

Free Dance in Summertime New York

By Gia Kourlas

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The best part about summer dance isn't that it's free: Quality matters as well. This year's River to River Festival, presented by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, is up to its usual good with performances and works by Twyla Tharp, the Trisha Brown Dance Company and Souleymane Badolo. Outdoor festivals like SummerStage, Celebrate Brooklyn! and Lincoln Center Out of Doors round out the — yes, happily free — programming. Here we highlight the artists behind some choice offerings, and list other performances you should consider adding to your calendar. These conversations have been edited and condensed.



Twyla Tharp, seated above, choreographed “The One Hundreds.” It will be performed as part of the River to River Festival. Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Twyla Tharp

‘The One Hundreds’

River to River Festival

Saturday at 7 p.m.

Nelson A. Rockefeller Park at Battery Park City

In the summer of 1969, Twyla Tharp lived on a farm where there wasn't much to do except dance in a pine forest during the day and listen to baseball on the radio at night. During that time, she made "The One Hundreds," which debuted in 1970 (above). In the dance, 100 11-second movement phrases are performed in unison by two dancers without music. Then five others each perform 20 of the sequences simultaneously. And in the final 11 seconds, 100 people — ordinary folks of all ages — present the phrases. It's glorious. These are edited excerpts from a recent conversation about the piece.

Q. Why did you make this dance?

A. I'm on a farm, and it's all of this greatness of nature, and I'm going, oh my goodness, what depth of creativity is going on here? Of course, it's God's handiwork, but never mind. I say, I only wish I could do something. You can, you can! You can do 100 11-second segments of movement and put them up simultaneously, and you will have something massively complex and rich.

Q. What was the process?

A. Two dancers, myself and Big Rose [Rose Marie Wright], rehearse this thing for three months and we get really good. Then five come in. They were all good dancers, and if they'd had a ton of rehearsals like Rose and I had, they could have been excellent. But they'd been given a limited amount of time. It's intact, but it's not the tour de force that the original two do. Then you have 100 people who are just people off the streets.

"The One Hundreds" as performed in 1970.
Nicholas Coppola

Q. What happens?

A. It's going to have declined, its edges are going to have eroded and isn't that interesting? If you happen to be a person with an acute eye, you can see the same 100 done in three different kinds of conditions. The idea that you could have this kind of spectrum in the same piece was not really something that was prevalent then nor now. It's called a kind of equality, it's called a kind of democracy. That's what the initial impetus really was. That and the game of baseball.

Q. Baseball?

A. I figure out, O.K., I'll bet you that a perfect game is 100 pitches, more or less, and that by the time the pitcher gives his signals to the catcher, he winds up, he releases, he falls off his mound and he returns back, it's about 11 seconds.

Q. That was the structure?

A. It's an adaptation of a real-world condition to an abstract form, so-called dance. Something else was important in this piece: Dance is not just an event and an activity. Dance is an object. It has its own objective existence and these one hundreds can be looked at like a netsuke [ivory and wood carvings]. Each netsuke is a singular, small masterpiece; they were miniature sculptures and each one could be taken out and examined. That's how I think of "The One Hundreds."

Q. Why is it so beautiful when everyone rushes out?

A. It's a willingness to gather. They give each other courage. It creates out of 100 strangers a community. It's one of those things that represents much more than meets the eye: about where art comes from, how it works, what it stands for, why it resonates with people.

Eiko Otake

'A Body in a Station'

River to River Festival

Monday and Wednesday at 7 p.m. and Tuesday at 4 p.m.

Fulton Center, Manhattan

Ms. Otake, the Japanese dance artist who usually performs with Koma, continues her solo exploration in "A Body in a Station," the latest iteration of works that have taken her to abandoned train stations in Fukushima, Japan, and the 30th Street Station in Philadelphia. At Fulton Center in Lower Manhattan, she continues her juxtaposition of a fragile body, full of memories, in a public space.

Eiko Otake in a previous work, "A Body in Governors Island." Her solo works juxtapose a fragile body, full of memories, in a public space. William Johnston

Q. What does Fulton Center mean to you?

A. I can't just think about it like a New York City train station. This is Fulton Street at Broadway. You can't quite see the new tower directly from this side of the building, but you can see St. Paul's Chapel, which is where the rescue workers were. I don't want to be all the trauma of the world, but it feels dishonest if I don't feel the connection to that 9/11 site. One thing I was thinking about was how to situate my body in the neighborhood rather than just the station.

Q. What is your plan?

A. I will carry the outside to inside. I think if I'm already there, I belong to the building, but this way I can carry the location rather than just the building. I'm not there just to adore the new building.

