



CART (0)

Dance Atlanta: An Ode to Self Expression and ATL's Fiercest with photographer Shoccara Marcus

OCTOBER 24, 2020 · COMMUNITY, INTERVIEW, SMALLSTUDIOGRANT, ATLANTA, SHOCCARA MARCUS

Brown Girls Do Ballet has teamed up with photographer Shoccara Marcus to create *Dance Atlanta!*, a photo project showcasing the energy of Atlanta through dance with talented Black and Brown dancers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shot in various prominent landmarks of Atlanta, Shoccara embraced each dancer's personality while collaborating with local stylists and the Atlanta dance community to compile a series of fiercely majestic and electric photos. The photos will be sold as [limited-edition postcards](#) to benefit Brown Girls Do Ballet's [Small Studio Grant Program](#).

Shoccara opened up about the creative vision behind the *Dance Atlanta!* project as well as her own journey as a dancer and photographer of color.



Photo: [@shocphoto](#) on Instagram

The Photographer

A Bridgeton, New Jersey native, Shoccara started dancing around the age of 4. When her family relocated to Atlanta, she continued her lessons on a casual, yet consistent basis. It wasn't until Shoccara reached high school that dance became a very prominent part of her life. After her freshman year of high school, Shoccara was accepted into Alvin Ailey's summer dance program in New York. She quickly realized that dancing was her life's purpose.

Early in her dancing career, Shoccara was faced with the challenge of fitting into a mold of dancing and posture that didn't suit her. Sometimes, she was compared to other dancers of color or asked to tone herself down. Shoccara explained how the shift from high school dance classes to college dance classes are a huge mental challenge that all dancers - especially dancers of color - must try to prepare themselves for.

"You have to know who you are and you have to be confident in that, because it's a mind game...You'll need to be conscious of your body, conscious of what space you're in, and be conscious of how to thrive," she said.

As she continued her study of dance at Howard University, she remembers stepping onto the campus and immediately feeling at home. She felt more familiar with the style of dance they taught on campus, as it was similar to the training she had while growing up.

After graduating from Howard, she moved to New York and began her journey to fulfilling her dream: to eventually dance under the direction of Bill T. Jones. Just as she was getting into the swing of things in New York, her father fell ill with kidney disease, causing her to relocate back to Atlanta. The move really discouraged her, derailing her plans as a dancer and leaving her unsure of what her next step should be.

That's when her photography career truly entered the spotlight.





Photo: provided by [Shoccara Marcus](#)

Back when she attended Howard University, Shoccara stumbled into studying photography after oversleeping for a final exam and being required to retake the course. At the time of registering for classes, she needed to enroll in one more class to classify her as a full-time student. She picked photography. To her surprise, she ended up loving it so much that it became her minor of studies.

Now, here she was in Atlanta, desperately searching for a path that would lead her back to dance. Advice from her former dance professor led her to apply to the Savannah College of Art and Design to study photography, although she initially scoffed at the idea. She didn't want to shift her focus from dance.

Reluctantly, she applied, and was ultimately accepted. She decided to stop overthinking her journey and instead went with the flow of God's plan for her, despite her doubts. For a while, she was met with extreme difficulty. There was a

learning curve that she was trying to catch up to. Not only was she struggling to learn all of the technical skills of photography, but she also struggled finding her lane as an artist.

"I was really trying to find myself. I was really trying to find my artistic voice, because everybody knew what they wanted to shoot," she said.

That's when dance found its way back into her life.

