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*Fatima Robinson, credit Stephan Schacher*

**Legendary Emmy-nominated hip-hop and pop music choreographer**  
**Fatima Robinson**  
**announced as featured speaker and masterclass instructor for**  
**Red Clay Dance Company's La Femme Dance Festival**  
**March 14-16, 2023**

**Robinson's recent projects include the acclaimed Warner Bros. musical**  
***The Color Purple*, Beyoncé's Renaissance World Tour and the 2022 Super Bowl**

**Festival celebrates women of the Black/African diaspora in dance, with performance**  
**of world premieres at the Harris Theater choreographed by Red Clay Dance's**  
**Founder & Artistic Director Vershawn Sanders-Ward and Michelle N. Gibson,**  
**and the Chicago premiere of Wanjiru Kamuyu's solo *Portraits in Red***

CHICAGO (January 23, 2024)—Continuing its 15th Season, [Red Clay Dance Company](#) is thrilled to announce the return of its [La Femme Dance Festival](#), March 14-16, 2024, featuring a special opening reception and dance masterclass with legendary three-time Emmy-nominated hip-hop and pop music choreographer **Fatima Robinson**—whose recent projects include choreography for the critically acclaimed Warner Bros. musical *The Color Purple* directed by Blitz Bazawule, Beyoncé's Renaissance World Tour and the 2022 Super Bowl. Robinson was nominated for Emmy Awards for choreographing the Beyoncé performance "Be Alive" at the 2022 Oscars, and for her role as a producer for both the 2021 and 2022 Grammy Awards.

The **La Femme Dance Festival** is a three-day celebration of women in dance that brings choreographic works created by women of the Black/African diaspora to Chicago audiences. This year marks the return of the biennial festival following the Covid-19 pandemic.

On Thursday, March 14 at 6 p.m., the festival kicks off with a VIP opening reception at The Arts Club of Chicago (201 E. Ontario Street), featuring a fireside chat with **Fatima Robinson** about her legendary career. The next day, Friday, March 15 at 12 p.m., Robinson will lead a masterclass for professional dancers at Red Clay Dance Company's Center for Excellence (808 E. 63rd Street).

The festival culminates in a series of captivating performances at the Harris Theater (205 E. Randolph Street) on Saturday, March 16 at 7:30 p.m. Performances include the Chicago premiere of *Portraits in Red*, a solo piece by Paris-based choreographer **Wanjiru Kamuyu**, and two world premieres featuring the award-winning Touring Company of Red Clay Dance Company: the first by its Founder and Artistic Director **Vershawn Sanders-Ward**, and the second by guest choreographer and New Orleans native **Michelle N. Gibson**, created to a live original score by Grammy Award-winning composer **Adonis Rose**.

**La Femme Dance Festival** tickets are now on sale, with VIP Festival Packages for \$225, including the VIP opening reception with Fatima Robinson at The Arts Club of Chicago and a ticket to the Harris Theater performance; single VIP opening reception tickets for \$175; Masterclass tickets for \$50; and individual tickets for the Harris Theater performance ranging from \$25-\$85. For more information on Red Clay Dance Company and to purchase festival tickets, visit [redclaydance.com/la-femme-dance-festival](https://redclaydance.com/la-femme-dance-festival).

### **Artist bios**

#### **Fatima Robinson**

As the *New York Times* notes, three-time Emmy-nominated Fatima Robinson is “one of the most sought-after hip-hop and popular music choreographers in the world.” Her latest project is the critically acclaimed Warner Bros. musical *The Color Purple*, directed by Blitz Bazawule, adapted from Alice Walker’s pivotal novel of the same name. Recent projects for Robinson include Director of Choreography for Beyoncé’s Renaissance World Tour and the 2022 Super Bowl. She was nominated for Emmy Awards for producing the highly regarded 2022 Grammy Awards, as well as the 2021 Grammy Awards, along with choreography nominations for each. She has also choreographed films such as the critically acclaimed *Dreamgirls*, *Coming 2 America*, *The Harder They Fall*, *American Gangster*, *Public Enemies*, *Ali*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and *Space Jam 2*. Robinson has choreographed memorable television performances including five different Academy Awards performances and on such popular shows as *Queens*, *Blackish*, *Grownish*, *American Soul*, *The Voice*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, *American Idol* and NBC’s live musical *The Wiz*.

