



Roots & Rhythms

STUDY GUIDE

presented by the Miami-Dade Arts Collective

About The Zest Collective

In 2013, Gentry George co-founded Zest Collective, a celebrated dance company based in Washington Heights, NYC. Under his leadership, Zest Collective has delivered captivating performances at prestigious venues, leaving a lasting impact on the world of dance.



In 2020, Gentry relocated the Zest Collective to South Florida, where the company continued to thrive. They have performed at a range of South Florida venues, including the Miami Hispanic Cultural Arts Center, Miami Theater Center, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, First Baptist Fort Lauderdale, African Heritage Cultural Arts Center, and the Broward County Main Library.

About the Choreographer

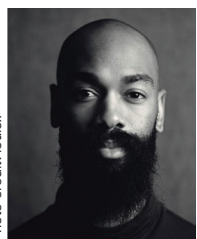


Photo credit: ioulex

Gentry Isaiah George is a prominent figure in the dance world, known for his role as the Co-Founder and Artistic Director of Zest Collective. Originally from Miami, Florida, Gentry attended Charles R. Drew Elementary and Horace Mann Middle School and began his dance journey at New World School of the Arts High School. After graduating from The Juilliard School in New

York City, he joined Ailey II of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, earning recognition as 'one of three men to watch in Ballet' by the *NY Post*. Gentry's versatile career also included roles in Lustig Dance Theatre and the Dance Theatre of Harlem under the Direction of Virginia Johnson.

Gentry's impressive career encompasses performances across the United States and internationally and he is a respected choreographer and teacher. His recent accomplishments include directing *PianoSlam 14*, presented by Dranoff 2 Piano, and the *Adrienne Arsht Center*, which is a testament to his enduring commitment to the arts and artistic innovation. Currently, Gentry is a dance professor at the New World School of the Arts.

About the Show

Roots & Rhythms celebrates the voices of black musicians, blending biography, social history, music, and choreography to celebrate the beauty and innovations of the African diaspora. This performance, presented by Zest Collective and the Miami-Dade Arts Education Collective, explores a century of creativity, imagination, and triumph to tell the stories of black artists and communities whose songs rang out despite North America's dark history of oppression.



Company images photo credit: Simon Choong

About the Musicians

PART ONE of this performance was developed to help students and educators better understand the rich and complex traditions of African-American music. This segment pays particular attention to selected artists and their significant influence on these musical traditions.

Scott Joplin who was born in Linden, Texas, was known as the “King of Ragtime,” and was a renowned composer and pianist. His compositions, like “The Entertainer” and “Maple Leaf Rag,” are famous for their catchy melodies and syncopated rhythms. Joplin’s innovative work greatly influenced the development of ragtime music, impacting jazz and other genres. His legacy remains influential in American music history.

Celia Cruz who was born in Havana, Cuba, the “Queen of Salsa,” was a Cuban-American singer known for her vibrant and electrifying performances. Her distinctive voice and charismatic stage presence helped popularize salsa music on the international stage, and she remains an icon of Latin music.

Aretha Franklin who was born in Memphis, Tennessee, was known as the “Queen of Soul,” and was a groundbreaking American singer and songwriter. Her powerful and emotive voice, combined with her ability to infuse soul and gospel into her music, left an indelible mark on the world of music and earned her a place as one of the greatest vocalists of all time.

1868

Scott Joplin



1925

Celia Cruz



1942

Aretha Franklin



1917

Ella Fitzgerald



Ella Fitzgerald who was born in Newport News, Virginia, was often hailed as the “First Lady of Song,” and was a legendary American jazz singer. Her unparalleled vocal range, improvisational skills, and emotive delivery made her one of the most celebrated and influential vocalists in the history of jazz and popular music.

1927

Harry Belafonte



Harry Belafonte who was born in Harlem, New York, and was a pioneering American singer, actor, and social activist, who played a significant role in introducing Caribbean and folk music to a global audience. His iconic calypso music, including hits like “Day-O (The Banana Boat Song),” not only topped the charts but also carried profound social and political messages, making him a key figure in both music and civil rights activism. Harry Belafonte passed away in April of this year.

**The year listed above denotes the birth year of the musician highlighted in the timeline.*

Questions To Ask On The Bus After The Show

- ➔ What emotions did the dancers movements and the music evoke in you during the performance?
- ➔ Can you identify one artist or musical genre from the show that you found the most interesting? Why did it stand out to you?
- ➔ How did the performance help you learn more about the history and contributions of black musicians and artists in America?
- ➔ How did the dance and storytelling in the show change the way you think about cultural diversity and the power of the arts to tell stories?

ACTIVITY:

“Rhythms of the Diaspora”

PART TWO of the performance features a piece called *Afro Blue* which celebrates the hypnotic sounds of American jazz singer Abbey Lincoln and Cuban percussionist Mongo Santamaria combine Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin jazz music and dance. Commissioned by the Miami Light Project, this work premiered at the Miami Theater Center in 2023. The objective of this dance activity is to help students explore the distinct rhythms associated with different musical genres and foster an appreciation for the cultural diversity showcased in *Roots & Rhythms*. It encourages creativity, collaboration, and reflection while providing an engaging and educational dance experience.

