**For Immediate Release**

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Press photos available upon request

Urban Jazz Dance presents

**The Bay Area Deaf Dance Festival**

August 9-11 at 7:30pm (Fri-Sun)

Tickets: $20 \* brownpapertickets.com (group discounts available)

Dance Mission Theater \* SF CA 94110 \* 415-826-4441 \* www.dancemission.com

Urban Jazz Dance is proud to announce the *first ever* **Bay Area Deaf Dance Festival** (BADDF). The festival celebrates the artistic talents of hearing-impaired performing (dance, music) and fine artists (painting, other handcrafted wares) and highlights the ways in which hearing and deaf artists can collaborate with exciting results. Participating artists include: **Antoine Hunter** (also festival artistic director), **Half-N-Halfs**, **Beethoven’s Nightmare**, **Michelle A. Banks**, **Joy Elan**, **National Deaf Dance Theater**, **Lux Aeterna Dance Company** and more!

Why “Deaf in Arts?” 9 to 22 out of every 1000 people in the United States have a severe hearing impairment or are deaf. Deaf artists share the same struggles as hearing artists, along with the added struggle of communication access challenges. Nancy Creighton, advocate for deaf artists states, “Those whose work is specifically about their deaf experiences have even more barriers to showing their work, despite the fact that their work helps to create deaf culture by showing us our shared experiences and feelings.” Deaf artists have a unique place in the arts due to their preference for visual, movement centered works; works that highlight an alternative and shared method of communicating how they experience the and move in world.

A tremendous body of talent exists within the Deaf community that is not being used or celebrated to their fullest extent. Hearing-impaired artists are an untapped treasure that would bring new life to the arts and redefine what is meant by “diversity” in the arts. In the spirit of inclusion and visibility, we wish to open this window of expression to the Bay Area, where deaf artists can celebrate their gifts and deaf audience members and family can celebrate their own unique contribution to their community.

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS:**

**Antoine Hunter (Artistic Director)** is an award-winning American Deaf and Hard of Hearing Choreographer, Dancer, Dance instructor, actor, poet and Deaf Advocate. He has performed with Savage JazzDance Company with Artistic Director Reginald Ray Savage since 2001 as dance artist/Performer/ jazz instructor; also with Nuba Dance Theater, many lead roles with The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, Alayo Dance Company with Artistic director, Ramon Ramos Alayo and Robert Moses' Kin Dance Company with Artistic Director, Robert Moses. He is a faculty member at East Bay Center of the Performing Arts, Youth In Arts, Co-Director/founder of Iron Tri-Angel Urban Ballet in Richmond, Urban Jazz instructor for Dance-A-Vision Ent in Oakland, Ca, and an instructor and rehearsal director for the Ross DanceCompany with Tecsia Ross. Antoine Hunter is the founder and the director of Urban Jazz Dance Company. Mr. Hunter dances for various companies from many parts of the world and proves that even those with a hearing disability or any kind of disability can reach for their dreams too. Awards include the 2011 National Bay Area People’s Dancers Choice Award, a 2011 Margaret Jenkin’s CHIME recipient, and 2009 VRS AWARD. He is currently the president of the Bay Area Black Deaf Advocate and Director at Large for Northern California Chapter of the California Association of the Deaf.

**Half-N-Half (Artists)** Sherry Hicks and Michael Velez are Codas (Children of Deaf Adults) that have been collaborating and touring nationally and internationally since 1994. This dynamic duo delights audiences everywhere with their original multimedia Deaf-centric and Coda-centric performances combining ASL, Music, and storytelling. Their work is truly a "feast for the eyes."

**Beethoven’s Nightmare (Artists)**, Ed Chevy, Bob Hiltermann and Steve Longo are three deaf musicians who make up Beethoven’s Nightmare, and for them, music is something truly felt inside and an expression of the soul, thus allowing them to rock out with all the talent and excitement as their hearing counterparts. The band plays their own songs, as well as the occasional cover, while front man, Paul Raci, grinds out vocals and interprets using American Sign Language. Raci, who is hearing, fits right in with the boys as his parents are deaf and he has been around music and sign language all his life. Ludwig Von Beethoven inspired the group’s name, whose life became a nightmare after becoming deaf at the age of 35, however, it did not stop him from continuing his love of music and composing some of his greatest works.

**Michelle A. Banks (Artist)**, is an award winning actress, writer, director, producer, choreographer, motivational speaker, and teacher. She can be seen in Hilari Scarl’s documentary about the Deaf Entertainers, SEE WHAT I’M SAYING. Michelle was chosen as one of 13 actors for NYC’s 2008 ABC Diversity Talent Showcase.  She has appeared in plays such as STORY THEATRE with Open Circle Theatre, BIG RIVER at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, CA and at Ford’s Theatre in Washington, DC, and FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF at the Los Angeles’s Globe Playhouse. After Michelle received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama Studies from the State University of New York at Purchase, she founded Onyx Theatre Company in New York City, the first deaf theater company in the United States for people of color. She was featured article in the February 1998 issue of ESSENCE magazine.