Robinson also notably choreographed the 2011 Super Bowl Halftime Show with the Black Eyed Peas and Coachella performances including the Tupac Hologram, Kendrick Lamar, Major Lazer, Brockhampton, and Halsey. She recently executive produced “Taking the Stage: Changing America,” the concert honoring the opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and culture. Robinson has taught a master class at the White House and was the creative director behind such notable events as Fashion Rocks, BET Awards, The American Music Awards, and the Grammys. She has choreographed notable spots including Gucci, Chanel, Burberry, Target, H&M, Pepsi, Gap, Apple, Nissan, Verizon, Motorola and Heineken and worked with a variety of artists including Britney Spears, Meghan Trainor, Michael Jackson, Pharrell Williams, Black Eyed Peas, Fergie, Gwen Stefani, Lana Del Rey, Usher, Sade, Prince, Rihanna, Major Lazer, Kendrick Lamar, and Mary J. Blige.

Named one of *Entertainment Weekly’s* “100 Most Creative People in Entertainment,” Robinson has received numerous MTV VMA nominations and wins for Best Choreography. She was also nominated for a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Choreographer – Off-Broadway for her theatrical debut, *Radiant Baby* based on the life of artist Keith Haring. Robinson will be making her feature directorial debut in 2024 with a Universal film.

### **Vershawn Sanders-Ward, Founder & Artistic Director of Red Clay Dance**

Vershawn Sanders-Ward is an ARTIVIST. She is an award-winning choreographer, arts leader, scholar, and educator. Sanders-Ward is the Founding Artistic Director and CEO of Chicago-based Red Clay Dance Company and is currently a candidate for Dunham Technique Certification. She holds an MFA in Dance from New York University and is the first recipient of a BFA in Dance from Columbia College Chicago (Gates Millennium Scholar). Sanders-Ward is a 2022 Dance/USA Artist Fellow, a Chicago Dancemakers Forum Awardee, a Harvard Business School Club of Chicago Scholar, a Dance/USA Leadership Fellow, a 3Arts awardee, and received a Choreography Award from Harlem Stage NYC in 2009. She is a three-time recipient of *Newcity* magazine's "Players 50: People Who Really Perform for Chicago," and in 2023 was inducted into *Newcity's* "Hall of Fame."

Her choreography has been presented in Chicago, Minneapolis, New York, San Francisco, The Yard at Martha's Vineyard, and internationally in Toronto, Dakar, and Kampala. Vershawn is currently on faculty at Loyola University Chicago in the Fine and Performing Arts Department and has received choreographic commissions from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Loyola University, Columbia College Chicago, Northwestern University, Knox College, AS220, and the National Theatre in Uganda. Her most recent project, *Rest.Rise.Move.Nourish.Heal* was selected for a 2021 National Dance Project Award from NEFA with additional support from the NEA. As an arts advocate, she serves on the Board of Trustees for Dance/USA and is the Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Black Arts & Culture Alliance of Chicago. Vershawn was selected to attend the inaugural Obama Foundation Summit for Emerging Global Leaders and has had the pleasure of gracing the cover of the *Chicago Reader* and *DEMO Magazine*.

### **Michelle N. Gibson**

Michelle N. Gibson intricately intertwines Black African American dance traditions, choreography, and associated scholarship linking the vibrant heritage of New Orleans through the Caribbean to the vast expanses of Africa, evoking the social, political, economic, and spiritual understandings central to building bonds within and across cultures. Gibson received her BFA in Dance from Tulane University and her MFA from Hollins University in collaboration with the American Dance Festival at Duke University. Gibson showcases a vast repertoire spanning genres of the African Diaspora, Contemporary Afro Modern, Afro Funk, Jazz, and her own New Orleans Second Line Aesthetic. A number of original works include: "Takin' it To The Roots," supported by the National Performance Network/Visual Artists Network's Creation Fund; "Displaced Yet Rebirth" performed by Dallas Black Dance Theatre; "Origins of Life on Earth" with the Ashé Cultural Arts Center; and "Voices of Congo Square," presented at Sun Theatre in St Louis, Missouri, and the Orpheum Theater in New Orleans. From 2021 through 2023, Gibson curated the Culture, Brass and Jazz in the Park Festival as a partnership between The New Orleans Original BuckShop and ArtsBridge Powered by Toyota, a community arts program of the AT&T Performing Arts Center in Dallas, TX. In 2022, Gibson was Grand Marshal for the Ascona Jazz Festival in Switzerland, leading Second Line processions and movement workshops.