Materials Needed:

- Music from various genres (e.g., ragtime, jazz, salsa, blues, calypso, Afro-Cuban)
- A large, open space for dancing
- Speakers and music player

Genre Exploration (20 minutes):

1. Have jazz music playing as students come into the room. Ask students: *What kind of music is this?* (Jazz, Salsa, Blues, etc.) *What are the basic elements of jazz?* (Melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, and expression in jazz, instruments). *How is jazz similar or different from other types of music? How is Afro-Cuban music similar or different to Ragtime? Do you know any dance movements from any of these genres of music? Can you demonstrate any that you saw from Roots & Rhythms?*
2. Tell students that jazz dance and jazz music both utilize improvisation. *What is improvisation? Where else is improvisation used?* (Theater, art, life)
3. Invite students to improvise movements while listening to jazz music. Play jazz music in the background and encourage students to show the class how they improvise.

Keyword: **Improvisation** is composing or choreographing in the moment.

4. Provide a brief overview of the musical genres that were explored in the show (see in the box below). Mention how each genre has unique rhythms, movements, and cultural roots. Play a short musical excerpt (about 2–3 minutes) from a specific genre, starting with Ragtime, and ask students to listen to the music and observe its rhythm and mood.
5. Next, discuss the historical and cultural context of that genre. For example, when introducing Ragtime, discuss its origins in African-American communities in the late 19th century. After the discussion, invite students to explore the rhythm and movements they associate with that genre. Encourage creativity and free expression.

Dance Rotation (15 minutes):

1. Divide the students into small groups, and assign each with a different genre (e.g., one group gets Jazz, another gets Salsa, and so on).
2. Play the corresponding music for each group, allowing them to explore the rhythm and movements of their assigned genre. *Can they remember any specific dance steps or movements from the piece? Do they have any movements they'd like to share?* Rotate the music every few minutes so that each group has the opportunity to experience multiple genres.

Sharing and Reflection (15 minutes):

1. Ask each group to share a short dance sequence inspired by movements or dance steps they saw in the performance at the Moss Center and their assigned genre.
1. After each performance, facilitate a discussion about what they learned, how they felt dancing to different rhythms, and what cultural elements they noticed, and conclude the activity by discussing the importance of celebrating the diversity of musical genres and the cultural stories they tell through dance.

Genres of Music

RAGTIME

Ragtime is a syncopated musical genre that emerged in the late 19th century, characterized by its lively, piano-based rhythms and a distinctive, “ragged” melody.

JAZZ

Jazz is a genre of music characterized by improvisation, syncopation, and a unique blend of African and European musical traditions, resulting in a diverse and often complex musical style.

SALSA

Salsa is a lively and rhythmic Latin music and dance genre that blends various musical influences, primarily originating from Afro-Cuban traditions, and characterized by its energetic tempo and vibrant, syncopated rhythms.

BLUES

Blues music is a soulful and expressive genre rooted in African-American experiences, featuring emotive vocals and a 12-bar structure, often exploring themes of hardship and resilience.

CALYPSO

Calypso is a Caribbean musical style known for its lively, rhythmic melodies and storytelling lyrics, often addressing social and political themes with humor and satire.

AFRO-CUBAN

Afro-Cuban music is a vibrant and rhythmic genre that fuses African and Cuban musical traditions, featuring complex percussion, intricate melodies, and a rich cultural history.

Teacher Resources

These resources cover a range of topics related to dance, music, and cultural history, providing teachers with valuable tools to support their curriculum and enhance students' understanding of the art forms explored in the show.

Books:

“The Jazz of Physics: The Secret Link Between Music and the Structure of the Universe” by Stephon Alexander – Explores the connections between jazz music and physics.

“The History of Jazz” by Ted Gioia – Offers a comprehensive overview of the history and evolution of jazz music.

“Blues People: Negro Music in White America” by Amiri Baraka – Explores the cultural and historical significance of blues music.

Websites:

Kennedy Center ArtsEdge (artsedge.kennedy-center.org) – Offers a wealth of resources for teachers, including lesson plans, activities, and multimedia resources related to dance, music, and theater.

Dance/USA (danceusa.org) – Offers resources, articles, and information about dance education and the dance community in the United States.

National Endowment for the Arts (arts.gov) – Provides resources and research on various art forms, including dance and music.

Jazz at Lincoln Center's Jazz Academy (academy.jazz.org) – Offers educational resources, including interactive lessons and videos, to explore the world of jazz music.

Library of Congress Performing Arts (loc.gov/performingarts) – Features digital collections, archives, and resources related to performing arts, including music and dance.

The Miami-Dade Arts Education Collective

The Miami-Dade Arts Education Collective, consisting of the Miami Theater Center, The Adrienne Arsht Center, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs' Culture Shock Miami program, and the Dennis C. Moss Cultural Arts Center, united in 2020 to deliver diverse and high-quality virtual arts experiences to students during school closures. Since its inception, the Collective has positively influenced over 100,000 students in Miami-Dade County. In the 2023/24 season, marking our third year of collaboration, the Collective has shifted towards in-person programming, acknowledging the transformative journey of the arts industry shaped by the profound impact of the pandemic. We are privileged to co-produce and co-present the Zest Collective as our inaugural in-person performance.