

“We Danced Anyway”

Program Notes

Music and movement have always shared an unbreakable bond. Across cultures and centuries, dance has served as a vessel for celebration, worship, labor, and the expression of emotions that words alone cannot hold. Tonight's program, *We Danced Anyway*, explores the many dimensions of this connection — the ways music invites us to move physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Each work reflects a distinct tradition of dance: from the vitality of African American folk forms to the introspective journey of the American spiritual, from the groove of Southern juke joints to the quiet choreography of everyday resilience. Together, they tell a story not just about movement, but about the human impulse to keep dancing — even when life makes it difficult.

Symphonic Dance No. 1

Carol Brittin Chambers (b. 1970)

Carol Brittin Chambers opens the evening with a work that does exactly what its title promises: it dances. Bold rhythmic gestures, gleaming brass fanfares, and intricate woodwind exchanges propel the music forward with a sense of joyful inevitability. Chambers — one of the most widely performed composers for wind band today — has a gift for writing music that feels both inevitable and surprising, balancing moments of high energy with lyrical breathing room before launching again into its rhythmic drive.

Symphonic Dance No. 1 sets the program in motion, inviting the audience into an evening where rhythm and momentum are at the center of everything.

Juba Dance

Florence Price (1887–1953)

Arranged by Jay Bocook

Florence Price occupies a singular place in American music history as the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra. Her work drew deeply from African American musical traditions — spirituals, folk melodies, and the rhythms of communal life — woven seamlessly into classical forms.

The Juba was a dance that emerged among enslaved African Americans in the nineteenth century, born of necessity and ingenuity. Because drums were frequently prohibited, dancers created intricate rhythms through clapping, stomping, and patting their bodies — transforming movement itself into percussion. It was music made without instruments, community forged under constraint.

Price captured the vitality of this tradition in the third movement of her *First Symphony*. Jay Bocook's arrangement for wind band preserves her syncopation, her playful melodic wit, and the rhythmic momentum that makes the Juba feel both historically rooted and utterly alive.

Wayfaring Stranger

Traditional American Folk Song
Arranged by Christopher Nelson

In contrast to the rhythmic energy surrounding it, Wayfaring Stranger offers the program its still center. This enduring American folk song tells the story of a traveler pressing through hardship toward the promise of peace — a journey as old as human experience.

Christopher Nelson's arrangement draws out the expressive warmth of the wind ensemble, allowing the melody to unfold with restraint and grace. The accompaniment remains spare, leaving space for the tune's quiet ache to resonate. Within tonight's arc, this is a different kind of movement entirely — the inward journey of perseverance, faith, and contemplation.

Shine On Me

Erin Keeton Howard (b. 1983)

Erin Keeton Howard's Shine On Me draws from the deep well of the African American spiritual tradition — music rooted in communal faith, collective endurance, and the transforming power of shared song. Howard does not seek to replicate this tradition so much as to inhabit its spirit, crafting a work of genuine warmth and emotional depth.

The piece builds through lyrical melodies and rich harmonic textures that evoke voices rising together. Rather than showcasing technical display, Howard's writing centers expressive phrasing and a sense of communal storytelling. Shine On Me is, at its heart, music of affirmation — an invitation to sit with the power of community, of hope, and of our shared humanity.

Proud of Me

Michele Fernández (b. 1977)

Michele Fernández composed Proud of Me as a musical letter of encouragement — to listeners, to young musicians, and perhaps to herself. The work celebrates the act of recognizing one's own growth while honoring the people and experiences that shaped the journey.

Fernández's writing moves fluidly between quiet introspection and energetic optimism, allowing the ensemble to express both vulnerability and strength. Uplifting melodies and warm harmonies carry the music forward, even through its more reflective passages. Within the context of tonight's program, Proud of Me reminds us that sometimes the most meaningful dance is the one we perform through the ordinary challenges and quiet triumphs of everyday life.

The Rusty Bucket (and Other Juke Joints)

Carol Brittin Chambers (b. 1970)

The evening closes where music has always lived — on the dance floor. Carol Brittin Chambers returns with *The Rusty Bucket (and Other Juke Joints)*, a spirited tribute to the informal Southern venues where live music, community, and movement converged throughout the twentieth century. Juke joints were spaces of joy and belonging, where the blues and jazz provided the soundtrack to lives fully and defiantly lived.

Chambers captures that energy with precision and delight: syncopated rhythms, colorful percussion, and bold ensemble writing that evokes the heat and energy of a crowded room. It is music that doesn't ask you to sit still.

We Danced Anyway ends, as it must, with dancing — a celebration of the enduring human impulse to gather, to move, and to affirm life through sound.