Gibson is beginning her 14th year on faculty with the American Dance Festival and has served at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas for four years. She works with senior citizens in facilities throughout the Dallas Metroplex using a movement therapy curriculum she created while serving as a resident artist at the Ashé Cultural Arts Center in New Orleans. Currently Professor of Practice in Dance at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX, Gibson presented in spring 2023 as guest panelist and instructor for Black Women Embodied Aesthetics Symposium at Duke University, Intangible Roots Professional Development Summer Intensive at Gloriana Kaufman School of Dance at University of Southern California, and is one of the featured artists in *Moving Together*, an official documentary selected for Dance on Camera at Lincoln Center that premiered in February 2023.

### **Wanjiru Kamuyu**

Wanjiru Kamuyu, native Kenyan based in Paris, France, is associate artist with Theater L'Onde (Vélizy, France) and a Live Feed artist with New York Live Arts (USA). Her career began with its genesis in New York City. As a performer she has worked with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Bill T. Jones, Molissa Fenley, Anita Gonzales, Okwui Okpokwasili, Nathan Trice, Dean Moss, Tania Isaac, and in Europe with choreographers Robyn Orlin, Emmanuel Eggermont, Nathalie Pubellier, Irène Tassemedo, Bartabas,

Stefanie Batten Bland, director/writer Françoise Dô, visual artist Jean-Paul Goude and TV director Christian Faure. Alongside Kamuyu has performed in industrials, television and Broadway musicals, *The Lion King* (Paris) and *FELA !* (UK and Equity European and US tours).

Kamuyu founded dance company, WKcollective, which is associate company with creative production agency camin aktion (Montpellier, France). Her choreographic projects include tours in the US, Africa, Asia and Europe. Commissions include musical *À la recherche de Joséphine*, director Jérôme Savary (Paris and International tours); *Love is in the hair*, director Jean François Auguste (France tour); *Maître Harold*, director Hassan Kassi Kouyate (Paris); US esteemed dance departments (Mills College, University of Michigan, Wayne State University, Stephens College); artistic consulting/outside eye for choreographer Bintou Dembele's ZH; choreographer assistant to Nathan Trice's *Their speech is silver*, *Their silence is gold*; storyteller Nathalie La Boucher's *La Chevauchée du Gange*; and community engagement projects with New WORLD Theater (USA), choreographer Eun-mi Ahn's project 1:59 (Festival Paris Quartier d'Été), Euroculture and the National Center for Dance project Assemblé (France). While touring, she offers master classes and workshops for dance companies, universities, community and dance centers. Kamuyu holds an MFA (performance & choreography) from Temple University (Philadelphia, PA). She has served as Visiting Guest Professor at Mills College (USA) and is currently core faculty for University of South Florida's Dance in Paris semester and summer programs.

### **About Red Clay Dance Company**

Red Clay Dance Company is Chicago's premier Afro-contemporary dance company. The Black, female-led, 501(c)(3) nonprofit and for-purpose organization awakens "Glocal" Activism through creating, performing, and teaching dances of the African Diaspora. Founded in Brooklyn, NY in July 2008 and now based in Chicago, Red Clay Dance Company is the brainchild of Vershawn Sanders-Ward, the institution's Founding Artistic Director & CEO. Red Clay Dance's award-winning Touring Company is a versatile and dynamic ensemble of dance activists that tours and performs locally, nationally and internationally the choreographic work of its founder. Red Clay Dance also houses its own School of Dance, Youth Ensemble, and provides dance education programming to schools and community partners. For more information, visit [redclaydance.com](http://redclaydance.com).

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