

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Untethered to a Theater

Ann Haskins · Wednesday, September 29th, 2021

Hip hop in the Hollywood Hills, contemporary in Century City, modern in Corona del Mar, all live, all outdoors! New dance downtown and post modern choreography exhibited in Leimert Park, new dance films, online encores, dance classes, and more SoCal dance this week.

With funds from the Phil

Arguably SoCal's premiere concert hip hop troupe, **Versa-Style Dance Company** built its reputation not just on its dancing but also its social conscience and academic encouragement of its dancers. The ensemble has logged an impressive record of all its younger dancers finishing high school and many moving on to college, at the same time performing the company's signature blend of street dance genres. During the lockdown, the ensemble quickly shifted to online performances, dance lessons, and more. With the Ford Theater now managed by the LA Phil, it's encouraging that Versa Style was selected for a commission to create a new work for the al fresco stage. The result, *Freemind Freestyle* has its world premiere this Friday. Promising an evening infused with improvisation with hip hop, popping, locking and krump, the new work also includes dance styles like salsa, merengue and cumbia drawn from LA's diverse communities. This premiere has costumes designed by local East LA-born artist Alex Ayon, dramaturgy from poet Bobby Gordon and spoken word by North Carolina-born poet/rapper Kane Smego. At the Ford Theater, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East, Hollywood; Fri., Oct. 1, 8 pm, \$15-\$30. Info, tickets, and Covid protocols at [The Ford](#)



Versa-Style Dance. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Taking it outside

After the pandemic lockdown, **Jacob Jonas The Company** was one of the first to explore outdoor performance in a parking lot with the audience in their cars and the dancers surreally illuminated by cars' headlights. JJTC's efforts then turned to producing a series of short films drawn from around the world in *Films.Dance* and rolled out on a weekly basis. *Films.Dance* recently launched a second round of short films running weekly into December. While some of the films involved JJTC dancers actually dancing, not just producing, the company now pivots back to dancing with three outdoor performances with live music under the banner *ACTIVATE LA*. The series opens in an outdoor park between two Century City high rise office buildings, then moves to an outdoor rooftop in downtown's arts district, with its conclusion in a garden nestled amid tech hub office buildings. The performances include *At Work* with music by LA-based composer Steve Hackman (Century City and Santa Monica) and *Juxtapose* with music by Anibal Sandoval, another LA-based composer (downtown). Jonas provided the choreography for both. Supported by the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, the series is another example of that theater's laudable support for LA-based dance companies. At Century Park, 2049 Century Park East, Century City; Fri.-Sat., Oct. 1-2, 7:30 pm, \$100-\$280 (tickets sold for 2, 4 or 8). Details on lawn or chair seating, picnicking, alcohol, and Covid protocols at [the Century Park page](#). Also at Row DTLA, 777 S. Alameda St., downtown; Fri., Oct. 22-24, 7:30 pm., \$35. Details on tickets, meal options, & Covid protocols at [the Row DTLA page](#). Also at The Water Garden, 1620 26th St., Santa Monica; Fri.-Sat., Nov. 12-13, 7:30 p.m., \$100-\$280 (tickets sold for 2, 4 or 9) Details on tickets, lawn or chair seating, picnicking, alcohol, and Covid protocols at [the Water Garden page](#)



Jacob Jonas The Company. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Amid the flora and fauna

With a commission from the Sherman Library and Gardens, choreographer Jennifer Backhaus and her **Backhausdance** are creating a site-specific work in the lush gardens. The company hosts a series of open rehearsals leading up to the mid-October outdoor performance. Sherman Library and Gardens, 2647 E. Coast Hwy., Corona del Mar; Open rehearsals-Thurs., Sept. 30, Oct. 7 & 14, Fri., Oct. 15, 10:30 am-1 pm, free. Performances-Sat., Oct. 16, 2 pm, free (sold out but accepting names for waiting list); Sat., Oct. 16, 5:30 pm, \$200 with pre-show option \$50. Info on rehearsals, performance, tickets & Covid protocols at [Sherman Library and Gardens](#).



