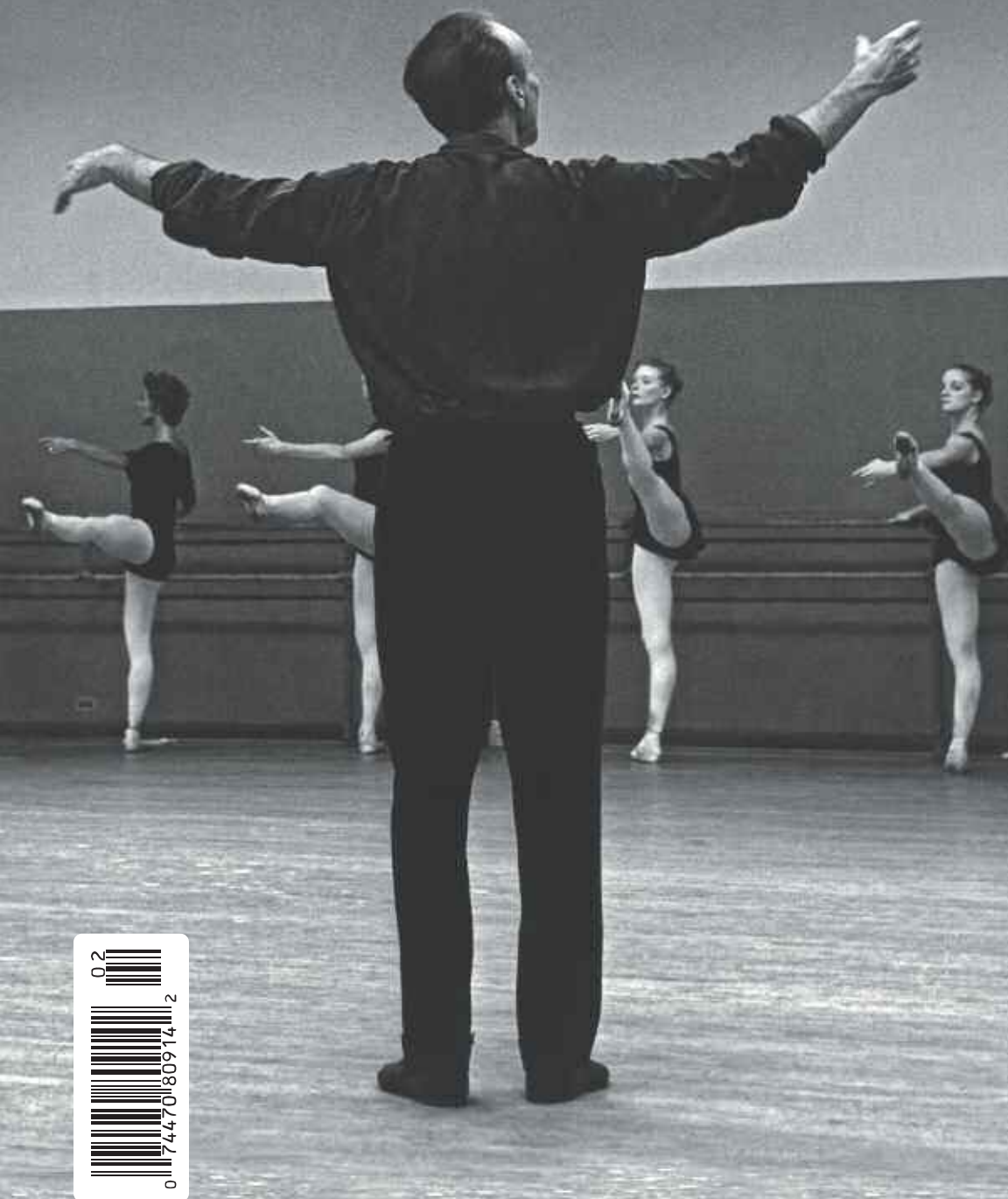


Summer 2017

# Ballet Review



Ballet Review 45.2  
Summer 2017

Editor and Designer:  
Marvin Hoshino

Managing Editor:  
Roberta Hellman

Senior Editor:  
Don Daniels

Associate Editors:  
Joel Lobenthal  
Larry Kaplan  
Alice Helpern

Webmaster:  
David S. Weiss

Copy Editor:  
Naomi Mindlin

Photographers:  
Tom Brazil  
Costas

Associates:  
Peter Anastos  
Robert Greskovic  
George Jackson  
Elizabeth Kendall  
Paul Parish  
Nancy Reynolds  
James Sutton  
David Vaughan  
Edward Willinger  
Sarah C. Woodcock



