

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Cleo Parker Robinson

PERSON

Robinson, Cleo Parker

Alternative Names: Cleo Parker Robinson;

Life Dates: July 17, 1948-

Place of Birth: Denver, Colorado, USA

Work: Denver, CO

Occupations: Dancer; Artistic Director

Biographical Note

Artistic director and dancer Cleo Parker Robinson Cleo Parker Robinson was born on July 17, 1948 in Denver, Colorado. She almost died at age ten when her kidneys shut down and a segregated Dallas hospital did not admit her quickly enough to prevent heart failure. A doctor told her she would remain bedridden her entire life, but Robinson refused to believe that. She threw herself into dancing in order to overcome the pain of her body and the racism she faced. Today, she is the executive artistic director and choreographer of the Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble.

Robinson began teaching dance at the University of Colorado at the age of fifteen. She graduated from the Colorado Women's College (now Denver University), having focused on dance, education and psychology. She studied with legendary dancer and humanitarian Katherine Dunham and then founded her own company in 1970. The mission of this ensemble is to foster appreciation, access and the development of new audiences for dance. Robinson attempts to educate audiences about the rich heritage and ancestral gifts on which this predominately African American ensemble draws through a year-round dance school, an international summer dance institute and national and international performances. Robinson also seeks to ensure the arts are carried on by future generations. A program called Project Self-Discovery (PSD) demonstrates her commitment to youth outreach. PSD provides the arts to at-risk Denver youth as an alternative to gang activity, substance abuse and other tragic possibilities. The Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble has performed in prisons, and some inmates have worked for the company after release. Robinson firmly believes in the healing power of art and that dance is a universal language.

Robinson has collaborated with many people on diverse projects, from operas such as Aida and Carmen to commissions with mentor Maya Angelou. She has worked with

Marin Alsop, conductor of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, on such pieces as Porgy and Bess and Stravinsky's The Firebird. She has been granted choreography fellowships from the Colorado Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Lila Wallace Foundation, among others. Robinson was featured in the Gordon Parks film, Run Sister Run. She serves as first vice president of the International Association of Blacks in Dance and as a Denver Center for the Performing Arts Board of Trustees member.

Related Entries

St. Anthony Academy [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

George Washington High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Colorado Women's College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Hill Campus of Arts & Sciences [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

[STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

University of Colorado [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 201009 to ?]

Dance Instructor

Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1970 to ?]

Founder