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## All the right moves for annual dancing festival

### Chicago's 'Woodstock' festival of dance steps up for fourth year

BY HEDY WEISS Dance Critic / [hweiss@suntimes.com](mailto:hweiss@suntimes.com)

Choreographer Robert Battle, the newly named artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, described his visit to last year's Chicago Dancing Festival as nothing less than "mind-blowing."

"To see all those people in the audience watching all those great companies on the stage was like being at the Woodstock of classic and contemporary dance," Battle said. "It's exactly what you want to happen — taking dance to the people, breaking down any ideas of pretentiousness. As Mr. Ailey said, 'Dance comes from the people and should always be delivered back to them.'"

With its fourth season set for Wednesday through Aug. 28, the festival now includes three free events at three different venues. Scan the many thousands who flock to Millennium Park's Pritzker Pavilion and pack the lawn beyond it and it is easy to see that a large, enthusiastic and sophisticated audience for top-notch classical ballet and contemporary dance exists in this city.

"In planning each season, we always begin with the big outdoor evening and work backward from that," said dancer Jay Franke, part of the visionary, risk-taking team, along with Chicago-bred, New York-based choreographer Lar Lubovitch, who founded the festival. "And this year, though we've stuck to our 2009 budget of about \$500,000, we've also added an opening gala because we wanted to thank our supporters, who have been with us through thick and thin, by creating a really special program with an almost 'rehearsal room' feel."

Following is a rundown of the programs, annotated with Franke's dancer's eye view:

**OPENING GALA BENEFIT** (6 p.m. Wednesday at the Museum of Contemporary Art Theatre, 220 E. Chicago.): New York City Ballet's Wendy Whelan and Craig Hall in a pas de deux from Balanchine's "Agon," to music by Stravinsky; Kanji Segawa in "Takademe" (see sidebar); Leanne Benjamin and Edward Watson of Britain's Royal Ballet in Wayne MacGregor's contemporary duet "Qualia," and the Joffrey Ballet's Victoria Jaiani in "Dying Swan," with archival footage of Anna Pavlova, too.

**MODERN MASTERS** (7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph): The Joffrey Ballet in Jessica Lang's "Crossed," a soaring evocation of spirituality, to music by Mozart, Handel and Des Prez ("Look at how Lang has integrated the dance with a series of moving panels to create a unique stage realm"); New York City Ballet's Whelan and Hall in Christopher Wheeldon's "Liturgy," to music by Arvo Part ("Watch Whelan, Wheeldon's muse, and marvel at the seamless partnering"); Juilliard Dance in Paul Taylor's "Last Look," to music of

Donald York (“Enjoy the reckless abandon of these young dancers, and the way artist Alex Katz’s mirrored panels fuse with Taylor’s movement”); Lar Lubovitch Dance Company in “Coltrane’s Favorite Things,” to jazz master John Coltrane’s riff on Richard Rodgers’ tune (“Lar has a wonderful feel for jazz, and he uses a giant reproduction of a Jackson Pollock painting as an intriguing complement to the music”), and Mark Morris Dance Group in “V,” to music of Schumann, played live (“Just look for the ‘V’ formations”).

**THE DANCING SKYLINE** (6 p.m. Aug. 27 at the Museum of Contemporary Art): A discussion about the relationship between dance and architecture with Lubovitch and Chicago architect Dirk Denison, plus performances of “Agon” and Lubovitch’s “Meadow.”

**CELEBRATION OF DANCE** (7:30 p.m. Aug. 28 at Millennium Park’s Pritzker Pavilion): The Joffrey’s Step Up (high school scholarship) dancers in Derrick Agnoletti’s “Inferno” (“A large, spirit-lifting ensemble of all sizes and shapes”); Ballet West of Utah (led by former Joffreyite Adam Sklute) in Balanchine’s grand-scale ballet “Serenade”; the Royal Ballet’s Benjamin and Watson in a lush pas de deux from Kenneth McMillan’s “Manon,” to music by Massenet; Mark Morris Dance Group in Morris’ “Grand Duo,” to live music by Lou Harrison; two pieces by Battle (see sidebar) and, as a grand finale, the Joffrey in Gerald Arpino’s “Trinity” (“A great chance to show Gerry’s work, born out of the Vietnam War era and the youth culture of the late 1960s and early ’70s.”).

*For details about the festival, visit [chicagodancingfestival.com](http://chicagodancingfestival.com). All tickets are free, except for the benefit, though many seats for the Modern Masters program already have been reserved. Benefit tickets are \$250. Call (312) 520-2210.*

## Robert Battle stepping into big shoes as Ailey director

BY HEDY WEISS Dance Critic / [hweiss@suntimes.com](mailto:hweiss@suntimes.com)



Alvin Ailey II dances Robert Battle's "The Hunt."

(Photo by Eduardo Patino)

It has been just about four months since Robert Battle, the 37-year-old independent choreographer, received the dance world’s equivalent of a knighthood. To wit, he was named the next artistic director of the world-acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, succeeding Judith Jamison, who will retire in June 2011.

Battle will be in town for the Chicago Dancing Festival as members of the Ailey II company perform his work “The Hunt” and solo dancer Kanji Segawa (of his Battleworks company), reprises “Takademe” (a knockout at last year’s festival).

“I have many Chicago connections,” said Battle, who graduated from Miami’s New World School of the Arts, earned a BFA at New York’s Juilliard School and went on to perform with the Parsons Dance Company for seven years, where he first began to choreograph. “I participated in the initial choreographic competition for Hubbard Street II in the late 1990s and developed a strong bond with River North Chicago Dance [which earned raves with his 2008 work, ‘Train’].”

Battle describes "The Hunt," to the fiercely exuberant music of Les Tambours du Bronx, as "an abstract ritual for six men that also reflects my training in the martial arts." The tour de force "Takademe," set to Sheila Chandra's percussive vocalizing, is an electrifying blend of Indian Kathak dance, jazz and more.