

and a large-scale recycling of rhythms. Moreover, the philosophical and political ideals featured in many roots reggae lyrics were initially replaced by “slackness” themes that highlighted sex rather than spirituality. The lyrical shift also coincided with a change in Jamaica’s drug culture from marijuana to cocaine, arguably resulting in the harsher sonic nature of dancehall, which was also referred to as *ragga* (an abbreviation of ragamuffin), in the mid-1980s.

The centrality of sexuality in dancehall foregrounded lyrical sentiments widely regarded as being violently homophobic, as evidenced by the controversies surrounding Buju Banton’s 1992 hit, “Boom Bye Bye.” Alternatively, some academics argue that these viewpoints are articulated only in specific Jamaican contexts, and therefore should not receive the reactionary condemnation that dancehall often appears to impose on homosexuals. While dancehall’s sexual politics have usually been discussed from a male perspective, the performances of X-rated female DJs, such as Lady Saw and Patra, have helped redress the gender balance. By the early 1990s, with the emergence of performers such as Luciano offering a blend of reggae styles, dancehall became more philosophical, although X-rated lyrics maintained their popularity.

Dancehall has gradually become a global popular music commodity, with record sales closely linked to an ongoing alliance with the hip-hop world. The development of transnational corporate ties has also affected its popularity, as key independent record labels have been able to increase distribution through major established companies. Following the signing of Lieutenant Stitchie to Atlantic Records in 1987 (the first signing of a dancehall DJ by a major record label), commercial peaks have included the early 1990s success of Shabba Ranks (the first internationally successful Jamaican DJ) and the twenty-first-century impact of Shaggy, Beenie Man, and Sean Paul.

See also Reggae

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MIKE ALLEYNE (2005)

DANCE THEATER OF HARLEM

The Dance Theater of Harlem (DTH), a classical dance company, was founded on August 15, 1969, by Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook as the world’s first permanent, professional, academy-rooted, predominantly black ballet troupe. Mitchell created DTH to address a threefold mission of social, educational, and artistic opportunity for the people of Harlem, and to prove that “there are black dancers with the physique, temperament and stamina, and everything else it takes to produce what we call the ‘born’ ballet dancer.” During its official 1971 debut, DTH triumphantly debunked opinions that black people could not dance ballet. By 1993 DTH had become a world-renowned company with forty-nine dancers, seventy-five ballets in its repertory, an associated school, and an international touring schedule.

DTH’s extensive repertory has included technically demanding neoclassic ballets (George Balanchine’s 1946 *The Four Temperaments*); programmatic works (Arthur Mitchell’s 1968 *Rhythmtron* and Alvin Ailey’s 1970 *The River* to music by Duke Ellington); and pieces that explore the African-American experience (Louis Johnson’s 1972 *Forces of Rhythm* and Geoffrey Holder’s 1974 *Douglas* created in collaboration with DTH conductor-composer Tania Leon). DTH also excels in its own versions of classic ballets, including a sumptuous, Geoffrey Holder–designed production of Stravinsky’s *Firebird* (1982) choreographed by John Taras, and a stunning Creole-inspired staging of *Giselle* (1984) created by Arthur Mitchell, designer Carl Mitchell, and artistic associate Frederic Franklin. This highly acclaimed *Giselle* set the Romantic-era story in the society of free black plantation owners in pre-Civil War Louisiana. DTH is perhaps best known for its revivals of dramatic ballets, including Agnes de Mille’s 1948 *Fall River Legend* and Valerie Bettis’s 1952 *A Streetcar Named Desire*, both of which have starred principal ballerina Virginia Johnson. Other important classical dance artists associated with DTH include Lydia Arbaca, Karen Brown, Stephanie Dabney, Robert Garland, Lorraine Graves, Christina Johnson, Ronald Perry, Walter Raines, Judith Rotardier, Paul Russell, Eddie J. Shellman, Lowell Smith, Mel Tomlinson, and Donald Williams.



A scene from the Dance Theater of Harlem production of the ballet *Firebird*. Since its premier performance in 1971, the Dance Theatre of Harlem has become a world-renowned dance company, performing both traditional classical ballets and new works inspired by the African-American experience. © JACK VARTOOGIAN/FRONTROWPHOTOS

In 1972 the DTH school moved to its permanent home at 466 West 152nd Street, where training in dance, choreography, and music supplemented outreach programs bringing dance to senior citizens and children of the Harlem community with special needs. The international celebrity achieved by DTH began with a Caribbean performance tour in 1970, an engagement at the Spoleto Festival in 1971, and an auspicious 1974 London debut at Sadler's Wells Theatre. In 1988 DTH embarked on a five-week tour of the USSR, playing sold-out performances in Moscow, Tbilisi, and Leningrad, where the company received a standing ovation at the famed Kirov Theatre. In 1992 DTH successfully performed in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In 1990, faced with a \$1.7 million deficit, DTH was forced to cancel its New York season and lay off dancers, technicians, and administrative staff for a six-month period. Mitchell and the board of directors responded with increased efforts to enlarge corporate support and strengthen their African-American audience base. In 1994 DTH

completed a \$6 million expansion and renovation project, which doubled classroom and administrative space and confirmed the DTH commitment to provide access to the disciplined training necessary for a career in classical ballet. However, financial problems continued. In February 1997 the company was paralyzed by a three-week strike. In 2004 the company faced an overwhelming deficit that forced extended layoffs for much of its staff.

See also Ailey, Alvin; Ballet; Ellington, Edward Kennedy "Duke"

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THOMAS F. DEFRANTZ (1996)
Updated by author 2005

DANDRIDGE, DOROTHY

C. NOVEMBER 1923

SEPTEMBER 8, 1965

The daughter of a minister and a stage entertainer, the actor and singer Dorothy Dandridge was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and was groomed for a stage career by her mother, Ruby Dandridge, who separated from her husband and began touring the country as a performer shortly after Dorothy, her second daughter, was born. While still a child, Dandridge sang, danced, and did comedy skits as part of her mother's show. When their mother settled in Los Angeles, she and her older sister, Vivian—together they had been billed as "The Wonder Kids"—attended school and appeared in bit parts in films, including the Marx Brothers comedy *A Day at the Races* (1937). During the 1940s, Dorothy and Vivian joined with another young African-American woman, Etta Jones, to form an act called "The Dandridge Sisters," and the three embarked on a tour with the Jimmie Lunceford band. Dandridge met her first husband, Harold Nicholas (of the Nicholas Brothers dancing team), while she was performing at the Cotton Club in Harlem. A brain-damaged daughter, Harolyn, was born to the couple before they divorced.

During this time, Dandridge managed to secure a few minor Hollywood roles, appearing in such films as *Drums*