**Joy Elan** **(Artist)** Joy Elan is from Oakland and Berkeley, CA. She received her BA in African American Studies at UC Berkeley and her MA in Education at Stanford University. She performs her poetry at Hot Water Cornbread's Mouth Off Wednesdays and other open mic venues and events around the Bay Area.

**National Deaf Dance Theater** **(NDDT) (Artist)**, is an unique professional dance troupe that was founded in January 1988. Touring internationally, this group blends a high energy dance with American Sign Language and theatre. NDDT believes that dance and theatre should be enlightening as well as entertaining within the deaf/hard of hearing and hearing communities. NDDT is one of the foundations that help several performing arts group surviving over a long period of time. Members of NDDT include deaf and hearing performers with a wide variety of performing experiences, including Gallaudet Dance Company, Deaf Dimensions, Talking Hands, Invisible Hands, DuPont Alley Dance Company, JamCrew, Rochester Institute of Technology, University of Pennsylvannia at School of Performing Arts and many other theatrical afflictions. NDDT has appeared in well-known DANCE Magazine.

**The Wild Zappers (Artist)** are an all deaf male dance company, founded by Irvine Stewart with support of Fred Michael Beam and Warren "Wawa" Snipe in 1989. It was originally created to give deaf male dancers an opportunity to dance together and promote cultural/educational awareness through entertainment within deaf and hearing communities. Members of WZ, mostly Jazz/Funk/Hip Hop dancers have wide variety of performing experiences including Gallaudet Dance Company, Rochester Institute of Technology Dance Company, DuPont Alley Dance Company, National Theatre of Deaf, Penn Vision Dance Company, Center Stage at Baltimore, Md., J.F. Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Deaf West and many theatrical affiliations.

**Lux Aeterna Dance Company** **(Artist)** founded in April 2006, is an interdisciplinary dance and physical theater company, committed to the creation of an eclectic and powerful dance vocabulary through the fusion of various movement forms, such as ballet, modern, Brazilian capoeira, gymnastics, circus and aerial arts, body-to-body partnering, and most importantly, breaking (also known as break-dancing). Our mission is to cultivate beauty from sources that might not be considered beautiful, in and of themselves - elevating, evolving, and adapting these sources of movement into something transcendent and radiant. Lux is the recipient of the 2008 Lester Horton Dance Awards for Best Male Dancer and Best Choreographer: Short Form, as well as the 2007 Lester Horton Dance Award for Best Company Performance. And funded by the Durfee Foundation, the Ford Foundation (via the Hip Hop Theater Festival), and the Flourish Foundation.

**TL Forsberg** **(Artist)** is a hard of hearing singer/actress who distinctly identifies as "Deaf." A graduate of George Brown Theatre School, Forsberg performed as the singer/front person for the band KRIYA which opened for Alanis Morissette and Tori Amos at Molson Canadian Amphitheatre in 1999. Forsberg, is perhaps most known for her candidacy as the hard of hearing singer as one of four subjects, along with CJ Jones, Bob Hilterman, Robert De Mayo profiled in the 2010 award winning documentary See What I'm Saying: The Deaf Entertainers Documentary.

**ABOUT URBAN JAZZ DANCE COMPANY:**

Urban Jazz Dance Company is a convergence of artistic forces, where raw energy is rooted in an athletic expression of freedom and passion, featuring the syncopation of urban jazz rhythms.  These dancers are a mix of trained deaf and hearing dancers from all over the world.  The mission of Urban Jazz Dance is to provide opportunities for deaf and disabled artists to contribute to the arts and the larger society and to promote the educational awareness of Deaf issues through the performing arts. The company values the importance of play and performance to connect cultures of all races, ages, disability and backgrounds to live their dreams.

Founded in 2010 Urban Jazz Dance provides a home for aspiring performing artists, to hone their artistic skills, with the objective of

* guiding artists in discovering the depths of their creativity, not only through instruction, but by providing outlets for them to express their artistry and share their talents with the world;
* building a professional dance company that brings inspiration to the world through movement;
* expressing dance in art through an integration of movement and diverse, live music;
* cultivating an enriching environment that is fully-accessible to those wanting to express themselves, including the deaf, disabled, and low-income—no matter the age; and
* creating a haven from impeding societal burdens (drugs, violence, discrimination, etc.)

Urban Jazz Dance performs locally and nationally, celebrating the abilities, strength and history of deaf and Disability performers in the arts.

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**For Calendar Editors**

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When: August 9-11, Fri-Sun @ 7:30pm

Where: Dance Mission Theater, 3316 24th St, SF CA 94110

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