

# Carmen & Geoffrey

A documentary film by  
Linda Atkinson & Nick Doob

**79 minutes, color, 2006**



## **FIRST RUN FEATURES**

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## ABOUT THE FILM

This film is about the work of American artists Carmen de Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder, who stepped forward in the 1950's to play a vital part in the newly energized world of modern dance. It is also about a forty-seven year long marriage and creative partnership that has sustained their accomplishments.

Over the past three years, Linda Atkinson (a student of Carmen's) and Nick Doob have filmed the virtually uninterrupted creativity of this couple, now in their 70's. The film's style is spontaneous, intimate and revealing, showing Carmen and Geoffrey's natural penchant for uncommon good humor.

Born in New Orleans, Carmen won a scholarship at age 16 to study in Los Angeles with the pioneering choreographer, Lester Horton. She brought her high school classmate, Alvin Ailey to his first dance class. Noticed by Herbert Ross, she appeared he invited her and Ailey to dance in the Broadway production of Truman Capote's *House of Flowers*. Another member of that cast was Geoffrey Holder. They were married soon after. Carmen is also a noted choreographer and actor but her solo dance career is legendary, both with Ailey as well as John Butler, Jose Limon, Donald McKayle and others.

Geoffrey Holder came from Trinidad to debut in *House of Flowers*, which he also co-choreographed with Herbert Ross. Later he directed and designed the costumes for *The Wiz* winning two Tonys in the process. Geoffrey's world-class talent as a painter has been recognized with a Guggenheim fellowship and he is a prize-winning author and photographer. His ballet, *Douglas* is a permanent part of the Dance Theatre of Harlem's repertoire, as is his work *Prodigal Prince* for the Ailey Company.

The film was shot in New York, Texas, Trinidad and Paris and contains rare dance footage featuring them from the 50's and 60's, both solo and together. It also includes their work with Ailey, Ross, Horton, Joe Layton, Duke Ellington and Josephine Baker in Paris. There are scenes of their contemporary work, including Carmen's on-going partnership with Gus Solomons jr and Dudley Williams and both Carmen's and Geoffrey's current choreography.

The film provides young people with role models of lives boldly lived and above all will offer a paradigm for survival and accomplishment in one of the toughest professions to which anyone can aspire.

## SYNOPSIS

Carmen de Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder, two living legends in the world of American dance, are the subjects of this intimate and revealing documentary by Linda Atkinson and Nick Doob that tells the story of "an outstanding, five-decade creative collaboration, and also one of the dance world's great love stories" (*Dance Magazine*).

Carmen achieved notoriety in the early 1950s as a lead dancer of incomparable beauty and grace with Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater. Geoffrey, large in life and an elemental force on stage, found fame not only as a dancer but also as an actor (*Live and Let Die*), soda spokesman ("7-UP, the Un-Colaaaaa...") and theater director (*The Wiz*). He and Carmen met in 1954 and married a year later.

Filmed over several years in the United States, Trinidad and Paris, this exquisite documentary features candid interviews and glorious dance performances, with legends like Alvin Ailey, Herbert Ross, Lester Horton, Joe Layton, Duke Ellington and Josephine Baker, demonstrating the amazing talent and uninterrupted creativity of these icons of dance. There are also contemporary works, including Carmen's on-going partnership with Gus Solomons Jr. and Dudley Williams and a sampling of Carmen's and Geoffrey's current choreographies.

## **CARMEN DE LAVALLADE**

Carmen was born in New Orleans, moved at an early age with her father and two sisters to Los Angeles, where she won a scholarship to study with the pioneering choreographer, Lester Horton. She soon took along a high school class-mate, Ailvin Ailey, for his first dance class. She came to New York with Horton's company, dancing the principal role in his production of "Salome." As a result of this exposure, she was offered several movie roles. She appeared in "Lydia Bailey," and in "Carmen Jones," choreographed by Herbert Ross and subsequently Ross selected her to dance in the ground breaking Broadway production of Truman Capote's "House of Flowers." It was at this time she met her future husband, Geoffrey Holder.