- 4 Stuttgart – Gary Smith
- 6 New York – Catherine Tice
- 9 Tokyo – Peter Hollamby
- 10 Chicago – Joseph Houseal
- 11 New York – Harris Green
- 13 Miami – Michael Langlois
- 14 Paris – Vincent Le Baron
- 16 Sarasota – Elinor Rogosin
- 18 New York – Elizabeth Kendall
- 21 Havana – Gary Smith
- 23 Berkeley – Rachel Howard
- 24 New York – Susanna Sloat
- 25 Toronto – Gary Smith
- 27 New York – Alice Helpern
- 28 Paris – Vincent Le Baron

- Michael Popkin
- 30 A Conversation with  
Jean-Pierre Frohlich

- Andrea Amort
- 44 *Whipped Cream*

- Karen Greenspan**
- 50 White Lights 2016**

- Joseph Houseal
- 59 Balanchine Teaching  
Photographs by Nancy Lassalle  
Notes by Suki Schorer

- Karen Greenspan**
- 66 Next Wave 2016**

- Karen Greenspan**
- 74 Dancing Black Lives (Matter)**

- Francis Mason
- 80 Carlus Dyer on Graham

- 91 London Reporter – Clement Crisp
- 93 Music on Disc – George Dorris

and performs handstands that literally skate across the floor. Veteran ZviDance member Kuan Hui Chew also puts forth a most sensitive performance in her various roles.

These are balanced with powerful and joyous ensemble dancing – using Gotheiner’s weighty, rhythmic, stomping patterns; gestures; shouts; and claps – especially in coordination with the video footage of driving at night through brightly lit tunnels, across the Golden Gate Bridge, and arriving into San Francisco. The dancers and choreography project the thrill of reaching the destination, as well as a comfort and familiarity with the urban energy, as they form a diagonal line from which individual dancers peel off to dance a solo and then return to the grooving line.

Gotheiner’s *On the Road* is not a reenactment of the book, but rather, a qualitative examination of the book’s timeless themes – the exuberance of youth, the impulse to break free of regimented living, and the call of the open road – something people of any generation, age, and nationality can relate to.

This year’s Next Wave Festival benefitted from a new experiment called the Brooklyn-Paris Exchange. The idea grew out of conversations between BAM Executive Producer Joseph V. Melillo and Théâtre de la Ville director Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota. In an innovative exchange, each executive chose two companies or artists to debut as part of the other institution’s season as well as at home. This arrangement definitely bumped up the level of artistic innovation and variety – both coming and going. These works, when presented at BAM, debuted in the more intimate Fishman Space in BAM Fisher – and certainly factored into my resonating with the productions in that venue. Nonetheless, judging from the range, quality, and quantity of works presented over the three months of the festival in all three of the BAM live performance venues, I can confidently state that creative energy and authentic expression are thriving in the modern dance world today – provoking work that is strong, daring, and wonderfully affecting.

## Dancing Black Lives (Matter)

Karen Greenspan

The summer of 2016 was boiling over with public outcry and protest over repeated incidents of the killing of unarmed black men at the hands of police officers across the country. The Black Lives Matter movement, initiated by three black women in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of Trayvon Martin, had become a decentralized international network responding to the systemic racism toward black people in our society. And by that, I mean our global society – for colonialism and the practice of slavery have exerted their toxic influence both near and far. Black Lives Matter creates platforms for affirmation of the value and contributions of black people through dialogue and engagement and has grown beyond its original online forum to become a much larger social and political action movement.

As I attended BAM’s Next Wave Festival, it became clear to me that these issues were front and center for Nora Chipaumire, Kyle Abraham, and Reggie Wilson – the black choreographers featured in the festival. How could it not be? Dance is a well-disposed platform for the Black Lives Matter conversation, and these choreographers’ distinct, courageous, and brutally honest voices sparked thought, awareness, and dialogue for everyone involved. Audiences, tempered by ongoing seasons riven by continued tragedies borne of racial tensions, misperceptions, and misunderstandings, were sensitized and ready to grapple with these issues within the forum of BAM’s Next Wave Festival.

From the moment you entered the BAM Fishman Space, you faced an all-out assault for which the ushers merely offered plastic sun visors for protection from the harsh illumination. Nora Chipaumire – “daughter of Zimbabwe,” performance artist, and resident

of Brooklyn – initiated the audience into her search for identity as she called forth an image of her absent Zimbabwean father in *portrait of myself as my father*. Journeys rarely lead us to where we think we are going, and this personal search, being no exception, spawned a searing commentary on – or more specifically, a boxing match with – the collective, black, African, male experience.

