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**Jacob's Pillow to Present
The Inaugural Men Dancers Award
to American Dancer and Choreographer Roderick George
at August 15 Performance**

**George's company, kNonAme Artist, will debut
on the outdoor Henry J. Leir Stage for one night only**

August 2, 2024 (BECKET, Mass.)—Jacob's Pillow is thrilled to present American dancer and choreographer Roderick George with the Jacob's Pillow Men Dancers Award. George will accept the award at the outdoor performance by his New York City-based company, kNonAme Artist, on Thursday, August 15, as part of this summer's Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

A native of Houston, Texas, George studied dance at Ben Stevenson's Houston Ballet Academy as well as in programs including The Alvin Ailey School, Miami City Ballet, and LINES Professional Program. In 2007, he moved abroad to work with Ballett Basel/Theater Basel, and appeared with the Goteborg Operan DansKompani before joining The Forsythe Company in Frankfurt, Germany. George later founded his own company, kNonAme Artist, in Berlin. He now resides in New York City.

The Jacob's Pillow Men Dancers Award will be presented every two years to a choreographer of any gender who creates an innovative work danced by men dancers, to be performed at Jacob's Pillow. This new award is intended to honor the spirit of Jacob's Pillow founder Ted Shawn and his Men Dancers, and is given to choreographers of exceptional vision and achievement in this category. The award of \$25,000 may be used by the choreographer in any way they wish.

"We are pleased to present the inaugural Men Dancers Award to Roderick George," said Jacob's Pillow's Artistic and Executive Director, Pamela Tatge. "As I have gotten to know Roderick's work, I have been so moved by the depth of his choreography. Specifically in his newest work, *Venom*,

Roderick brilliantly advocates for visibility, expression, and representation for those in the Black and LGBTQ+ community. His overall repertoire builds on what Ted Shawn himself valued in his time: the amplification of the power of men dancers. This newly-created award is a wonderful opportunity to shed light on the ground-breaking work of Roderick George.”

George’s company, kNonAme Artist, is a collective that strives to use art as a form of protest and a healing method to find agency. The company will make their Jacob’s Pillow debut by performing two works by Roderick George: an adaptation of *Venom* for the Pillow’s Leir Stage and an excerpt of an earlier work, *Missing Fruit*. Tickets for this performance are available now, and are sold on a Choose What You Pay model, allowing audiences to set the price of their tickets. Tickets and full details about this performance, including a video trailer, are online at jacobspillow.org/events/knoname-artist/.

“I am truly honored to have the opportunity to share my choreography, which touches themes that have affected me and others in our current climate,” said George, adding that his identity deeply informs his artistry. “*Venom* is a work born off of my entire fear of coming out as a gay male from the South. Having six other men on stage with me to explore this topic and sentiment created this draft of a full-evening work in the making.”

George reflected on the fact that “Ted Shawn created this entity of men to fight for acceptance for the male dancer, and my work is focused on fighting for existence as a black and queer person. I never dreamed someone would witness and then acknowledge my work and its impact on this topic. I never intended this work to be rewarded, only for it to be a force that questioned rhetoric and love.”

Generous underwriting support for The Men Dancers Award was provided by Brian Fitzpatrick and his husband Fernando Cortes. Mr. Fitzpatrick explained how this award will impact Jacob’s Pillow and future artists that will perform. “Despite Ted Shawn’s successes, the social norms around men have never been fully overcome,” said Fitzpatrick, “so I hope this will be a good way to continue the vision and legacy of his men dancers and to support the broader community in the dance world.”

ABOUT RODERICK GEORGE

Roderick George has created work for leading arts institutions such as USC Glorlya Kaufman, SUNY Purchase and Boston Conservatory at Berklee, while choreographing for professional companies such as Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre and Los Angeles Contemporary Dance Company. George has collaborated with an array of notable choreographers, including

William Forsythe, Peeping Tom, Jorma Elo, Jérôme Bel, Jacopo Godani, Richard Wherlock and Ohad Naharin.

George's choreographic accomplishments have come through an extensive dance career performing with companies both in the United States and abroad, among them: Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, Ballett Basel in Switzerland, and The Forsythe Company in Frankfurt, Germany. Prior to George's professional career, he was the bronze winner of the 2005 YouthAmerica Grand Prix in New York City, and was elected a Presidential Scholar under the YoungArts Foundation in 2003.

