



Complexions Contemporary Ballet
RACHEL NEVILLE

Innovative dance from Complexions comes to Wortham for 2 evenings

Courtesy of Wortham Center

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When Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson first met and collaborated at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, both artists knew that they had landed on something unique.

“We spoke the same language. We just kind of got each other,” Rhoden said in a 2021 interview.

Initially, though, the pair didn’t set out to create their own company. “We set out to do a project with our friends. We were going to have one big performance, and that was it,” Rhoden continued. “But it didn’t turn out that way. We were so in love with all the different types of dancers we brought into one room. ... We looked at each other in the tech rehearsal and said, ‘We need to do something with this.’ It was too special.”

Twenty-eight years later, Complexions Contemporary Ballet represents

one of the world’s most recognized and respected names in performing arts. The company combines remarkably gifted dancers, powerful choreography and electrifying music to reenvision ballet through a modern lens. Together, Rhoden and Richardson have created an institution that embodies its historical moment, a sanctuary where those passionate about dance can celebrate its past while simultaneously building its future.

And that innovative approach is apparent in the programming planned for the company’s two performances at downtown Asheville’s Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, Sept. 23 and 24 — which, among other company favorites, includes the critically acclaimed “Love Rocks,” set to the psychedelic riffs of Lenny Kravitz.

Like ballet set to rock music, much of Complexions’ work brings together several contrasting themes or ideas to form unexpected harmonies. Citing his own

IF YOU GO

What: Complexions Contemporary Ballet.

When: 8 p.m. Sept. 23 and 24.

Where: Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, 18 Biltmore Ave., downtown Asheville.

Tickets: www.worthamarts.org/events/complexions-contemporary-ballet.

multiracial background, Rhoden said that this “appreciation of differences” has heavily influenced the company’s choreography, and that he’s always “looking for ways to bring together all these contrasting elements” to create something truly unique and meaningful, unlike anything the audience may have seen before.

Above all, he said, he and Richardson hope to create work that connects with

others — that means something beyond a performance on stage.

The founder’s mentor, Alvin Ailey, “made you believe that anything was possible” as long as you “bring your heart to it,” Rhoden explained. “It wasn’t enough for you to be able to do a step. It was about what you were saying with the work, and how you were able to reach people. ... And I hope that I’ve carried on those ideas.”

In addition to Complexions’ two Asheville performances, the company is hosting a master class for intermediate to advanced dancers ages 16 and older. The class, held at 1 p.m. Sept. 24, explores the intersections of classical and contemporary music and movement, teaching students exercises from the company’s repertoire. Ahead of each night’s performance, artists from the company will also host pre-show discussions at 7 p.m. in the Tina McGuire Theatre to give additional insight and context to the choreography presented.