With her signature hairdo – shaven, except for a crop of braids on the crown of her head – and costume of black loose pants; sheer black bra with exposed midriff; a massive set of shoulder guards; sun goggles; and a Zimbabwean flag tied across her back like Superman's cape, Chipaumire performed a postmodern, ancestral, spirit evocation with layer upon layer of encoded detail. As audience members entered the theater and took their seats sur-

rounding three sides of the square stage, Chipaumire was in the aisle confronting them – pacing forward and backward, massaging the floor as she step-stepped – in constant motion like a caged animal. She held a microphone into which she spoke a nonstop, multilingual litany – channeling the deep, African, male voice of her father.

Chipaumire staged the piece in a boxing ring where her characters were visibly confined by the elastic bands that defined the ring. She explained in her program notes, "I give him [her father] boxing gloves so that he can have a fighting chance." She commented in an interview that she placed the piece in the boxing ring because it is a metaphor for the sports arena that has been one of the only opportunities for success given to the black man.

In a ritualized reconstruction of her father's identity, Chipaumire and two male co-performers, Pape Ibrahima Ndiaye (a.k.a. Kaolack) and Shamar Watt, stepped into and sometimes lunged out of the boxing ring using a movement vocabulary culled from boxing warm-ups (they worked with a boxing trainer), various African dance motifs, and the body language, gesture, and posture assumed by liberation leaders, superheroes, and champions of the arena. The movements exploded from the depths of their being and created a sympathetic kinesthetic experience for the viewer.

Chipaumire was connected, or bound, by a thick cord to the boxer in a corner of the ring, performed by Kaolack, representing the father who Chipaumire barely knew. His mane was a thick mass of long braids, and he was clothed only in tight black briefs and protective gear, consisting of a metal-studded, black-leather jockstrap; sun goggles; and spiritual talismans tied around his arm, neck, and waist. Shamar Watt, wearing an open, black tailcoat; red jersey track



Nora Chipaumire in *portrait of myself as my father*.  
(Photo: Julieta Cervantes, BAM)

pants; and protective eye goggles, played the facilitator as he skirted the perimeter of the ring holding up signs, ringing a referee's bell, shining a handheld work light on the subjects, as well as echoing their action.

As Kaolack came to life from what looked like a time-out in a darkened corner of the ring, he danced powerful lunges and squats while thumping the floor with his fists and making snarling sounds as he bared his teeth and then vibrated his tongue. Chipaumire manipulated their connecting cord as if it were a leash, verbally egging him on like her captive. The two of them produced a host of strangely expressive sounds and calls, which she explained are the sounds of her people – lions (referring to their totem, a marker of ancestral origin within Shona culture). Then she used the strap as if to strangle him on the floor.

All of a sudden, she spoke into the microphone demanding a “black base.” The evocative soundscore, composed and designed by Philip White, produced a steady base beat to which Chipaumire narrated a sequence: “How do you become a man? A black man? A black African man?” She dictated a tongue-in-cheek, ten-step progression, which they demonstrated moving around the perimeter of the ring – Chipaumire following behind Kaolack to make sure he performed his African, black, stereotypically male moves correctly.

The piece touched on the manic when, in “Step Ten,” Chipaumire commanded, “Act like you’re the King – the King of Kings!” The lights warmed up on all three dancers in the ring as they opened large, colorful, patterned umbrellas and pranced around in unison to rap music. Chipaumire had donned a straw African mask for the number. Before long, we were in the midst of a championship fight in the ring – audience participation expected for cheers, shouts, and applause. Playing the sports announcer, she introduced her father as the prize champion.

In moments, we were free-falling into the darkest territory. Chipaumire held the light up to him and taunted, “If you don’t want to

fight, then you better run.” A fear-induced running scene ensued. Kaolack ran – criss-crossing the ring, escaping the bonds of the ring, and penetrating the audience space. Suddenly, in a spate of superhuman physicality, Watt echoed the action and began dashing across the ring and jumping over the six-foot-tall barrier ropes. Eventually, he no longer cleared the hurdles and he brought the ropes, the four corner posts, and the entire edifice down in a scene of destruction.