De Lavallade was soon a well known dance presence in New York. She made her debut as a principal dancer at the Metropolitan Opera and went on to work with every prominent choreographer from Agnes deMille to Glen Tetly, Joe Layton, and John Butler. Butler's "A Portrait of Billie," set to four songs by Billie Holiday became Carmen's signature piece. She also performed internationally, sharing a stage with Josephine Baker and touring the Far East with the De Lavallade-Ailey Dance Company.

While Carmen has never stopped dancing, she began to train as an actress also and joined the Yale Repertory Theater in the 1970's. She has continued to act on stage and in films since. Currently, she is at work with Debbie Allen on "Soul Possessed," a work-in-progress which she performed last year at the Kennedy Center. She has formed a new company, Paradigm, with two other living legends, Gus Solomon's Jr. and Dudley Williams. She has just completed remounting John Butler's "Carmina Burana," and will restage Joe Layton's "Porgy and Bess," for the Ailey Company.

## **GEOFFREY HOLDER**

Geoffrey Holder with his 6 foot 6 inch frame, extraordinary voice, and exuberant virtuosi seems larger than life. Two time Tony-Award winner, Drama Desk winner, Clio Award winner, and recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, Geoffrey's many and varied talents have won him recognition as an actor, dancer, singer, choreographer, composer, librettist, director, costume designer, scenic designer, writer, photographer and painter. His talent as a painter is the one least known to the public. His sense of community, love of bright colors, and ability to depict the visual imprint of memory, dream and deeply felt experience are strikingly evident in his work. With such a remarkably broad range of talents, it is natural that Geoffrey is a master at using the stage as a personal canvas.

Geoffrey is currently working on a feature film version of Hans Christian Anderson's "The Red Slippers," as well as an African-American version of "Alice in Wonderland." In addition, he is the collaborator and subject of a book by *The New York Times* dance critic, Jennifer Dunning, "The Marvelous World of Geoffrey Holder."

## **LINDA ATKINSON**

Linda Atkinson first met Carmen and Geoffrey while she was studying acting at the Yale School of Drama. She graduated with an MFA, having won the Carol Dye Acting Prize. She has performed in theaters around the country including The Old Globe, the Yale Rep., the Indiana Rep., the Folger, and the Alaska Rep. In New York she has performed at Playwright's Horizons, Manhattan Theater Club, The Public, and with Lyn Austin's Lenox Theater Group. She began directing in 1983 and worked at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, the Indiana Rep, the Peterborough Players, WestBank Theater Bar and for NBC's "Another World." She then began working with her husband, Nick Doob, to produce a prize winning series of health related documentaries for high school students. She is currently producing a

film based on a chapter from Robert Coles's "Women of Crisis." In addition, she has recently directed an original play, FINEPRINT, at Sing Sing Correctional Facility.

## **NICK DOOB**

Nick Doob has been director, cinematographer and editor on numerous award-winning films. He shot four films which were nominated for Oscars, including *From Mao to Mozart*, which won. He has received eight grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures and the Director's Guild. He directed *Down from the Mountain* with D A Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus and *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, which won an Emmy. In 2000 he won an Emmy as a producer on *American High*, the acclaimed verité TV series. For HBO he co-directed with Rory Kennedy *A Boy's Life*, and has shot a number of Pennebaker-Hegedus films, including *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1973), *The War Room* (1993), and directed with Chris Hegedus, *Al Franken: God Spoke*. Recently he directed *Carmen & Geoffrey* with his wife, Linda Atkinson, a film about the dancers Carmen de Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder. Currently he is directing and producing a 90 minute film for HBO about Alzheimer's.