Q. Or to decorate it?

A. No. I can't decorate anyway. [Laughs] But I realize the complexity. I was talking to an M.T.A. person who was there on 9/11. We bear that weight even though we don't talk about it every day. My body has my memory, and as human beings we all carry some kind of a memory and tragedy. Many of us have sickness and wounds; we're not new beauty. We survived, and we are with a sense of shadows and rustiness in our bodies. At the same time, I want to dance. I want to have that fragile dance.

Q. In Philadelphia, you performed in three-hour segments. Why is this just one hour?

A. I have done the marathon. Now I want to do a medium length. Here I'm dealing with place, and it's Lower Manhattan, Fulton Street, Broadway — it's my subway line, and this is my town. River to River is our festival. In the summer, people who are very rich or have very rich friends go somewhere else. We are pretty much leftovers, but still committed to be here. This is a good project for a 63-year-old.

Q. Why?

A. I'm seasoned, wrinkled. Because if I'm 35, I all of a sudden look like a picture of a woman in different places in a travel magazine. And I'm not 98. I'm kind of between grandma and auntie, right? It's a strange thing to say, but it's the right age to be in the station.

Dorrance Dance

'The Blues Project Revisited,' with Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely

Lincoln Center Out of Doors

July 24 at 7:30 p.m.

Damrosch Park Bandshell

Michelle Dorrance adapted "The Blues Project" for the Lincoln Center Out of Doors summer series.
Christopher Duggan

Michelle Dorrance, that superb tomboy of tap, presents this version of her evening-length production “The Blues Project,” seen this spring at the Joyce Theater. With live music by Toshi Reagon and her BIGLovely quintet, the work is a merging of forms: music envelops the dancing, and the dancing seeps through to the last chord. There are also solos by Derick K. Grant, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards and Ms. Dorrance, who sums it up: “It’s like a rock band and tap dancing.”

Q. Have you added new material to “The Blues Project” for Lincoln Center?

A. Yes, but honestly, the show changes every time. Toshi surprises me with a different song in every solo. I am going to tweak a little bit.

Q. Like what?

A. What’s most interesting to us is playing around with what’s happening rhythmically. The music is such a powerful collaborator. There is a new tune. There are five or six songs that Toshi wrote for the show that did not get used.

Q. Why did you exclude them?

A. My least favorite thing is a show going on too long. So we’re using one of those tunes, and it is unlike any other piece of music in the show.

Q. How do you feel about performing outside?

A. I’m really excited. It’s something I used to do a ton when I was a kid. We used to dance on a moving truck in the Christmas parade in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. All I want to do is dance outside, and this is my plan for next February: To go to Brazil or Cuba and find a space that has a beautiful wood floor and just dance outside in the heat for all of February.

Q. What does it mean to be a woman in the world of tap?

A. I don’t think about it very often. When I create choreography, I know what I want that aesthetic to be, and I like that it’s feminine on some people and masculine on others. But I also love a neutral ground. And that’s not to say that I don’t ever want to be a girl or a woman. There are times when I’ll definitely choose to, and to not be part of that [showing femininity], in part because of the culture I grew up in and the freedom that we had with Savion [Glover]. He’s someone I have to cite.

Q. In what way?

A. Every once in a while, he’d really have the ladies be the ladies, but he never asked me to look more like a woman. I feel a great freedom as a woman inside of my art form, and I also feel that’s why it’s my art form. That’s really empowering. There are a lot of people who didn’t get to explore their own voice as

early as some of us tap dancers did.

Q. How old were you when you started?

A. Four or five. Gene Medler was my mentor from North Carolina, and I probably started studying with him around 7 or 8. He's the one who tells me what happened in my early days of tap dancing. When you're that young, there are so many things you forget. He said that when I auditioned for the company [North Carolina Youth Tap Ensemble], I improvised.

Q. Isn't it great to know that you and tap dance are such a natural fit?

A. For sure. I absolutely loved it every day of my life. I wasn't one of those kids who didn't want to do it at some point. That's the thing about teaching kids these days who want to videotape at the end of class. It's the way people remember things now. It's a skill [learning from a video], but I so don't believe in it at all, and I don't believe in taking videos. The reason people like me were good when we were teenagers or remember things we learned with Savion when we were 13 is because we were so obsessed with it that we did it over and over again. You have to do that. I miss that part of the culture.

Contemporary Circus

SummerStage

Various times and locations

Françoise Nadia Voranger of Hybrid Movement Company in an aerial work. Philip Koenig

For the third year, SummerStage hosts a wealth of contemporary circus — especially as it crosses into dance.

“People are still like, ‘What is it?’ ” said Monique Martin, SummerStage’s programming director. “ ‘Will there be elephants?’ ” She laughed. “There are no animals.”