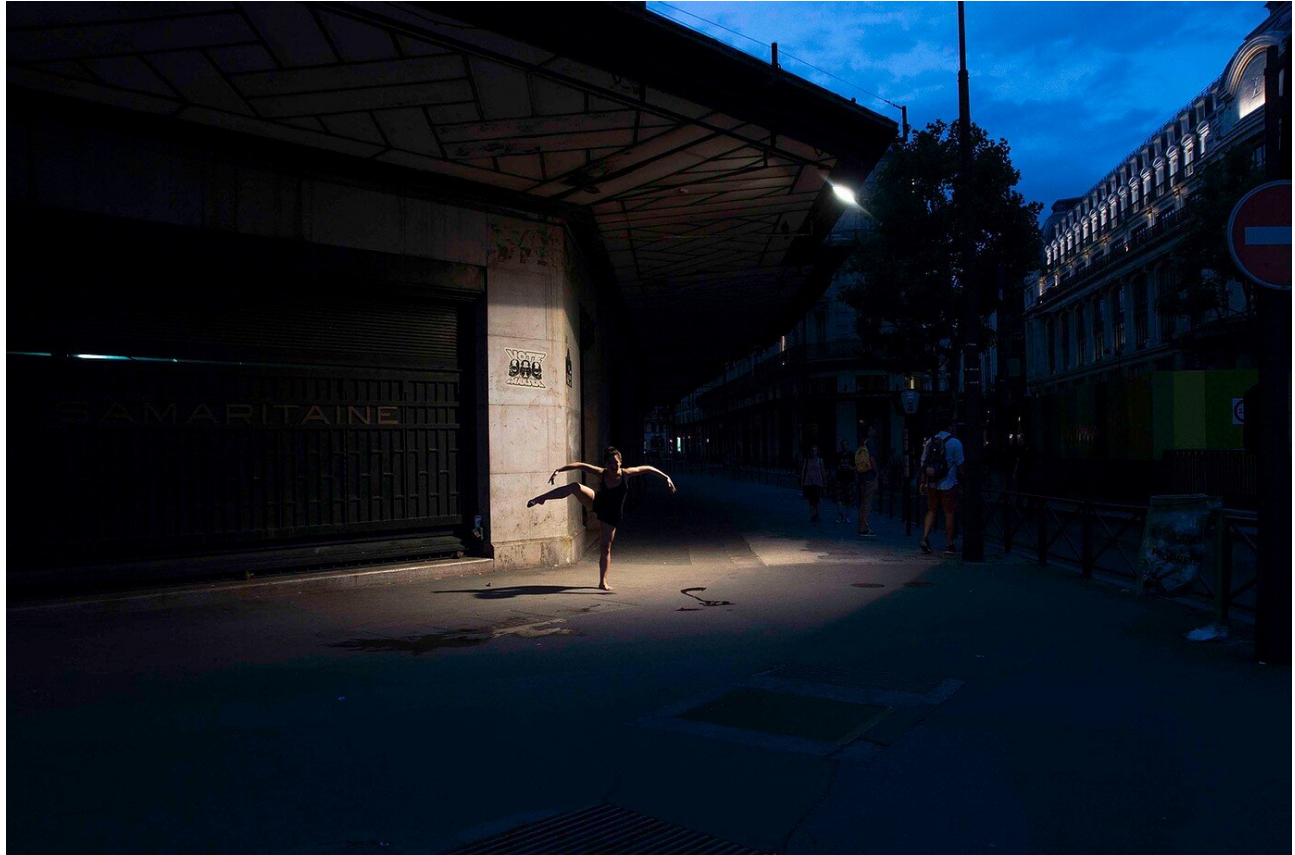


Photo: *Samaritaine Duet*, Paris, France - [Night Moves](#) by Shocarra Marcus

"Being a dancer, I feel like there's a performance everywhere we go," she said. "I love architecture, buildings, and locations. I feel like there's this dialogue with the lines, shape, and form of the buildings and the dancer's body - this inner dialogue that's happening with each other creating this beautiful conversation that just merges."

Before long, Shocarra found her niche, shooting dancers under unorthodox spotlights in different venues. Her first photo project, [Night Moves](#), was inspired by interesting lighting she noticed at her friend's apartment building. She

discovered her ability to visualize scenes in everyday experiences. Through this style of shooting, she found her flow and was able to blend her passion for dance with her love of photography.

Creating *Dance Atlanta!*

When Brown Girls Do Ballet founder TaKiyah Wallace reached out to her for a virtual meet and greet, Shoccara was amped. She had recently lost a lot of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the stress of it all started to take a toll on her. In order to uplift herself, she spoke positivity and success into existence.

"I remember I posted on Facebook, I said 'I'm going to have joy today, despite everything that's going on. I'm just going to have joy and it's gonna work out,' and I shut my computer." From there, she said, blessings started pouring in.

"As a Black female photographer myself, it's always been essential to me to highlight other women creatives of color first," TaKiyah said, "Shoccara was the first photographer I reached out to work with this year because of her beautiful work and familiarity with Black and Brown dancers' struggles in the dance community. After meeting her, I knew an ode to her city and dance should be our first big project of this annual event."

Shoccara had already been brainstorming ideas for a photoshoot highlighting Atlanta, so she was thrilled to be commissioned by Brown Girls Do Ballet for the project. TaKiyah gave her complete creative control and freedom of the project.

"Every idea I had, she was like 'go for it,' and anything I needed, she was there to assist me," Shoccara said.

Using her current artist's residency at the Promenade Building in downtown Atlanta, Shoccara was able to

reserve photoshoot locations at The Fox Theatre, The High Museum of Art, the Art Center MARTA station, Woodruff Park, and the Jackson Street Bridge.

