



# IMANI WILLIAMS

By: Emma Lambert

Imani Williams, a dancer with DanceWorks Chicago, is grateful and excited to embark on this year's *New Dances* project. He is in his third consecutive season with *New Dances* and each year has brought an abundance of growth and new lessons to be learned. From Atlanta, GA, Imani was introduced to dance at the age of 16. He began dancing at Sugarloaf Performing Arts during his junior year of high school and decided to pursue dance as a career. Prior to joining DanceWorks Chicago in 2018, he danced with Florida Dance Theater and Giordano II.

Imani was introduced to *New Dances* by friend and former DanceWorks Chicago dancer, Cameron Lasater. He auditioned for *New Dances* and was pleasantly surprised to be invited to join the *New Dances* company as “there were so many people who auditioned for it, and I was super nervous.”

When asked about working with Imani, Julie Nakagawa, Artistic Director of DanceWorks Chicago expressed that “*New Dances* has been a bookend of sorts for Imani's time with DanceWorks Chicago. He joined the *New Dances* 2018 company prior to successfully auditioning for DWC. As an original cast member of Shannon Alvis' *Heartsong*, he was part of bringing Shannon's creation to the DWC repertoire and sharing the piece in studios and on stages locally, nationally, and internationally. And now, as Imani moves on to join the ranks of DWC alumni at the conclusion of *New Dances* 2020, I hope that he feels empowered to share his personal heartsong with the world.”

Each year, Imani looks forward to the amazing group of dancers that he gets to meet. He explains that the community is what makes *New Dances* such a special opportunity for dancers in Chicago. His experience with *New Dances* has led to meeting many new people and growing his network of dancers. “When I first moved to Chicago, my outlook on dance and the dance world was very small. I was only exposed to what I auditioned for and to what I already knew was out there.” After his *New Dances* experience, he was introduced to a plethora of people in the dance community in Chicago. This aspect has continued to be one of his favorite parts of participating in *New Dances*.

While Imani has been a part of the professional dance world for several years, he explained that “the growth I have experienced with *New Dances*, I can't compare to anything else.” More importantly though, *New Dances* continuously helps him evolve as both a dancer and a person.

“With each new year of Thodos Dance Chicago and DanceWorks Chicago coming together to present *New Dances*, it only continues to grow and affect the dance community more and more.” When Imani reflected

on how *New Dances* continues to develop, he stated that he sees more dancers interested in joining each season. He explained that each year his personal network of dancers in Chicago grows, and the exposure that *New Dances* receives seems to increase.

While *New Dances* has continued to grow as an entity, its dancers have also found that they experience personal growth. When Imani thought back to some of the greatest lessons he has learned throughout his journey with the project, one of the most important takeaways was to not be so hard on himself. “It’s up to you each time you go into a new rehearsal to start over.” He explained that you shouldn’t carry what happened in your last rehearsal to your next rehearsal, no matter how tired you are. “It’s out of respect for yourself and the people in the room.”

When thinking back on favorite memories with *New Dances*, Imani expressed that he felt almost emotional when remembering the shows because he misses them so much. He also explained that the classes he took during *New Dances* held some great memories. In particular, he remembered a fond memory of taking a voguing class during his first season. “Everyone was a little hesitant taking the class at first, but eventually everyone threw themselves in it.” This stood out as a great example of the kind of community and environment that this project fosters.

It was evident from talking with Imani that he loves and cares for *New Dances* and he is honored to be in his third year, sharing “This is all going to be very ground-breaking, and there will be new discoveries that come along.” He went on to explain that “as an individual, I owe so much to *New Dances* for my journey in Chicago as a dancer, and I would just love to say thank you for that.”

