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Photo: Rob Li

A Cross-Cultural Encounter: DanceVisions' Full Circle

by Ziying Cui

As part of the 2024 Fringe Festival, the hour-long Full Circle concert at the Performance Garage features a hybrid dance work by [DanceVisions'](#) Resident Artists: Dr. yaTande Whitney V. Hunter (2022), Weiwei Ma (2023), Meredith Rainey (2024), as well as Dana Williams's work for the [YouthMoves](#) program. The four choreographers, each with their distinct background in modern, West African, Afro-Caribbean dance, Chinese dance, and ballet, offer the audience a vibrant cross-cultural experience.

William's energetic group dance, *Faluma/Makelele*, opens the show. Students from Franklin Learning Center, clad in bright red tops and skirts, stomp with the beat of percussive music while swiftly swaying their hips. The fusion of Caribbean movement vocabulary, [Katherine Dunham's](#) modern dance, and dancers' athletic stunts, such as aerial splits and a series of somersaults, creates a dazzling performance celebrating Blackness.

Also drawing from African traditions is Hunter's *Prelude: Site of Becoming*. Inspired by the Vodun religion of West Africa, the piece highlights the belief in natural materials. Four dancers, dressed in simple white dashiki dresses, emerge from beneath black "soil" (represented by blankets). Hunter, portrayed as a priest and guide, raises his arms as invoking divine will to lead the dancers to gather the "soil" into a large bag, dancing in reverence to the supernatural power of this new creation. The music, a mix of African drums and Jazz-inspired saxophone, accompanies each dancer as they perform solos, expressing different emotions, including excitement, struggle, madness, and peace. The group dance incorporates downward movements, deep knee bends, foot stomping, and hand clapping, emphasizing embodied rhythm. Hunter's return to the stage concludes the ritual, with his spinning and bending body serving as the final gesture.

While the first two pieces delve into Black cultural traditions, Rainey's duet works, *Building* and *This Is It/It Is This*, explore intimate male-female relationships. Wearing ballet slippers and cobalt blue jumpsuits, Rainey and his partner, Chandra Moss-Thorne, deliver a

seamless collaboration, performing dynamic lifts and expressive movements. Their fluid exchanges of pushes, runs, leans, and falls, set to piano music, capture the tensions and frustrations of a couple's relationship. In the second duet, the dancers' plain black and white tank tops and shorts accentuate their sinewy physiques. The traditional ballet dynamic—where the man leads and the woman follows—highlights the power imbalance between the dancers. The male dancer's explosive leaps contrast sharply with the female dancer's graceful high-leg extensions throughout the piece.

The concert's finale features excerpts of Ma's *24 Solar Term* that draw inspiration from the Chinese solar calendar. The dancers wear traditional Chinese folk costumes, with overlapping mandarin collars, and perform Chinese dance movements like orchid hands and quick small steps on tiptoes. Ma's choreography represents seasonal terms such as "Grain in Ear," "Grain Rain," "Awakening of Insects," and "Start of Spring." In the "Grain in Ear" sequence, six dancers, mimicking farmers planting crops, move rapidly to the beat of a Chinese opera drum. They walk backward in unison, kneeling on the floor in rhythmic succession, their heaving chests echoing the breath sounds in the music. In "Grain Rain," a female quartet uses frozen gestures and delicate body movements to mimic the unpredictable drops of water. The dance peaks with the celebration of the "Start of Spring," where dancers' arms sway gently in unison, as if blown by a soft breeze, evoking the liveliness of willow branches in the wind. The dancers' fluid, improvised movements encapsulate the vitality of spring, maintaining the energy until the stage fades to black.

Through their varied cultural and artistic perspectives, the four choreographers showcase the diversity and inclusivity of Philadelphia's contemporary dance scene. While the hybrid performance offers audiences a dynamic and eclectic experience, I believe each choreographer deserves the opportunity to present a full concert dedicated to their individual work.

[Full Circle](#), DanceVisions, The Performance Garage, Fringe Festival, September 13 and 14.

Homepage Image Description: The poster of the Full Circle features portraits of the four choreographers, from left to right, Meredith Rainey, Weiwei Ma, Dr. yaTande Whitney V. Hunter, and Dana Williams.

Article image description: Weiwei Ma, dressed in a linen outfit, strikes a deep lunge against a dark background. With a branch of cherry blossom resting on her right shoulder, she arches her chest backward, gazing up toward the sky.

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