## **PRAISE FOR CARMEN & GEOFFREY**

"One of the most revelatory dance films I have ever seen...Just see it!" –Andrew Sarris, *NY Observer*

"Exquisite!" –Ernest Hardy, *The Village Voice*

"*Carmen & Geoffrey* leaves you wondering why its subjects are not widely recognized as national treasures." –Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*

"Charming, big-hearted, rare and invaluable .... *Carmen & Geoffrey* is a portrait and celebration of a marriage as well as a chronicle of two ongoing, vibrant careers in the arts." –Susan Reiter, *NY Press*

"What you see is more than an outstanding, five-decade creative collaboration; it's one of the dance world's great love stories, too." –*Dance Magazine*

"Engagingly-chronicled ... a fitting tribute to a pair of extraordinary overachievers and as a touching portrait of over a half century of black-on-black love and of lives very well lived."  
–Kam Williams, *Black Star News*

"A glimpse into the remarkable lives of the two consummate professionals who never let fame get in the way of true love." –Jason Buchanan, *All Movie Guide*

"This heartwarming documentary on these two larger-than-life personalities is full of wonderful archival footage." –Dance Films Association

"The artistry of dance and choreography is put on brilliant display with this terrific documentary...A must see! Grade: A." –Laz Alonso, *EURweb*

"A panoply of archival gems." –Joseph Jon Lanthier, *Slant*

"A pair of warm, funny and wonderfully unpretentious creative artists who clearly love each other and take joy in spreading the magic of visual and performing arts to new generations...one feels glad to have made their cinematic acquaintance." –Phil Hall, *Film Threat*

“An endearing look at Carmen de Lavallade and Geoffrey Holder’s lifelong love affair with dance — and each other... glorious, amazing archival footage.” —*This Week in New York*

“Revealing, intimate.” —Don Thomas, *NY Beacon*

“Enlightening, entertaining and lively...*Carmen & Geoffrey* is a definite must see!”  
—Misani, *The New York Amsterdam News*

“Dancing, Loving, Art and Magic...there is much to applaud and ruminate over once the credits roll.”  
—Matthew Nestel, *Boxoffice Magazine*

## **CREDITS**

*a film by*  
Linda Atkinson  
and  
Nick Doob

*With*  
Carmen de Lavallade  
Geoffrey Holder  
Boscoe Holder  
Leo Holder  
Gus Solomons jr  
Dudley Williams  
Judith Jamison  
Jennifer Dunning  
Alvin Ailey  
Josephine Baker

*Dancers*  
Janet Collins  
James Truitte  
Skoogle Brown  
Ulysses Dove  
Briana Reed  
Matthew Rushing  
Stephenie Mills  
Joanne Bonding  
Greg Barker  
Henry Valentino  
Bill Myers  
Carl Hall  
Ella Mitchell  
Ann Duquesnay  
Eartha Kitt  
Venessa Shaw  
Ira Hawkins  
Renee Robinson  
Glenn A. Sims  
Bahiyah Sayyed

Clifton Brown

*Choreographers*

Geoffrey Holder  
Lester Horton  
John Butler  
Joe Layton  
Alvin Ailey  
George Faison  
Carmen de Lavallade

*also appearing*

John Lahr  
Ray Bolger  
Rev. Calvin O. Butts, III

*photography*

Nick Doob

*additional photography*

Leo Holder  
Ron Gray

*sound*

Linda Atkinson

*editing*

Nick Doob

*sound mix*

Paul Furedi  
Sony Music Studios

*legal*

Karen Shatzkin  
Shatzkin & Mayer

*thanks to*

Abyssinian Baptist Church  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater  
American Folk Art Museum  
British West Indies Airlies  
Contemporary Dance/Fort Worth  
Holder Family Archive  
Joyce Theater  
Limon Video Rental  
Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York Public Library Dance Division  
Paradigm  
Symphony Space  
Towson State University

Trinidad Hilton Hotel

*and*

Jane Balfour

Marjorie Boothman

Yvonne Davis

Ronni Favors

Chris Hegedus

Leo Holder

Sheila Holder

Judith Jamison

Elaine E. Johnson

Kerry Kreiman

George Lindsey

Monica Moseley

Lorry & Mark Newhouse

Beth Olsen

D A Pennebaker

Dennis Price

Dwight Rhoden

Karen Shatzkin

Isaiah Sheffer

Martin Wechsler

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