



OREGON ARTS  
COMMISSION

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**Agnieszka Laska honored with Joan Shipley Award;  
2017 Individual Artist Fellowships Announced**

Salem, Oregon – Agnieszka Laska, a Portland-based dancer/choreographer and the founder of Agnieszka Laska Dancers, is the 2017 recipient of the Oregon Arts Commission’s honorary Joan Shipley Award. Laska leads a group of seven Oregon artists selected for the Arts Commission’s 2017 Individual Artist Fellowships. The 2017 fellowships support artists working in the performing arts; visual artists are reviewed in alternating years.

The Joan Shipley Award is named for Oregon arts leader Joan Shipley, who passed away in 2011. Shipley was a collector, philanthropist and supporter of many arts and humanities organizations. In 2005, she and her husband John received an Oregon Governor’s Arts Award. Many in the arts community also counted her as a mentor and friend.

The Arts Commission’s fellowship program is available to more than 20,000 artists who call Oregon home. Fellows are recommended by a review panel of Oregon arts professionals who consider artists of outstanding talent, demonstrated ability and commitment to the creation of new work(s). The Arts Commission reviews and acts on the panel’s recommendations.

The following performing artists were awarded 2017 fellowships: Agnieszka Laska (Joan Shipely Award), Portland; Oluyinka Akinjiola, Portland; Leah Anderson, Ashland; Douglas Detrick, Portland; Ashleigh Flynn, Portland; Eliot Grasso, Springfield; and Lydia Van Dreel, Eugene.

Brief biographies and photos follow.



**Oluyinka A. Akinjiola, Portland**

Oluyinka A. Akinjiola holds a master of fine arts in dance choreography and performance. She creates a unique blend between social commentary and dances of West Africa, the African Diaspora and contemporary dance. Her work was featured in the International Association of Blacks in Dance conference (Washington, D.C.), Carnaval 2014 (Salvador, BA, Brazil), the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, TEDx Mt. Hood, Bend Design Conference, Beaverton Ten Tiny Dances and more. Akinjiola is the artistic director and choreographer for Rejoice! Diaspora Dance Theater and currently teaches in Portland Public Schools and through residencies with Young Audiences and the Right Brain Initiative.



**Leah Anderson, Ashland**

Leah Anderson is the artistic director of The Arson, a traveling band of artists committed to radical inclusion in the stories they tell and their audiences. With a mission to make art that speaks directly to community and addresses issues facing both neighborhood and nation, their recent projects have included James Baldwin's "Blues for Mister Charlie," Suzan-Lori Parks' "In the Blood," Kia Corthron's "Force Continuum" and a Spanish translation of Paula Vogel's "How I Learned to Drive." Anderson is currently working on an adaptation of "Romeo & Juliet" as well as two projects dealing with sexual abuse and racial violence.



**Douglas Detrick** is a composer, trumpeter, podcast producer, writer and arts leader based in Portland, Oregon. His musical works make distinctive, concrete connections to story and place by combining his background in jazz, chamber music, and electronic music with audio storytelling and podcasting to tell stories in a unique way. He is reshaping Oregon's jazz community as the Executive Director of the Portland Jazz Composers Ensemble by pushing himself and other composers to place their creative work in contexts that help our community understand its heritage and its potential.



**Ashleigh Flynn, Portland**

2016 was a terrific year for Ashleigh Flynn ([see EPK here](#)). She released a LIVE EP, “[The Low Arc of the Sun](#),” which has received acclaim from notable Americana rags including [No Depression](#). She was featured by [Folk Alley](#) during her stay at 2016 30A Songwriter Festival. Flynn also recently contributed to an Emmylou Harris tribute CD for which her version of “Red Dirt Girl” received accolades from [RollingStone](#) and [Elmore](#) Magazine. Of late, Flynn has performed at 30A Songwriters Fest 2016, Red Ants Pants 2016, Delfest 2015, High Sierra Music Festival 2015 and Vancouver Folk Festival 2014. She has toured the country both under her own name and as support for such notables as Todd Snider, Hayes Carll, the Wood Brothers, Billy Joe Shaver, Nanci Griffith and more - all with great reviews and a growing fan base.



**Elito Grasso, Springfield**

Performer/scholar Eliot Grasso has taught, performed and recorded throughout North America and Europe for more than two decades. He has performed for President Clinton at the NEA Awards, appeared as a featured artist on "Prairie Home Companion," performed and taught for the William Kennedy Piping Festival and appeared as a soloist in the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall for Scotland's National Piping Festival, Piping Live. Grasso has more than a dozen recordings to his name, including an album of unaccompanied uilleann piping, which is volume 1 of Na Píobairí Uilleann's series of master pipers, The Ace and Deuce of Piping. Grasso holds a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of Oregon, and a masters in ethnomusicology from the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick. His artistic and academic work as a performer, recording artist, composer and researcher has earned awards from the traditional music community, the recording industry, and the academic establishment. A fuller picture of his endeavors is available at [www.eliotgrasso.com](http://www.eliotgrasso.com).



**Agnieszka Laska**, Portland (Joan Shipley Fellow)

Choreographer Agnieszka Laska danced more than 25 years with top Polish dance company Balet Form Nowoczesnych AGH, touring Europe and North America. She also choreographed extensively for leading Polish theatre companies in award-winning productions across Europe and at festivals in Edinburgh, Avignon, etc. In Portland since 2001, she launched Agnieszka Laska Dancers in 2003 and has created numerous works, often to music of local composers [Tomas Svoboda](#) and [Jack Gabel](#), among others, usually with musicians on stage. ALD performs regionally and has toured to dance festivals in Mexico and Poland. Laska was a

finalist in the choreographic competition Lenguaje Contemporáneo in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2005.



**Lydia Van Dreel**, Portland

Associate professor of horn Lydia Van Dreel joined the University of Oregon faculty in 2006. Van Dreel maintains an active and diverse performing career as an orchestral, chamber, solo and recording artist. A member of The Eugene Symphony Orchestra, The IRIS Orchestra (Memphis, TN) the UO's Faculty Brass and Wind Quintets, The Oregon Bach Festival Orchestra, and Quadre: The Voice of Four Horns, Van Dreel can be heard in concert halls worldwide and on recordings with groups as diverse as The Cherry Poppin' Daddies and the IRIS Orchestra. Her first solo CD, "New Millennium Music for Horn," was released on the Quadre Records label in 2014 and her playing was featured in the 2012 Chrysler Super Bowl ad "It's Halftime in America." Before joining the Oregon faculty, Van Dreel held a 10-year tenure as co-principal horn of the Sarasota Orchestra in

Florida. Van Dreel is a graduate of the Juilliard School and the University of Wisconsin.

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The Oregon Arts Commission provides leadership, funding and arts programs through its grants, special initiatives and services. Nine commissioners, appointed by the Governor, determine arts needs and establish policies for public support of the arts. The Arts Commission became part of the Business Oregon (formerly Oregon Economic and Community Development Department) in 1993 in recognition of the expanding role the arts play in the broader social, economic and educational arenas of Oregon communities. In 2003, the Oregon legislature moved the operations of the Oregon Cultural Trust to the Arts Commission, streamlining operations and making use of the Commission's expertise in grant-making, arts and cultural information and community cultural development.

The Arts Commission is supported with general funds appropriated by the Oregon legislature, federal funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and funds from the Oregon Cultural Trust.