Next, Shoccara hired her friend, [Annique Roberts](#), as the Casting Manager. To apply, dancers submitted headshots, videos, and Instagram handles. Annique reviewed all of the submissions and selected 20 dancers. Shoccara emphasized the importance of individuality for the photoshoot. She wanted dancers to arrive completely eager to express their true selves.

"I told them, I said, 'Bring your own style!' she said, explaining that she also told them not to wear their hair in the typical ballerina bun. "That's not what any of my work is about. It's about your style; your personality. So, rock your 'fro. Rock your curls. Rock whatever style that represents you. It's all about individuality."



Photo: Behind the scenes of *Dance Atlanta!* at Woodruff Park - provided by [Shoccara Marcus](#)

The next step was to gather a wardrobe for the project. "Each location had a different vibe and I wanted the wardrobe to be different," Shoccara explained.

Finding the outfits for the photoshoot at Fox Theatre proved to be the most challenging wardrobe obstacle. Shoccara wanted the dancers wearing grand, flowy dresses, but could hardly find companies willing to rent out or donate their pieces. She began tapping into her own network, contacting her friends and colleagues who are stylists to see if they could piece something together for her. In record speed, they delivered.



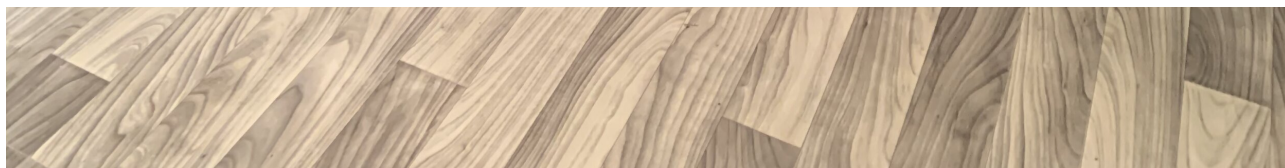


Photo: Dress designed by Zedyc L. Thomas of Needles and Threads, Inc. for the *Dance Atlanta!* project - provided by [Shoccara Marcus](#)

Shoccara was careful to style each dancer with pieces that they looked comfortable and felt confident in. When it came to directing poses, she gave dancers as much autonomy as possible. She knew if she placed the dancers in poses that felt unnatural to them, it would show on their faces.

“When we started to create poses, I said ‘What is something you do well? What is something that’s magical in your body?’ I wanted everyone to shine.”

Shoccara very thoughtfully chose each location of the *Dance Atlanta!* project. She picked landmarks that would serve as the perfect backdrops to represent the culture and confidence of Atlanta while complimenting the dancers who posed before it.