ABOUT THE AUGUST 15 PERFORMANCE

The Missing Fruit explores how the manifestation of racial and public health violence affects Black Americans and other Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities through an interdisciplinary artistic work rooted in contemporary dance. First conceptualized during the Black Lives Matter protests, *The Missing Fruit* examines the experiences of BIPOC communities, particularly addressing their struggles to combat oppression and death, financial insecurity, and health vulnerabilities while making space for Black joy to thrive.

Venom is a work inspired by the lasting impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the present events of the erasure of the LGBTQIA+ community, exposing how the queer community faced silencing, isolation, being forced into hiding, and death through fear, media, and 'God's reckoning,' while at the same time finding ways to uplift each other using the underground nightlife as a sanctuary. As a queer Black man from Houston, Texas, George recognizes that his existence lies on the backs of these individuals and pays homage to the power and grace of his community.

For a full calendar of events in the 2024 Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, visit jacobspillow.org/festival.

ABOUT TED SHAWN & HIS MEN DANCERS

When Ted Shawn selected his original Men Dancers from the athletes he taught at Springfield College in 1933, his stated purpose was to forge a new performance style for men, and to prove that dancing could be an honorable profession for the American male. By May 1940 when Shawn disbanded the group, the company had danced for over a million people across the United States and in Canada, Cuba, and England, having challenged and irrevocably changed the course of American dance.

For the final three decades of his life, Shawn became a major impresario, bringing dance to mainstream America through the theater and school at Jacob's Pillow. To promote his principle of the importance and universality of dance, Shawn introduced countless foreign companies to American audiences, provided opportunities for promising young artists and trained countless students in a full range of dance styles. Shawn orchestrated premieres by both the established and emerging talents of his day including Agnes de Mille, Anton Dolin, Pearl Lang, Merce Cunningham, Anna Sokolow, Alvin Ailey, and Robert Joffrey.

Watch clips on Jacob's Pillow Interactive

Finale from The New World, 1936:

<https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/ted-shawns-men-dancers/finale-from-the-new-world/>

Kinetic Molpai, 1962:

<https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/norman-walker/kinetic-molpai-1962/>

ABOUT JACOB'S PILLOW

Jacob's Pillow is a National Historic Landmark, recipient of the National Medal of Arts, and home to America's longest-running international dance festival, which celebrates its 92nd season in Summer 2024. Jacob's Pillow acknowledges that it rests on the ancestral homelands of the Muh-he-con-ne-ok or Mohican people. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors and elders past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all. In addition, we acknowledge the Nipmuc, the Wampanoag and other tribal nations who also made their homes in what is now known as Massachusetts.

Founded by Ted Shawn in 1933, each Festival includes national and international dance companies and free and ticketed performances, talks, tours, classes, exhibits, events, and community programs. The School at Jacob's Pillow, a prestigious professional dance training center, advances the careers of the upcoming generation of performers and choreographers; during the Festival, 100 international dancers evolve as artists in ballet, choreography, contemporary, musical theatre, tap, and other genres, and year round, artist faculty and accomplished alumni nurture younger dancers in a series of Jacob's Pillow 360 workshops and intensives offered in partnership with leading dance institutions worldwide. The Pillow also provides professional advancement opportunities across disciplines of arts administration, design, video, and production through seasonal internships and a year-round Administrative Fellows program. Through its community engagement programs, the Pillow serves as a partner and active citizen in its local community. The Pillow's extensive Archives, open year-round to the public and highlighted online at danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org, chronicle more than a century of dance in photographs, programs, books, costumes, audiotapes, and videos.

Notable artists who have created or premiered dances at the Pillow include choreographers Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Alvin Ailey, Donald McKayle, Kevin McKenzie, Twyla Tharp, Ralph Lemon, Susan

Marshall, Trisha Brown, Ronald K. Brown, Wally Cardona, Andrea Miller, and Trey McIntyre; performed by artists such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carmen de Lavallade, Mark Morris, Dame Margot Fonteyn, Edward Villella, Rasta Thomas, and hundreds of others. On March 2, 2011, President Barack Obama honored Jacob's Pillow with a National Medal of Arts, the highest arts award given by the United States Government, making the Pillow the first dance presenting organization to receive this prestigious award. The Pillow's Executive and Artistic Director since 2016 is Pamela Tatge. For more information, visit www.jacobspillow.org.

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