Chipaumire continued her taunt, “If you are tired of running, then you better learn how to fuck.” Kaolack performed frenzied copulatory hip thrusts in multiple positions until exhausted from her demands, he dropped to the floor. She continued, “If you are tired of fucking, you better learn how to die.” Chipaumire persisted, “Be ready to die . . . born to die,” and the stage went dark. The lights came up slightly so we could just make out her figure bearing his limp body across her shoulders. She summed up her father (in the printed title, the word “father” is tellingly struck out), “Webster Barnabas Chipaumire – the black African with zero futures.” She concluded, “I carry my father. I carry the carcass of my father.”

Kyle Abraham’s *Pavement*, inspired by John Singleton’s 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood*, is a distillation of the decline of Pittsburgh’s historic Hill District, where Abraham grew up. This once-vibrant home of African American cultural legends now plagued with poverty, gang violence, drugs, and dilapidation, sets the emotional tone for this piece – placed in a fenced-in basketball court with a hoop. On the backboard is a projected image of a crumbling doorway. The house lights in BAM Fisher’s Fishman Space remain on as the stage lights brighten.

As blues music ripples through his torso and limbs, a dancer (Abraham) enters wearing jeans, T-shirt, and an open flannel shirt. His entire body “sings” the blues – every joint and muscle melting, slithering, bending, and thrusting to the sound – in this most personal expression of the music. A second dancer walks onstage and echoes a gesture from the



first dancer's sequence as his point of entry into a repetition of the dance sequence. The two dancers are both male and black.

A white male dancer walks over and gently stops each of the dancers mid-phrase and places them face down on the floor with hands clasped behind their backs, as if in handcuffs. The first stands up to resume his dance only to be put down again. With unemotional clar-

en other dancers (all male but one) with energy and precision in an unsentimental exposition of the African American male experience. It is an experience that volleys between exultation and despair.

In a duet of simple eloquence, Abraham and another black male dancer are positioned in very close proximity to each other, but not quite touching. Their disjointed hip hop iso-

lation moves look uncomfortable and awkward as they describe their unease with the relationship. Their movements progress, taking on a fluidity that leads to the clasping of hands, a hug, a smile, and finally, a sensitively danced duet. Now that is an honest dance.

A memorable scene is framed by the rhythmic sound of the dancers jogging around the perimeter of the court while a dancer breaks away and returns to the movements of the introductory solo. This time, however, it is all interrupted by a soundtrack of a

shooting with the accompanying cries, shouts, and a police dispatcher's voice. The group disperses; the dancer runs away.

One of the most notable aspects of *Pavement* is how the diverse music of the sound score drives the choreography. It is a collage of wide-ranging music selections (Bach, Brel, Britten, blues, and others) – conceived by Abraham. In a post-performance conversation, he told the audience, "Music is my first love." He attributes this to his upbringing playing classical cello, piano, and French horn. Abraham admitted to me that he loves music so much that he thinks about making dances to highlight different kinds of music. He is a vision of open, upbeat positivity and it shines through in the



Thomas House and Kyle Abraham in *Pavement*.  
(Photo: Ian Douglas, BAM)

ity, Abraham lays out the pattern of uplift met with relentless oppression that will play out through the piece.

Abraham assembles a seamless parade of dancing and dramatic interludes from an expansive vocabulary of talk, gesture language, male-bonding rituals, combative moves, hip hop stunts, pedestrian movement, ballet-based modern vocabulary, and his own personal movement style. The creation process involved research – reading literary works such as W. E. B. Du Bois's 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk* and Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*, group discussion, and work with dramaturge Charlotte Brathwaite. The scenes are performed by Abraham and a cast of sev-

group sections of buoyant jumps; swirly turns with loose, active, momentum-producing arms; and lively floorwork to exuberant baroque music.

The choreography's encoded symbols add another layer of messaging that relays the bipolar reality that Abraham reiterates throughout the work. Toward the end of the piece we hear soothing classical music superimposed over people screaming and pleading. The beautiful dancing has morphed into a two-man fight. The projection on the backboard of the basketball hoop is of exploding debris swirling through the air. The dancers methodically lie down in two piles of stacked bodies as another performer walks onstage, sits down on the floor next to a downed body, and numbly stuffs the contents of a giant bag of potato chips into his mouth. A telephone line with pairs of sneakers dangling from it is strung across the back of the stage high above the court in the urban ritual that signifies someone has died.

