

Mo Jazz Dance Company: Where Women of "A Certain Age" Cut Loose

Before the pandemic limited large gatherings, these women journeyed across three states weekly to share their love of dance and movement.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- It's Friday night, and a group of self-described "women of a certain age" have gathered at Danceteria, a rehearsal space off Brooklyn's Fourth Ave.

[Audrey Madison](#) clicks a boom box on the floor along one wall, and a Roy Ayers, Lonnie Liston Smith style jazz tune rocks the walls.

First, the [Mo Jazz dance company](#) members hug.

Then they dance, and dance some more, working bodies to and in the music. Madison, Mo Jazz's founder and choreographer, shouts encouragement as she matches them step for step.

“

That's right, that's right!
Come on, get going! Come on!
It's been awhile! Hit it!"

Audrey Madison

“That's right, that's right,” Madison calls to the room. “Come on, get going! Come on! It's been awhile! Hit it!”

The women laugh, shout encouragement, and squeal with delight as they hit the mark on difficult moves. Brows are sweaty but the 10-kilowatt smiles in the room never fade.



The Mo Jazz Dance Company performs "Inspiration Rising."

They are not here because the music makes the years melt away. These lifelong hoofers meet each week to embrace another chance to blend body and beat, music and magic.

They come from as far as Ossining, NY and Connecticut for another chance to dance.

For these women – ages from late 40's to early 70's - Mo Jazz lets them practice a discipline that has been a part of their lives since they were children. Yet the Mo Jazz Dance company springs from a legacy older than the company's 1997 founding.

Each shuffle, sashay, wave, whip and dip echoes long hours of classes with some of the top dance instructors of their day - Alvin Ailey, Charles Moore, George Faison, Ruby Blake, Pepsi Bethel, Carmen DeLavallade and husband Geoffrey Holder, to name a very few.

The Ailey-founded [Clark Center](#) for the Performing Arts (1959 - 1989), where many of the above choreographers taught and trained, was a mecca for aspiring dancers of the day.

Several Mo Jazz members did exceptionally well in dance. Choreographer Hope Clarke, 1993 Tony and Drama Desk award nominee for her work in Jelly's Last Jam, is not a member but regularly dances with them on Friday nights. Clark, with Carmen de Lavallade and Sheila Rohan, founded the 5 Plus Ensemble, where Madison is Board member and dancer.

Member Sharon Holder danced in Aida at the Met while in high school. Beverly Moore was a student when she performed at the White House with the Mama Lou Parks Jazz Dancers. (Maurice and Gregory Hines trained and danced with Parks' group.)

Now Holder, Moore, Angela Eargle-Bell, Cynthia Cummings, Sheila Kennedy, Bernadette Lewis, Angela Lomax, Jackie David-Manigaulte, Karen McClain-

Marvin, and Frances Vidal meet most Friday nights to twirl and shuffle for hours under Madison's attentive direction.

"I can't describe the impact this group has had on me personally, spiritually and emotionally," said Kennedy. "I am very grateful for this group."



Mo Jazz Founder, President and Choreographer Audrey Madison



Mo Jazz dancers perfected their pre-pandemic moves during weekly rehearsals.

"I am doing this because it feels so right to me" Madison said. "It feels right when the audience sees women of a certain age enjoying themselves, committing themselves and sharing.

"It's a lot of fun," she said. "I am very thankful, and blessed, and fortunate, and I've known that my whole life."

And they owe it all to Madison's once flat feet.

The Brooklyn native and still resident was six years old when doctors told her parents that dance lessons might benefit their flat-footed child. (Cummings and Holder had the same flat foot diagnosis and prescribed remedy as children.)

One dance lesson and Madison was hooked.□

"I loved it!" she said. "I can't tell you why. I know how much I loved it because my father, who bowled on Friday night, had to get up to take me, and there was always that look on his face that I don't like you right now! But we still went!"

This was the early '60s, and just finding a ballet class in working class Brooklyn was more than a notion. But George and Laretta Hubbard, a New York Transit Authority motorman and stay at home mom later an insurance company clerical worker, enrolled their only daughter in Saturday morning classes at the Williamsburg Settlement, in the borough's industrial Williamsburg neighborhood, a short drive from their Cooper Park housing project home.

(Madison's brother, James, was born with cerebral palsy. Seeing him as 'differently able' led Madison to become a special education teacher.

Laretta Hubbard died in 2013, Jimmy in 2015, and father George in 2016. Brother George Michael is a bowling alley mechanic.

Madison kept dancing through her years in the New York Public schools (PS 110, PS 132, Junior High School 50, and Grover Cleveland High School) and through Hunter College, where she majored in mathematics and eventually earned a Master's degree.

In 1979 she started teaching students with learning disabilities in the public schools. "I had to develop myself into the educator those children needed and deserved," she said. "The principal told me to keep them in the classroom. It was horrible. I knew I did not know what they were supposed to know or supposed to do."

Thinking of her brother, Madison developed a curriculum for special needs students that identified the knowledge, skills and understanding her students needed.

She took the same immersive approach to dance, attending Clark Center classes and workshops as often as she could, sometimes several times a week.

Though her skills led her middle school teachers to encourage Madison to audition for the performing arts high school, but she decided not to consider as a professional career.

Mo Jazz performs several times a year at various events. They taped a Christmas number in 2019 that aired on Manhattan Cable Network.

They can be contacted on their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/MoJazz-Dance-1440606392853532/>

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