



Photo: Ebru Yildiz

Breathing Fire

The Dragon Sisters slay—from professional dance to modeling, hip-hop, LGBTQ+ advocacy—and now educating the next gen of dancers at Purchase.

Observing a class taught by The Dragon Sisters, the energy, positivity, and sense of camaraderie flow through the studio and grow more evident as the class ends. No one wants to leave. Students continue to practice the steps. They change the music. They swarm the instructors, who share statuesque builds so alike it's hard to miss. But the clear draw is their appealingly authentic dispositions.

Issa (Perez) Dragon '13 and Odessa (Cain Coleman) Dragon '09 – '15 have returned to the Conservatory of Dance this fall to teach Special Modern Technique, and on a Thursday in late September, it indeed felt pretty special.

An award-winning multidisciplinary performance art duo, The Dragon Sisters' concept developed over time as Issa and Odessa honed their professional dance careers.

Odessa danced for the Martha Graham Dance Company, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company, and The Metropolitan Opera, among others, while Issa joined Gallim Dance right from Purchase, then Punchdrunk's Sleep No More.

by Kristi McKee

Love The Nightlife

A dip into the world of private event nightlife, where "you're basically a statue demonstrating the wardrobe, the headpiece, the costume," says Odessa, drew attention and landed them commercial work in campaigns for brands like Adidas, Absolut Vodka, Bombas, and Frederick Anderson.

A turning point came when award-winning producer Spencer Ludwig showed interest in collaborating and pushed them to write and perform their own music. But the sisters were not confident there would be space. "We're queer dancers and Black, and we just weren't seeing that in the music industry," says Odessa. But they dove in and their first EP, *The Fine Print*, had write-ups in *Vogue* and *Billboard*, who called it "a slinky six-track vibe fest that's relaxed yet impassioned, chill but fierce."

They've since won three Glam Awards, honoring the best in NYC Nightlife, including 2021's Breakthrough Artists of the Year and the Best Duo/Group for 2021 and 2022, and they earned a featured spot in the 2022 NYC Pride Campaign, "Unapologetically Us."

On a Mission

A Dragon Sisters' show is "equal parts dynamic synchronous movement, lyric incantations, skin, glitter, and hip-hop vibrations that reach audiences in their viscera," according to their website. But more importantly, they aspire to spread messages of love and acceptance "on a mission to radicalize and make space while facilitating joy and inspiring inner expansion." Positive audience feedback buoys them as they face negativity that increases as their platform and visibility grows. "There's still hate in the world, and disrespect, and people not understanding, and all those things," says Issa. "What keeps us from dwelling on that is all the other light, all the positivity, all the lives that we're now a part of or that we've changed or the circles that we've entered."

Purchase Bound

As Issa and Odessa return to Purchase 10 years later, they're excited by the next generation's potential and by what the pair are bound to receive in return. They're teaching the same Special Modern Technique class next semester while also creating new work for the Purchase Dance Company's spring 2024 concert. "It's like food in a way. We're fueling each other, we're learning from each other. And it's kind of like an opportunity for us to go back to school in a different way," says Issa.

As Open Call resident artists at NYC's arts space The Shed, Issa and Odessa hope to include Purchase in the program. "We're trying to find a way to incorporate the students or the work that we make in spring concert into the piece at The Shed," says Odessa. A summer 2024 performance is planned.

"This is the beginning for [students]. People we met in school, we still know. We're still connected with people we looked up to. Now we work with them in the real world," says Issa. **"Welcome to the group chat."**