Reggie Wilson formed Reggie Wilson/Fist and Heel Performance Group in 1989 to research, develop, create, and present new work that draws from the spiritual and mundane traditions of Africa and its diaspora. The company's name derives from when enslaved African Americans were denied their ritual drums and resorted to pounding out their traditional rhythms in a soulful expression with their hands and feet. The authorities dismissed this practice as "fist and heel worshipping" – hence, a new idiom was born spawning great music traditions including the blues, slave songs, and gospel.

For this BAM season, the Brooklyn-based troupe presented *Citizen*, a piece inspired by African American figures throughout history who were conflicted about whether or not to leave their home country, given the pervasive racism. Wilson is known for his love of and attention to ethnographic research before going into the studio to choreograph. The idea for the work was sparked when Wilson came across a 1797 portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, a Senegalese-born slave who bought his free-

dom in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), became a leader in the Haitian Revolution, and sailed to France as an elected leader to the French National Convention to cast his vote in favor of the abolition of slavery. The painting, titled *Portrait of Citizen Jean-Baptiste Belley*, portrays the black man dressed in the fine garb of a statesman leaning against a marble bust of an abolitionist priest. Details like the tricolor sash tied around his waist and the tricolor plumes in his hat signify his status of holding a high public office.

The image of this black man who had acquired full agency over his life is projected onto a screen behind the dancers through part of the performance. There are multiple screens of various sizes and shapes strung up in a kind of horseshoe shape around the back and sides of the stage. Projected upon these screens is dance cinematographer Aitor Mendilibar's video footage of the dancers moving through natural settings. *Citizen* opens with four dancers posing in a still while we hear an old slave song, "Run, Nigger Run." The music changes to an African folk melody and the dancers come to life incorporating African moves.

The dancers each perform a solo sequence that they repeat throughout the piece, sometimes in combination with other dancers performing their solos. They don't interact with each other, but seem to perform in parallel universes. Each solo has a particular emotional tone and could be a portrait. The initial solo to African plucked strings features Yeman Brown moving downstage along a diagonal. He jumps, kicks his leg high, and then slaps his foot down on the floor. Brown later descends into a deep squat and pauses as he looks out and observes. This motif is repeated along with a gesture in which his fingers wriggle through the air as if sensing something.

A lighting cue to a harsh red ushers in Anna Schön, whose legwork consists of more traditional modern dance movements mixed with arm and hand gestures of frustration. She seems to be pounding against barriers. This dance of frustration is paired with video clips



Clement Mensah in Reggie Wilson's *Citizen*.  
(Photo: Stephanie Berger, BAM)

of a woman attempting to move her body in a very tight space – between two cement blocks.

Performer Clement Mensah enters and places his hands around his mouth and moves them outward as if he is speaking. He launches into a sequence of hopscotch-like jumps that develop into turning and traveling patterns. He lends his strong physical presence to the embodiment of the words “fist and heel” in a signature movement in which he stretches his body horizontally extending an arm with clenched fist and the opposing leg ending with the heel of his flexed foot.

The tall, lean Raja Feather Kelly grips us with his hip-gyrating solo set to a black church hymn that becomes a mounting religious experience. His unhurried, circling hips keep time with the plodding rhythm of the beginning of the song while his long, sinewy arms move through flowing gestures as if singing the melodic line. The gestures build in speed and urgency and his legwork loses its sensuality and becomes an exercise in keeping up with the increasing speed and technicality of the steps. The video projections, at first on one

screen only and eventually on all of the surrounding screens and floor, show Kelly running through a tropical forest. The projections start to rotate from screen to screen and the camera focuses upward so that we look through the leaves of the trees toward the sky. The layering of the video and dance movement overwhelms as the chant grows in volume, energy, speed, and added hand clapping. Meanwhile, the other dancers enter the space and perform their previous solos, imbuing the stage with a sense of transcendence and rapture.

Annie Wang, a fifth dancer who has not been previously introduced in the dance, performs an authoritative solo in silence. Eventually the other dancers return to the stage for an over-long group section. Wilson offers a masterful ending ornament – a momentary dialogue between the dancers and the video. The entire group is jumping in unison when suddenly the stage goes dark; a single screen lights up with a video clip of an aerial view of a dancer dancing outdoors. In the next moment the lights return to the live dancers who are still jumping in unison. Final blackout.

Wilson's range and choice of musical selections are the heart and soul of this work. Enver Chakartash's black-and-white, multi-patterned costumes provide a postmodern African design element to complement the movement language that blends black movement and modern dance. I think the piece would benefit from nurturing a dramatic line through the work (which feels disconnected). Or maybe that is what Wilson wanted to communicate – a group of people disconnected from their country.