Backhaus Dance. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Movin' indoors by threes

For the next three weeks, the 18th annual **REDCAT New Original Works (NOW) Festival** brings three programs of innovative dance and other performing arts to the stage, each program presenting three artists. The opening triptych includes *Togetherness*, a duet by Melissa Cisneros developed in collaboration with dancer Eric Geiger. In *Sex Lives of Dates*, Pau S Pescador employs found objects, film, and a slide show of imagery. For her *Piece X Piece*, choreographer Rosanna Tavaréz drew on scholarly research on the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and Week 1: Thurs.-Sat., Oct. 7-9, 8:30 pm, Week 2: Oct. 14-16, 8:30 pm, Week 3: 21-23, 8:30 pm, \$20, \$16 students. Details on weeks 2 and 3, tickets, & Covid protocols at [REDCAT](#)



Rosanna Tavarez. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Post-modern rituals

Continuing its acquisition and exhibition of the work of post modern choreographers, the Getty Research Institute unveiled the first-ever retrospective of the work of choreographer and video artist **Blondell Cummings: Dance as Moving Pictures**. Known for translating everyday activities into dance movements, Cummings' work often focused on food, family, major life events, and daily life rituals, especially Black life. Initiated as part of the GRI's African American Art History Initiative, the exhibit includes videos, interviews, and photographs. On view at Art+Practice, 3401 W. 43rd Pl., Leimert Park; Wed.-Sat., noon-6 pm, to Feb. 19, 2022, free. Research guide at [Getty Research Institute](#), Exhibition at [Art+Practice](#).



Photo by Blondell Cummings.

Let the fall Galas begin

Lineage Dance returns with an outdoor edition of its annual gala. To allow more space among guests, there is a late afternoon or early evening option. The performance and other program elements will be identical. The dual events safely limits attendance to 60 for each edition. Private residence in Pasadena, address provided with ticket purchase; Sat., Oct. 2, 4-6 pm or 7-9 pm., \$150, \$275 for two. More details, tickets, Covid protocols at [4pm show](#), [7pm show](#).



Lineage Dance. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Dance films in theaters and online

A bit of Mr. B

After last week's opening in New York City, *In Balanchine's Classroom* gets its theatrical release here in LA. The film focuses mostly on Balanchine's technique with commentary from several New York City Ballet alumni including Jacques D'Amboise, Merrill Ashley, Edward Villella and some glaring absences including Suzanne Farrell. Director Connie Hochman's bio notes she spent time as a student at the New York City Ballet's affiliated School of American Ballet and makes her point of view clear from the beginning. Hochman starts off a bit rocky historically, positing that ballet did not exist in the U.S. until Balanchine arrived in the 1933. That statement might be debatable, but not the dubious decision to cut immediately from that summary statement to a clip of ballet from 1913, in Russia, as if that early Russian declamatory ballet style was ballet in America pre-Balanchine. Those quibbles aside, the film has a wealth of insight into how Balanchine taught and how he molded his dancers that defined his ballets. At the Laemmle Royal Theater, 11523 Santa Monica Blvd., West L.A.; Fri., Sept. 24, tickets, showtimes and other venues at [Laemmle Theaters](#).



George Balanchine teaching class circa 1964. Photo by Martha Swope.

A myth resonates

Drawing a contemporary perspective on ancient Persian mythology, *The Scarlet Stone* (*Moher-ye Sorkh*) combines traditional and contemporary Persian dance, music and animation to find parallels between the myth and the 1979 Iranian Revolution along with its aftermath. The 80-minute film in Persian with English subtitles screens starting this week through the month of October. On October 10, the film includes a discussion moderated by famed director Peter Sellars with the film's creators. Fri.-Sun., Oct.1-31, online at [Tirgan](#).



