



Charlique C. Rolle, photo by John R. Boehm

The African American Arts Alliance of Chicago names a new president for the first time in 25 years, succeeding Jackie Taylor

New President **Charlique C. Rolle is an arts administrator and interdisciplinary artist, executive director of Congo Square Theatre Company and a 2023 Chicago Urban League IMPACT Fellow**

****Vershawn Sanders-Ward**, founder and CEO of Red Clay Dance Company, named Alliance's new vice president**

Alliance presenting Black Arts Month in October, with public programs highlighting Black artists and industry-specific events

CHICAGO (August 21, 2023)—The nonprofit [African American Arts Alliance of Chicago](#) is pleased to announce **Charlique C. Rolle** as its new board president, effective immediately. Rolle is the first new president in the Alliance's 26-year history, following the celebrated tenure of founding president Jackie Taylor. Joining Rolle as the new vice president of the Alliance is **Vershawn Sanders-Ward**.

Rolle brings extensive experience to the Alliance, having worked for over a decade as an arts administrator, interdisciplinary artist, choreographer, director, producer, actor and writer. She is the current executive director of Congo Square Theatre Company and a 2023 Chicago Urban League IMPACT Fellow. For the past three years, Rolle has served as a board member of the African American Arts Alliance and developed signature events for the organization, including its Black United Theatre and Black United Dance auditions, as well as producing the Alliance's annual Black Excellence Awards.

"It truly is an incredible honor to stand upon the shoulders of the Alliance's founders, whose dream and vision was to ensure that Black artists and organizations had a place that not only reflected them, but represented them," says President **Charlique C. Rolle**. "As I step into this role, I express my deepest gratitude to Jackie Taylor, the Alliance's founding president for the past 25 years. Twenty-five years of Black excellence in serving our community is a legacy that I do not take lightly. I am so honored and ready to continue to carry the mantle into this next era—honoring our history, deepening our community, and elevating our future."

In 1997, founders Jackie Taylor, Joan Gray, Chuck Smith and Ron O.J. Parson saw a great need for community interaction and development, and incorporated as a new African American Arts Alliance to build upon the rich history of the original Black Theatre Alliance, expanding to serve the needs of Black performing, visual, literary, technical and design art forms.

“I am so proud to be transferring the Alliance to a new leadership team,” says Founding President **Jackie Taylor**. “I’m proud of the fact that we were able to sustain this vital and important organization through the past twenty-five years, and I am looking forward to seeing Charlique C. Rolle and Vershawn Sanders-Ward usher in a new phase for the Alliance.”

This October, the African American Arts Alliance presents its **Black Arts Month** programming, a series of public events highlighting Black artists from across Chicago, as well as industry-specific events for Alliance members. Registration for new individual, organizational, and affiliate memberships will open on September 1, and all new members who register by October 31, 2023, will receive 15% off their Alliance membership fee. More information is available at www.aaaachicago.org.

Public programming for Black Arts Month includes the following events across the city:

- Monday, October 9 from 7-9 p.m.: Black Arts Month Kick-off and North Side Convening at Black Ensemble Theater (4450 N. Clark Street, Chicago)
- Monday, October 16 from 7-9 p.m.: Black Arts Month South Side Convening at Retreat at Currency Exchange (305 E. Garfield Boulevard, Chicago)
- Monday, October 23 from 7-9 p.m.: Black Arts Month West Side Convening at Muse Coffee Studio (747 S. Western Avenue, Chicago)

More details about the featured artists, companies and performances for Black Arts Month will be announced in September.

Bio for Charlique C. Rolle

Charlique C. Rolle is an arts administrator, interdisciplinary artist, choreographer, director, producer, playwright, actor, writer, poet, and Executive Director of Congo Square Theatre. Rolle holds a BA in Dance (Summa Cum Laude) from Missouri Valley College with minors in Theatre and Business, an MA in Ministry Leadership from Moody Theological Seminary, and an MBA from Concordia University Chicago.

As an artist, her work has been featured throughout the US and the Bahamas. Rolle was named as one of *Newcity's* “Players 2022: The Fifty People Who Really Perform for Chicago,” and is a 2023 IMPACT Fellow with the Chicago Urban League and the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business.

Rolle is proud to be an advocate and organizer in the Chicago arts and culture sector, serving as a board member for the League of Chicago Theatres, a member of Arts Alliance Illinois' Arts Leadership Council, various local and national committees for the arts, arts advocacy, grantmaking and social justice efforts. In 2023, Rolle served as a team lead of a group of advocates with Arts Alliance Illinois for Capital Day in Springfield. Rolle is also a member of Chicago Women in Philanthropy and Chicago African Americans in Philanthropy. Additionally, Rolle serves as the Associate National Director of the August Wilson New Voices Competition (a partnership between the August Wilson Legacy, LLC., the Goodman Theatre, and Gilded Road Productions) and is an Adjunct Professor at The Theatre School at DePaul University.

A Bahamas native, Rolle's passions are telling Black stories of the diaspora, creating works that catalyze healing, freedom, and transformation, and providing resources and structures for artists and communities to breed creative freedom, sustainability, and longevity. She is deeply committed to utilizing the arts as a means of community organizing, community healing, and community, societal, and

economic development. She is thrilled to extend this vision in support of Black Chicago artists and arts organizations as the new President of the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago.

Bio for Vershawn Sanders-Ward

Vershawn Sanders-Ward is an *ARTIVIST* and the Founding Artistic Director & CEO of Red Clay Dance Company. Sanders-Ward, currently a candidate for Dunham Technique Certification, holds an MFA in Dance from New York University and is the first recipient of a BFA in Dance from Columbia College Chicago (Gates Millennium Scholar). Sanders-Ward is a 2022 Dance/USA Artist Fellow, 2019 Chicago Dancemakers Forum Awardee, a 2019 Harvard Business School Club of Chicago Scholar, a 2017 Dance/USA Leadership Fellow, a 2013 3Arts awardee, and a 2009 Choreography Award from Harlem Stage NYC. In 2015, 2018 and 2020, *Newcity* magazine selected Ward as one of the “Players 50, People Who Really Perform for Chicago,” and in 2023 she was inducted into *Newcity*’s “Hall of Fame.”

Her choreography has been presented in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, The Yard at Martha’s Vineyard, and internationally in Toronto, Dakar and Kampala. Vershawn is currently on the faculty at Loyola University Chicago in the Fine and Performing Arts Department and has received choreographic commissions from Columbia College Chicago, Northwestern University, Knox College, AS220, and the National Theatre in Uganda.

As an arts advocate, she serves on the Board of Trustees for Dance/USA and is the Vice President of the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago’s Board of Directors. Vershawn was selected to attend the inaugural Obama Foundation Summit for Emerging Global Leaders and has had the pleasure of gracing the cover of the *Chicago Reader* and *DEMO*, Columbia College Chicago’s Alumni Magazine.

About the African American Arts Alliance

Founded in 1997 by a group of Chicago’s leading African American artists and arts organizations, the **African American Arts Alliance of Chicago** is a nonprofit service organization dedicated to supporting and promoting Black excellence within the performing, visual, literary, technical and design art forms. The Alliance has worked to increase interaction, communication and collaboration within the Black arts community to promote the continuing development of organizations and individual artists, as well as highlighting their accomplishments through its annual Black Excellence Awards. For more information, visit www.aaaachicago.org.

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