choreography and challenging preconceptions about dance. This group of outstanding artists has introduced dance lovers and neophytes alike to an experience that is unconventional, yet deeply human and resonating. The desire to push boundaries is evident in Shimotakahara's bold initiative: To constantly seek collaboration and input from ground-breaking choreographers of the highest caliber and to make certain that the repertoire of the company is constantly evolving. The company performs new works by Shimotakahara, as well as commissioned work by nationally and internationally acclaimed choreographers including GroundWorks Artist in Residence Antonio Brown, Rena Butler, Sidra Bell, Peter Chu, Dianne McIntyre, Robyn Mineko Williams, Adam Barruch, Gina Gibney, David Parker, Brian Brooks, James Gregg, and many others. Now in its third decade, GroundWorks looks toward its future, having earned solid support and a growing audience base as more and more people discover what the Cleveland Plain Dealer has described as the "smoldering brilliance" of one of "Cleveland's cultural gems."

ABOUT THE FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

David Shimotakahara has been a member of the Atlanta Ballet, Boston Repertory Ballet, Kathryn Posin Dance Company, and the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. He performed with Ohio Ballet under the direction of Heinz Poll from 1983-1999. He also served as Rehearsal Assistant for Ohio Ballet from 1989-1999. Mr. Shimotakahara has choreographed for opera and theater with the Cleveland Opera, Great Lakes Theater Festival and the Dallas Theater Center. He served on the Carlisle Project advisory panel in 1996, and dance panels for the Ohio Arts Council, Illinois Arts Council, the Mid Atlantic Arts Alliance, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He has been awarded 8 Individual Artist Fellowships for Choreography from the Ohio Arts Council from 1996 to 2016. Mr. Shimotakahara received the 2000 Cleveland Arts Prize for Dance. In 2002, his work with GroundWorks DanceTheater was voted "One of 25 to Watch" by Dance Magazine. In 2007, he received the OhioDance award for Outstanding Contributions to the Advancement of the Dance Artform. Mr. Shimotakahara was a 2008 recipient of the first COSE Arts and Business Innovation award as the founder of GroundWorks DanceTheater. In 2010 and 2013, Shimotakahara received a Creative Workforce Fellowship; a program of the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture funded by Cuyahoga Arts and Culture.

To request an interview with Executive Director Jenai Cutcher, Founding Artistic Director David Shimotakahara or Board of Directors President Cynthia Dunn, email Marketing & Communications Manager Steve Sucato at steve@groundworksdance.org or call 216-751-0088.

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