

MEET OUR ALUMNI

**Antoine Hunter** *Dance*

Award-winning African American Deaf choreographer, dancer, instructor, actor, poet, producer, and Deaf advocate. He is founder and Artistic Director of both Urban Jazz Dance Company and the Bay Area International Deaf Dance Festival.

**Monserrat Armendaris-Ibarria** *Dance*

Monserrat received her BA in Sociology, with a minor in American Studies and Chicano Studies from UC Merced, and a Masters in teaching at University of Southern California. She is currently an education specialist.

**Paola Meza Rojas** *Voice*

Paola joined the Young Artist Diploma Program at the start of her junior year at Kennedy High in Richmond, and now attends San Francisco State University studying music.

**Simmie Foster** *Piano*

Simmie followed an educational path that would lead to a BA in Molecular & Cell Biology from UC Berkeley and an MD & PhD from Yale. She's currently an Instructor in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.

**Jamar Welch** *Theater, Hip Hop Dance*

Jamar was the Artistic Director/Co-founder of the Hip Hop Dance Company, "Housin' Authority." He has worked with Michael Jackson, Madonna, Usher, Beyoncé, and Diana Ross, while also teaching at the Center for 20 years.

**Danny Sandoval** *Jazz Saxophone*

Danny started playing semi-professionally when he was 16, playing up to five nights a week in San Francisco, paying his way through college. He now works at the California Health Care Foundation in Sacramento.

**Mayra Padilla** *Dance, Theater*

Mayra received a BS in Applied Physics from UC Davis and a PhD in Neuroscience from UC Berkeley. Today, she is the Dean of Institutional Effectiveness & Equity at Contra Costa College and is VP of the Center's Board of Directors.

**Alder Duan Hurley** *Saxophone*

Alder graduated from Dartmouth College in 2019 where they studied computer science and continued to play jazz. They went on to work as a software engineer and now as a poet.

**Gonzalo Rucobo** *Dance, Steel Pans*

In 2005, Gonzalo co-founded Bay Area Peacekeepers, a gang intervention program designed to touch those individuals that the community and society had given up on. He continues to serve as ED of this organization.

**Ricardo Esquivias** *Son, Violin*

Ricardo attended Sarah Lawrence College, where he studied dance. After graduation, he worked as an AmeriCorps volunteer, teaching dance to children. In 2011, he joined the staff of City Year New Hampshire.

**Joel Calderón** *Double Bass*

Joel has worked closely with Center faculty to develop a student music group at Richmond High, a group that is now 25 members strong. Joel attended UC Berkeley where he studied Astrophysics and Music.

**Selah Laigo** *Piano, Ballet, West African Dance*

The Center has been a second home to Selah since the age of four. Selah studied Humanities for medicine at Dominican University and is now assisting with biochemistry research there.

**Chloe Dichoso** *Voice*

Chloe recently graduated from California State University Long Beach, where she received a Bachelor's of Science in Healthcare Administration. She continues to sing and even sang the National Anthem at a Giants game recently.

**Richard Zhu** *Piano*

Richard continued studying piano at UC Berkeley, as well as earning his BS in Business. He is currently a Vice President of Investment Solutions at Merrill Lynch. He also serves as Treasurer on the Center's Board of Directors.

**Marshall Hooper** *Trumpet*

Marshall graduated from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, with a Major in Business Finance. He credits the mentorship he received at the Center for his success.

**Father Maseo Gonzales** *Hip Hop Music*

Fr Maseo founded El Padrecito Ministries, a nonprofit which brings faith and the arts together in the service of empowering youth. Over the years, he has provided guidance to over 10,000 youth throughout the country.

**Abigail Armendaris** *Hip Hop, Ballet, Son*

Abigail studied theater design/criminology at Contra Costa College, pursuing a career in lighting design and juvenile reentry programs. She studied in Ghana and danced at the Ghanaian National Theater.

**Monique Woods** *Voice*

Monique is a Bay Area vocal artist who goes by the stage name "MoeSoul," performing with local and national recording artists. She also works for the Alameda County Probation Department as a Juvenile Institutional Officer.

**Henry Benitez** *Guitar, Steel Pans, Voice*

Henry moved with his family to California from El Salvador at the age of 9. Henry attributes the Center for his deep commitment to his community. He graduated from UCLA in 2018 and hopes to attend law school in the near future.

**Matt Eakle** *Flute*

Matt began studying flute at the Center soon after it opened in 1968. He has gone on to become an accomplished jazz and classical flutist, playing with musicians such as Dave Grisman, Bonnie Raitt and Jerry Garcia.

**Liam Collins** *Saxophone*

Liam graduated from UCLA, with a degrees in Ethnomusicology and Economics and as a member of the UCLA Jazz Orchestra. He pursued a Master's degree in Quantitative economics at Paris school of Economics and is now working as a Data Analyst.

**Pablo Puente** *Voice, Piano, Aerial Dance*

Awarded a full scholarship to Wesleyan University where he studied songwriting with a minor in West African Dance. Pablo is now back at the Center teaching circus classes and helping out at the front desk.