

CHICAGO TRIBUNE
JUNE 5, 2009

BREAKOUT SUMMER FOR 3-YEAR-OLD CHICAGO DANCING FESTIVAL

By Sid Smith

The Chicago Dancing Festival, warm and enticing for two summers so far, looks to be red-hot this time around.

The free series of events -- yes, all programs are free -- runs Aug. 18-22, expanding from three programs to four and promising the biggest names on the festival's line-up so far: New York City Ballet's Wendy Whelan and Craig Hall.

It's the first time NYCB dancers will participate, and an all-too-rare visit by members of that prestigious U.S. ballet troupe to our city. Whelan and Hall will dance Christopher Wheeldon's "After the Rain" as part of the program Aug. 20 in the Harris Theater.

Without a doubt, fest founders Lar Lubovitch and Jay Franke have nurtured their quixotic, one-night endeavor into one of the most exciting and must-see events of the annual Chicago dance calendar. In addition to Whelan and Hall, the variety of programming and artists scattered throughout the whole event this year flirts with the extraordinary. You'll see a nice sampling of modern dance and ballet, local and otherwise, as well as some top-notch performers, by attending all the events.

Here's the schedule:

Aug. 18: Baryshnikov protege Aszure Barton's "Ah! Crudel," performed by Barton's New York-based troupe; Jessica Lang's "To Familiar Spaces in Dream" by Virginia's Richmond Ballet; River North Chicago Dance Company in Robert Battle's dynamite "Train," one of the troupe's best works ever; the Oregon Ballet Theatre in Trey McIntyre's "Just"; and the Joffrey Ballet in Edwaard Liang's dense and complex "Age of Innocence" from last fall. (At the Harris Theater, 205 E. Randolph St.; 312-334-7777)

Aug. 19: "Artists Up Close" lecture/discussion, featuring choreographers and dancers from the festival discussing their work and dance in general. (At the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago Ave.; 312-397-4010 or mcachicago.org.)

Aug. 20: The terrific Aspen Santa Fe Ballet in William Forsythe's "Slingerland"; Hubbard Street Dance Chicago in Nacho Duato's "Gnawa"; Luna Negra Dance Theater in Jose Limon's "There is a Time;" Lubovitch's own "Jangle (Four Hungarian Dances)," by his eponymous troupe he now says is both New York- and Chicago-based; the Joffrey in Jerome Robbins' lush and romantic "In the Night"; and Whelan and Hall in "After the Rain." (At the Harris Theater)

Aug. 22: Dayton Contemporary Dance Company in Ulysses Dove's "Vespers"; the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's Linda Denise Evans in Ailey's signature solo "Cry"; the Houston Ballet in Forsythe's "The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude"; American Ballet Theatre's Hee Seo and Cory Stearns in the "Le Corsaire" pas de deux; Lubovitch's troupe in "Coltrane's Favorite Things"; the all-male Les Ballets Grandiva in "Star-Spangled Ballerina"; and a tap-friendly, percussive joint appearance by the Chicago Human Rhythm Project and Step Africa. (*Outdoors at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park; free*)

Wow.

While events are free, the indoor programs require advance reservations. Expect them to be snatched up quickly. Tickets become available June 12, and there's a two-ticket limit per reservation for all indoor events. The outdoor finale Aug. 22, with Chicago's grand skyline as backdrop, requires no reservations.

Also worth catching:

A more imminent but equally eminent presentation looms with the visit of the Netherlands Dans Theater I (7:30 p.m. June 16 and 17 at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress Pkwy.; \$30-\$89; 800-982-2787 or ticketmaster.com).

It's the renowned troupe's first performances here in more than 35 years and will give us an enviable chance to see the company soon to be taken over by departing Hubbard artistic director Jim Vincent, who worked there earlier in his career.

The program includes a piece by the great Jiri Kylian, who was artistic director for many years and remains a choreographer in residence.

The 30-member company will perform Kylian's "Wings of Wax," to a score featuring music by John Cage, Philip Glass, Johann Sebastian Bach and Heinrich von Biber. Glass also provides the score for "Shoot the Moon," by the team of Paul Lightfoot and Sol Leon, while "The Second Person," by Canadian wunderkind Crystal Pite.