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Arts, Race and Social Justice:
A Conversation with Sylvia Waters, Renee Robinson and Walter Belcher
Presented by The Boeing Company
Through Monday February 28 (recorded presentation)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 14, 2022 (Mesa, AZ) Mesa Arts Center is excited to announce **Arts, Race and Social Justice: A Conversation with Sylvia Waters, Renee Robinson and Walter Belcher.**

The talk explores how race and social justice have influenced the arts. Walter Belcher (Singer, Actor, Director, Social Justice Advocate) will lead Sylvia Waters (Artistic Director Emerita, Alley II) and Renee Robinson (Alvin Ailey Dance Instructor) in conversation about the impact, challenges and personal experiences they have had in the arts in relation to race and social justice. Giving them a chance to openly discuss the impact Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater has had and examining the question: *How can we use the power of art to promote greater inclusivity, representation and healing in America?*

The recorded presentation will be available for viewing on Mesa Arts Center's website through Monday, February 28. To view the presentation
<https://www.mesaartscenter.com/index.php/events/arts-race-and-social-justice>

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About Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Celebrating over 60 years of unparalleled artistry, this performing arts community plays a crucial social role, using the beauty and humanity of the African American heritage and other cultures to unite people of all races, ages and backgrounds. Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater never fails to remind us of the power of dance to bring people together.

ABOUT SYLIVA WATERS

Sylvia Waters began her dance studies in junior high and earned her Bachelor of Science in Dance from The Juilliard School. As a professional dancer, she toured in the European company of Black Nativity, as well as in Donald McKayle's Black New World. She also worked with Maurice Béjart's company in Brussels and at the Summer Olympics in Mexico City. As a member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ms. Waters toured the globe as a principal dancer before shifting her focus to Ailey II when Alvin Ailey chose her to become the artistic director. She is the recipient of honorary doctorates from the State University of New York at Oswego and The Juilliard School. She has received a "Bessie" Award, the Legacy Award as part of the 20th Annual IABD Festival, Syracuse University's Women of Distinction Award, and the prestigious Dance Magazine Award. Ms. Waters served on panels including the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Princess Grace Awards. Currently, she leads The Ailey Legacy Residency, a lecture, technique, and repertory program for college-level students that looks definitively into the history and creative heritage of Alvin Ailey. She is also a consultant to the Ailey Archives.

ABOUT RENEE ROBINSON

Renee Robinson (Washington, D.C.) began her training in classical ballet at the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet. She was the recipient of two Ford Foundation scholarships to the School of American Ballet and was awarded full scholarships to the Dance Theatre of Harlem School and The Ailey School, where she danced as a member of Ailey II. Ms. Robinson was a member of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 1981 to 2012, during which time she performed principal roles in several of Mr. Ailey's ballets including Revelations, Cry, Memoria, Blues Suite, and others. She danced in works choreographed by renowned choreographers such as Robert Battle, Judith Jamison, Lar Lubovitch, Ulysses Dove, Talley Beatty, Garth Fagan, Kyle Abraham, Ronald K. Brown, Elisa Monte, and Matthew Rushing.

Ms. Robinson performed at the White House State Dinner in 2003 in honor of the President of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, and at the White House Dance Series in 2010. Recently, Ms. Robinson was honored with the prestigious Dance Magazine Award. She is a master teaching artist with Ailey Arts in Education and is a faculty member at Yale University teaching under the Dance Studies Curriculum.

ABOUT WALTER BELCHER

Walter Belcher Singer/Actor/Director/Social Justice Advocate hails from Cleveland Ohio and lives in Phoenix Arizona, where he is a staple part of the arts community. After pursuing his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre from the University of Arizona, Walter garnered international recognition touring Switzerland as the featured soloist for the Swiss military orchestra. A few of Walter's diverse theatre credits include (Billy Flynn in Chicago, Mr. Tambo in Scottsboro Boys, & Gabriel in Fences) Walter's acting career spans film, T.V., and stage. He has entertained in regional theatres, coliseums, and concert halls worldwide for such prestigious names as Former President Bill Clinton, Colin Powell, and Pope John Paul II. His film credits with feature roles include (Driven to

Dance, Exit to Hell) and regional and national commercials credits including (Allstate, Trident, Eegees). Walter is currently the Director of the internationally acclaimed Up with People show.

In addition to his love of the arts, Walter has dedicated much of his career to social justice causes, and youth development. Most recently, joining the efforts to aid the United Nations in achieving the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals, working as an AmeriCorps' vista, facilitating educational/leadership training for the federal Job Corps program, designing arts-based curriculums celebrating diversity, equity, and inclusion among youth world-wide, and his proud participation in the BIPOC theatre podcast "sipping tea in the balcony. As a result of successfully integrated his love of theatre arts with his passion for social justice, Walter co-created two youth programs of which he is currently the director, Camp Up with People, a nonprofit arts and social justice program for teens, and Up with People Jr for 8 – 12-year-olds which has been launched internationally in Canada, Belgium, and the USA. Today Walter continues to use the arts as a catalyst for betterment, and social change.

ABOUT MESA ARTS CENTER

Mesa Arts Center, owned and operated by the City of Mesa, is a unique, architecturally stunning, international award-winning facility located in the heart of downtown Mesa. Arizona's largest arts center is home to four theaters, five art galleries, and 14 art studios. Guests, patrons, and students come to Mesa Arts Center to enjoy the finest live entertainment and performances, world-class visual art exhibitions, and outstanding arts education classes. The facility is an architectural showpiece and a destination for visitors to the Phoenix area. Mesa Arts Center's mission is to invite all people to create and discover entertaining, challenging and diverse art and arts experiences within joyous, dynamic and welcoming environments. For more information, visit mesaartscenter.com.