

HARLEM DANCE THROUGH THE YEARS

An Essay by John Reddick, Harlem Historian

Harlem dancers and dance innovators have long been a part of America's theater performance and dance training. From early in the 20th Century when Harlem dancers like **Aida Overton Walker** where performing for the King of England and instructing Broadway's Ziegfeld chorus girls in the variations of the cake walk and continuing until now, where the dancer/choreographer **Savion Glover**, innovates Broadway dance to match the drive and rhythms of Hip Hop.

From Overton-Walker to Glover there has been a continuum of African American dancers who have looked at our African, Caribbean and American experiences and brilliantly labored to interpreted that history through dance.

Katherine Dunham who pursued a doctorate in Afro Caribbean rituals and dance, formed a company that brought both its beat and dance technique to reining choreographers like George Balanchine and to broader dance audiences. The influence of Dunham's company would inspire dancers like **Alvin Ailey**, whose own company would forester the artistry of African American choreographers who incorporated, Afro Caribbean and African rhythms as well Jazz and popular R&B beat to their dance work. Dance Theatre of Harlem's, **Arthur Mitchell** chose the rigor of ballet and infused it with jazz rhythms and when necessary enriched traditional ballet story-lines with African tales or African American themes. **Bill T. Jones'** work looks at the movements in everyday life and captures their beauty and pathos in dance. An artist like **Michael Jackson** draws bits from all of this history, and his dancing on stage and in music videos in an instant make it all part of contemporary dance and life!



Keith Haring Poster
for Bill T. Jones