



KEVIN IEGA JEFF

## LONG BIOGRAPHY

Kevin Iega Jeff is an accomplished dancer, award-winning choreographer, acclaimed artistic director, respected dance educator, and innovative executive leader. He creates transcendent works while inspiring those around him to foster extraordinary lives, onstage and off, through dance, management, and art-making. In 2005, the Juilliard School named Iega as one of its 100 Outstanding Alumni in celebration of the school's centenary anniversary, an honor he shares with many, including Viola Davis, Aretha Franklin, Tyler Perry, Nina Simone, and Robin Williams. In January 2020, Newcity magazine recognized Iega among the top 10 Players 2020: The Fifty People Who Really Perform for Chicago. That same month, Mayor Lori Lightfoot appointed him to the City of Chicago's Cultural Advisory Council of the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. He has also received recognition from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Council for Culture and Art, the Chicago Black Theater Alliance Awards, the Chicago Dancemakers Forum Lab Artist program, and the Field Foundation's 2022 Leaders for a New Chicago award.

As a performer, Iega appeared on Broadway in *The Wiz* and *Comin' Uptown*. His television performances include the 1994 Academy Awards where he danced the role of The Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* with "America's Ballerina" Cynthia Gregory, choreographed by Debbie Allen.

Iega has created more than fifty works, ranging from solos to large-scale company dances. He has choreographed for renowned theater companies throughout the United States and abroad and continuously receives commissions for new and repertory works by internationally renowned companies. Commissions include the Dallas Black Dance Theater (Nia Keii); D.C. Contemporary Dance Theater (*In a Child's Eye*); Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble (*Church of Nations*); Ailey II (*Seeds*); Chicago's Goodman Theater (*By the Music of the Spheres*); Wylliams/Henry Dance Theater (*Naeemah's Room*, and *We Dance*); River North Dance Company (*Sky* and

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Dawn); SUNY Purchase and Howard University dance programs; and the 1996 Summer Olympics Festival (Walls); Collage Dance Collective (Dawn, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Lamps, and Mood).

Theater direction and choreography credits include Black Nativity at Penumbra Theater; Oedipus the King at Hartford Stage; an international tour of Porgy and Bess for Living Arts, Inc.; and Goshen, a new gospel musical currently in development. His film work includes choreography for Spike Lee's She's Gotta Have It.

As a community-centric artist, lega collaborates on a wide range of professional and community-based projects across the globe. His collaborations include Grit & Grace, Swamp Gravy, Cross Tides, and Scrap Mettle SOUL, all with Community Performance International, Inc.

lega has taught and lectured nationally and internationally at universities, colleges, and cultural institutions, including Howard University, Purdue University, Point Park University, The Fry Museum, the University of Kansas City Missouri, The University of Chicago, UMass, and the University of Kwazulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa.

A native New Yorker, lega began studying dance and choreography at The Bernice Johnson Cultural Arts Center in Jamaica, Queens, NY. In 1982, he founded JUBILATION! Dance Company in Brooklyn, NY, which toured internationally for over ten years. JUBILATION! began lega's pursuit to choreograph new works and train new generations of dancers and choreographers in an Afrocentric environment. After the profound impact of AIDS on the company and dance community, he co-founded Deeply Rooted Dance Theater in Chicago in 1995 where he continues to serve today as Co- Founder and Artistic/Executive Director Emeritus. lega established the vision and laid the foundation for the forthcoming Deeply Rooted Center for Black Dance and Creative Communities. The 33,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility will be a home for Deeply Rooted Dance Theater and partner organizations, a conservatory for Black dance excellence, and a community center for world citizen artistic creativity. The Deeply Rooted Dance Center is scheduled to open in the spring of 2025.

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After 24 years of artistic and executive leadership, Iega stepped down as Artistic Director of Deeply Rooted Dance Theater in September 2019 and as Executive Director in December 2022 to continue his leadership role as Emeritus and pursue new collaborative endeavors. Iega established Deeply Rooted's new Special Projects division to create interdisciplinary works for expanded markets. Under Iega's direction, GOSHEN, with music by Grammy Award winner Donald Lawrence, is the first special project in development.

Speaking about his work, personal philosophy, and mission, Iega shares: "I am made possible by the energies of Creation and influenced by the ancestors and mentors who have come before me. I am because they were and are. I am born liberated into the possibility of me and empowered by free thought. I pray to be respectful and courageous and to think wisely. I strive to analyze and dismantle oppressive thoughts and systems through forums that inspire human evolution with creativity. I want my work to grow truer, more focused, and relevant as time passes. My artistic practice is borne out of personal and human examination, and my desire to communicate authentically informs what I create. For me, dance and art-making are a perfect catalyst for revealing the genius inherited within our spiritual and cellular beings, reflecting who we are and who we strive to become."