

Ta'Shayla Montgomery Brings Her Expertise To SIUE East St. Louis Center For Performing Arts

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Birthered and nurtured as a dancer in the dynamic, rhythmic world of Dunham Technique and driven to shape other dancers in the same legendary, compelling method, Ta'Shayla Montgomery now teaches in the same performing arts program, located in her hometown of East St. Louis, where she began her training at the age of nine.

Montgomery is the assistant director and dance consultant at the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Center (ESLC) for the Performing Arts. Homer Simmons is the program director.

“My training in Dunham Technique has molded me into the dancer I am today,” said Montgomery, who teaches ballet, contemporary jazz, Afro Cuban and acting. “I want to train and provide students with the same accuracy and precision required to become a professional dancer. The Dunham Technique conditions dancers to form a broad

versatility in cultural movement, as well as strengthens their technical diversity, which enables the ability to transition into other forms and techniques.”



Katherine Dunham was a renowned dance pioneer, anthropologist and social activist who is hailed for creating the Dunham Technique. The dance method engages the body, mind and spirit and is informed by traditional dances of the African Diaspora, as well as modern and ballet. Dunham founded the Performing Arts Training Center (PATC) at the ESLC in 1967 and adopted the City of East St. Louis as her second home around the same time. PATC later became known as the ESLC for the Performing Arts.

Montgomery, who earned a bachelor's in theater arts from Howard University, was trained by former ESLC Performing Arts staff: (the late) Director Theodore H. Jamison, Jamila Ajanuku, Andrea Smythe, Jack Williams and Keith Williams (no relation). She also trained with Ruby Streate, Heather Himes and James Belk at the Katherine Dunham Children's Workshop in East St. Louis. Montgomery graduated from Central Visual and Performing Arts High School and was a student company member at the Center of Creative Arts (COCA), both in St. Louis.

“I am proud to continue Mrs. Dunham’s global and artistic legacy,” Montgomery emphasized, “because she created and developed such a rare form of artistic genius, all while making such a difference in the lives of many, including my own, across the globe. Her work as a social activist, humanitarian and anthropologist is remarkable. The Dunham Technique has been the foundation and power to succeed inside and outside of the dance studio and classroom. I have learned self-discipline and developed a strong work ethic, but most importantly, gained confidence.”



“As a teen struggling with self-doubt, I had a habit of walking around with my head down,” she continued. “Mrs. Dunham and Mrs. Streate would scold me and insist that I keep my head up, stand proud and strong, and leave life’s problems outside of the dance studios. It was a wonderful seed that was planted. Today, I walk with confidence, and continuously strive for growth as an individual dancer, teacher and choreographer.”

All of the benefits Montgomery received from the world of dance are the same gifts she is now excited to pass along. “My goal is to comprehensively prepare all my students,” she shared, “with well-rounded physical and mental knowledge of all art forms for ongoing success in their professions and in life.”

SIUE East St. Louis Center for Performing Arts After School classes are offered 5-7 p. m. Monday-Thursday on campus. For more information and to enroll, visit the [ESLC Performing Arts website page](#) and click on register.

The [SIUE East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts](#) has a long, rich history. The legendary dancer, anthropologist, and social activist Katherine Dunham founded the Center for Performing Arts at the SIUE East St. Louis Center in 1964. At its peak in the 1990s, the East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts provided year-round instruction to more than 1,000 youth and became a training ground for professional artists of all disciplines. For decades, the East St. Louis Center for the Performing Arts provided performing arts classes to students and community members to develop local talent and to cultivate a love of the arts. Classes often culminated in musical and theatrical productions.