In honoring the link between circus and dance, this season features the hip-hop dancer Ephrat Asherie in a circus-inspired piece at Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem (on Aug. 15 and 16 at 7 p.m.). The Hybrid Movement Company of Brooklyn, which specializes in aerial work, shares a program in Crotona Park in the Bronx (next Friday at 7 p.m.) with the Incredible Incredible, a clown-and-acrobat duo from Washington, making its festival debut.

In “Palindrome,” Matthew McCorkle and Justin Therrien of the Incredible Incredible portray characters who are each other’s imaginary friend. “We’re wearing the same clothes, and we have the same hats and suitcases, and we find each other in this world,” Mr. Therrien said. “We’re characters who don’t conform to normal rules. It’s a show about their interactions.”

Françoise Nadia Voranger, an artistic director of Hybrid, said her company drew inspiration from its music. The work it is presenting at SummerStage, “Momentum,” features classical music, including works by Brahms and Chopin, as well as hip-hop. “What we do is sculpted from the grinding and blending of a variety of disciplines like contemporary ballet, break-dance, martial arts, gymnastics, circus arts,” she said. “We match that with music.”

While Magmanus is a Swedish circus company specializing in acrobatics and juggling, Ms. Martin, in organizing this area of SummerStage, had a mission not to veer too far afield. “There’s so much fantastic art and companies from abroad, but I did not want our festival to feel like an import festival — like everything’s really fabulous in France or Stockholm,” she said. “The companies from North America are from the soil: They breathe the air.” The Swedes will perform in Brooklyn Bridge Park on June 27 and 28 at 4 and 7 p.m.

The Best of the Rest

Celebrate Brooklyn!

LEESAAR THE COMPANY, OHAD NAHARIN AND GUEST DANCERS FROM BATSHEVA DANCE COMPANY Gaga — the dance language originated by the Israeli choreographer Ohad Naharin — gets its due in a program featuring “Grass and Jackals,” by Lee Sher and Saar Harari, along with a duet by Mr. Naharin performed by Batsheva dancers.

Aug. 6 at 8 p.m., Prospect Park, Brooklyn

Lil Buck is known for his jookin style of dance, native to Memphis.
Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Lincoln Center Out of Doors

LIL BUCK This Memphis jookin dancer lights up Lincoln Center with an early family presentation and then takes over the stage of Damrosch Park Bandshell in the evening.

July 25, Josie Robertson Plaza (11 a.m.) and Damrosch Park (7 p.m.)

'A CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF GEOFFREY HOLDER' This dancer, choreographer and actor who died last year is honored on what would have been his 85th birthday. Along with screenings and a discussion, a sure highlight is a performance by his widow, Carmen de Lavallade, of his solo work "The Creation," from 1972.

Geoffrey Holder, in a 1957 performance with his company.
Sam Falk/The New York Times

Aug. 1, beginning at 1 p.m., various locations at Lincoln Center

River to River Festival

TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY The group assembles selections from Ms. Brown's vast, groundbreaking repertory to create a site-specific work.

Sunday at 4 and 6 p.m., Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park, Battery Park City

WALLY CARDONA, JENNIFER LACEY, JONATHAN BEPLER These excellent contemporary choreographers collaborate with Mr. Bepler, a composer, on a new installment of "The Set Up," in which they work with a master of a traditional dance form. For "The Set Up: Saya Lei," they team up with a 70-year-old master of Burmese classical dance.

Wednesday at 6 p.m., Thursday at 9:30 p.m. and next Friday at 8:30 p.m., Cannon's Walk at South Street Seaport, Manhattan

EMMANUELLE HUYNH/COMPANY MÙA This French choreographer offers a new iteration of her site-specific work, inspired by Iannis Xenakis's "Persephassa." In "Cribles/Wild Governors," dancers enact a maypole dance to reveal the relationship between individuals and a group.

Next Friday at 3 p.m., June 27 and June 28 at 3:30 p.m., Governors Island Parade Ground

SummerStage

'HIP-HOP DANCE: FROM THE STREET TO THE STAGE' SummerStage and Dancing in the Streets present Full Circle Souljahs, Float Master John, Buddha Stretch and others.

July 11 at 7 p.m., St. Mary's Park, the Bronx

'THE WIZ: A CELEBRATION IN DANCE AND MUSIC' In honor of the 40th anniversary of "The Wiz," the Tony-winning choreographer George Faison presents some of that show's original dances and songs.

Aug. 12 at 8 p.m., Central Park; also Aug. 13-14 at 7 p.m., Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem

'ALT MODE': A COLLABORATION BETWEEN RYAT AND KATE WATSON-WALLACE This shared program includes a presentation outside of the box: "Alt Mode" features music by Ryat (the Los Angeles composer Christina McGeehan), reconstructed into a performance of dance, electronic music and video mapping by Ms. Watson-Wallace.

Aug. 19 at 8 p.m., Central Park