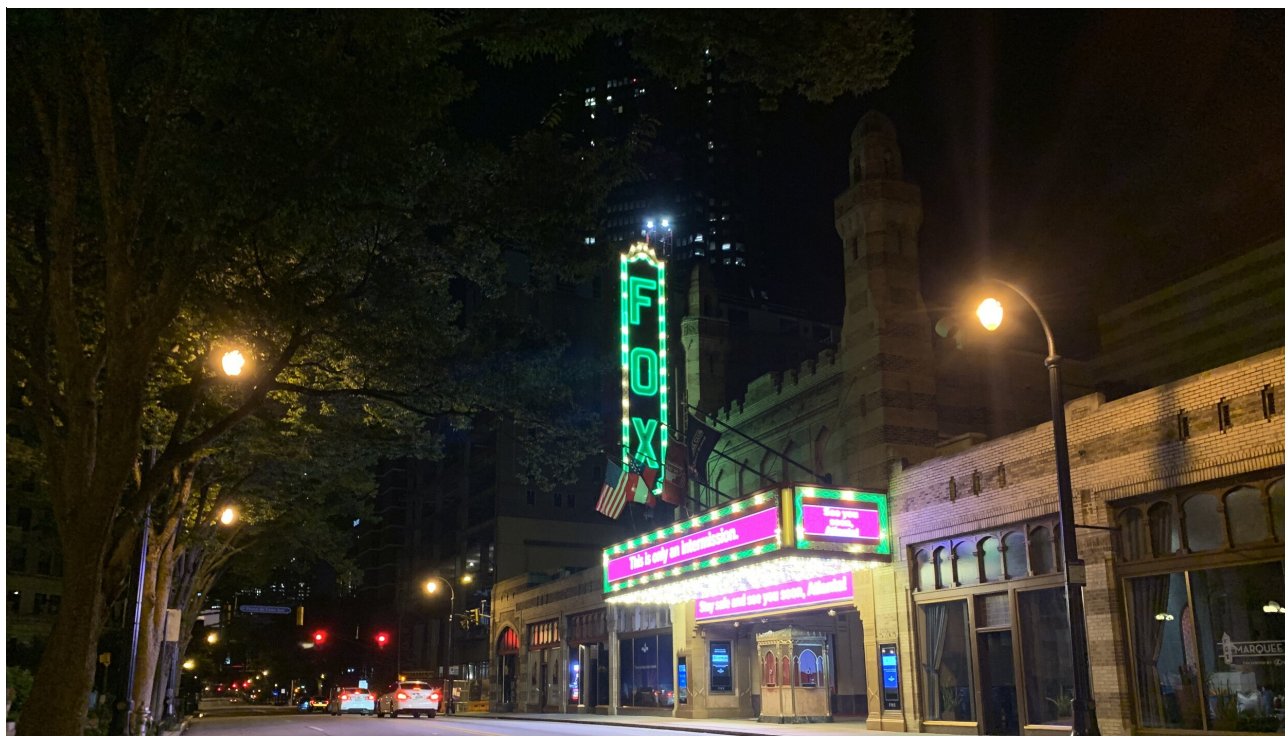




Photo: Fox Theatre, Atlanta, GA - provided by [Shoccara Marcus](#)

The photoshoot at The High Museum was a “salute to Black men,” where Shoccara casted male dancers and had them pose in shirts that read “Black Joy is Revolutionary,” donated by [Black Men Smile](#). “I wanted the guys in something that spoke to what was going on,” she said, “how this pandemic made us stand still and become conscious of how blacks are being killed - especially black men.”

[Stacie Rose's](#) mural at the Art Center MARTA station was a location Shoccara had been eager to shoot in for a long time. “It has so much energy and vibrance and looking at the artwork, I just - I could hear rhythm,” she said. At this location, she aimed to spotlight young adults with high energy and bright colors.

Next was the photoshoot in Woodruff Park, in front of a huge “ATL” sign. Shoccara described the sign as iconic, igniting pride in everyone who sees it. “Once you see that it’s like ‘Hey that’s Atlanta!’” she said, “So when people will see these [pictures], they’ll be like ‘Yo, this is my city.’” For this location, she shot the youngest dancers in vibrant colors that popped against the brown grain of the sign.

The last photo shoot was set on the Jackson Street Bridge, with downtown Atlanta’s skyline as the backdrop. In this shoot, the dancers wore shirts that read “Dance Atlanta,” and she wanted their poses to represent the project and everything it stands for. “I had my casting manager pick out dancers from the other four locations. They represented the crunkest; the hypest.”



Photo: Behind the scenes on the Jackson Street Bridge for the *Dance Atlanta!* project - provided by [Shoccara Marcus](#)

"Bring your funk!" she told them, "You can have a tutu. We've got tights. You can have a skirt. Cut up your shirt. You can bring your style - lots of energy; all your personality. When you see that backdrop everybody's gonna know...When you Google Atlanta, that photo should pop up."

The Impact

To Shoccara, the *Dance Atlanta!* project not only represents the vibrancy of Atlanta and highlights the talent and perseverance of dancers of color, but it also provided a reason for dancers to get out of the house and safely exercise their craft during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shoccara hopes the project will help eliminate the expectations dancers of color are often constricted by while motivating dancers to break the mold by being themselves at all times.

"It's not just females," she said, "It's not about your age. It's not about your body type." It's about what you bring to the table!"

One thing Shoccara's creative journey has taught her is that sometimes society puts us in a box, and other times, we are the only things holding ourselves back. The *Dance Atlanta!* project is proof of what happens when you expand your horizons to new possibilities while remaining aligned with your purpose and true to yourself.

Shoccara embraced the opportunity to merge her dance and photography talents while also aiming the spotlight on every dancer involved, encouraging them to turn their reality - whatever that may be - into a stage that they shamelessly and proudly conquer.

"I want Black and Brown dancers to be inspired. I want them to know they can do it. I want them to know that 'starving artists' - that's something we used to say, but guess what? You can *thrive* in this area... [*Dance Atlanta!*]"

was all about how beautiful they are. How amazing they feel to be a dancer - an *unapologetic* dancer."

Behind the Scenes of DANCE ATLANTA!



Shoccara Marcus is a professional photographer based in Atlanta, Georgia. To learn more about her and her work or to book a photo shoot, visit her [website](#). To purchase the limited-edition *Dance Atlanta!* postcards in support of Brown Girls Do Ballet's [Small Studio Grant Program](#), visit our [shop](#).



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