**For Immediate Release**

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Press photos available upon request \* Please contact for interviews (we can provide interpreters)

Urban Jazz Dance in collaboration with Dance Mission Theater presents

**DEAF LOUDER: The 2nd Bay Area Deaf Dance Festival**

August 8-10, 2014 \* Fri-Sat, 8:30pm; Sun, 4pm

Tickets: $25 \* brownpapertickets.com or 1800-838-3006

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

Urban Jazz Dance is proud to announce **DEAF LOUDER: The 2nd** **Bay Area Deaf Dance Festival** (BADDF). The festival celebrates the artistic talents of hearing-impaired performing artist (dance, music) and highlights the ways in which hearing and deaf artists can collaborate with exciting results. Participating artists include: **Antoine Hunter** (also festival artistic director), **Def Motion** (from London), **Michelle Banks**, **Fred Beam**, **Half N Half**, **Joey Antonio**, **CODA Brothas**, Deaf rapper **James L Taylor the 3rd,** and poet **Joy Elan.** The festival debuted last year and was applauded for both its artistry and its celebration of deaf artists of color (as often the small part of the deaf culture that *is* visible to the mainstream is a white one).

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.

**Def Motion (Artist)** is the UK’s only all deaf dance crew. Def Motion was formed by Billy Read in March 2011 in collaboration with Deaf choreographer Rebecca Ann Withey. Together they recruited young, talented individuals and set out their ambitions to create and perform visual entertainment through dance and sign-song. Their style is predominantly Street Dance, Hip Hop, Contemporary, and Jazz.

**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."

**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 Theater 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)** 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.

**Fred Beam (Artist)** is a familiar face—or at least a familiar name—to many in the Deaf Community, thanks to his performances with the acclaimed all-male Deaf dance troupe, the Wild Zappers, which he now directs. This high-energy troupe uses not just dance, but gesture, storytelling, and physical theater to great effect. The Zappers have zapped deaf and hearing audiences across the nation and abroad; they've performed at prestigious venues like the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., and the Apollo Theatre in Harlem. Actor, dancer, choreographer, and director, the charismatic Beam was recently elected President of the National Deaf Black Advocates. He has won several awards for his work. For his outstanding work in the community, he was chosen one of **Essence's** 2006 "Real Men of the Year."

He's currently director of the award-winning Invisible Hands, Inc., which promotes Deaf awareness through performing arts. One of his ambitions is to establish a performing-arts studio for deaf people, especially ethnic minorities and Deaf people of color. He'd also like to break into TV or movies, so that Black Deaf people gain more visibility. And, of course, he'll keep dancing.

**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**

What: Urban Jazz Dance presents Bay Area Dance Deaf Festival

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

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

Tickets: $25; available at brownpapertickets.com or 1800-838-3006

Info: dancemission.com; 415-826-4441