The Scarlet Stone. Photo by James Carmody

Opera dances

Dancer Lloyd Knight from the Martha Graham Dance Company provides the movement in the **LA Opera**'s latest digital short, *The First Bluebird in the Morning*. Jamar Roberts directed and choreographed to composer Carlos Simon's setting of verses by Sandra Seaton. Online, free at [LA Opera](#).



Lloyd Knight. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Taking it to the summit

LA's Latin dance company **CONTRA-TIEMPO** performs *joyUS justUS* with music by Las Cafeteras. The event is online as part of the 3-day NALAC (National Association of Latino Arts & Culture) national Latinx summit. Fri., Oct. 1, 11:10-11:30 am, free. Info at [CONTRA-TIEMPO](#).



CONTRA TIEMPO's "joyUS justUS". Photo courtesy of the artists.

Two birds on their toes

With a plot based on A.K. Small's novel *Bright Burning Stars*, the new feature film *Birds of Paradise* now is in release on Amazon Prime. Sara Adina Smith gets double credit as director and for the screenplay that follows an American ballet student befriendng and competing with a

French ballet student for a single coveted spot in the Opéra National de Paris. The background of Diana Silvers and Kristine Froseth, the two actresses playing the aspiring competitors, are as models and actresses. While they trained seriously in preparation for the film, dance doubles Natasha Watson and Noémi Verbóczy, respectively, did the serious dancing and receive credit along with the other dancers in the film. Celia Rowson-Hall is the choreographer with assists from Ida Saki and Jason Kittleberger. After the *Black Swan* kerfuffle over Natalie Portman given credit for dancing actually done by American Ballet Theater's Sarah Lane, such questions and credit issues follow any film with stars who seem to lack the depth of dance proficiency presented on screen. Amazon Prime video, starting Fri., Sept. 24. [Amazon Video](#).



Noémi Verbóczy, a dance double in “Birds of Paradise.” Photo by Andrea Paolini Merlo

They’re back with more

When theaters shuttered with the pandemic, dance and its audiences went online and began expanding the possibilities of dance on film. LA choreographer **Jacob Jonas and his Jacob Jonas/The Company** gathered artists from around the world to produce 15 original short dance films under the banner *Films.Dance*. In January 2021 the films started rolling out over four months, one each Monday, all free. The project earned boasting rights as many of those films went on to win awards at other film festivals. This week begins *Films.Dance Round Two*, again with

dance, dancers, and filmmakers from around the world. The original films, a preview, and e-mail sign up for free weekly film delivery at [Films.Dance](#).



“Films.Dance Round 2.” Photo courtesy of the artists.

In case you missed it the first time

Continuing its roll out of encore videos from past performance, **Viver Brasil** adds *Peace Transcends* to the examples of the rich repertoire reflecting efforts to preserve Brasil’s African culture in dance and music. Free at [Viver Brasil](#). The ensemble also is part of KCET’s *Southland Sessions* streaming at [KCET](#).



Viver Brasil. Photo courtesy of the artists.

L.A. dance gets a little love

The third season of the Music Center's digital series *For the Love of L.A.* keeps adding new videos filled with curated dance, music, and visual arts. The season includes South Asian-American dance with **Shalini Bathina** and 17-year old **Shreya Patel**, Japanese influenced dance in a film directed and performed by **Kyoko Takenaka**, contemporary dance set in Leimert Park from **Brianna Mims**, an excursion between beach and backyard from **Maya Alvarez-Coyne**, Albertossy Espinoza's **LA Fusion Dance Theater**, and more. Online free, at [Music Center](#).



Brianna Mims. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Get thee to a dance class!

On-line dance classes continue on zoom, instagram, other on-line platforms, and increasingly in person. Many classes free, low cost or suggesting a donation. One central, constantly updated source on dance classes and in-depth reporting on SoCal dance, [LA Dance Chronicle](#) lists on-line dance classes including any cost and contact info. Grab a chair or clear off a corner of the room and use this time to dance. [LA Dance Chronicle](#)..



Dance classes.

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