

THPAC Prepares for its 45th Anniversary Season Coming June 2021



Greetings,

2021 is upon us and what an entrance it has made- national upheaval and the roll out of the COVID vaccine. With these events as a backdrop, THPAC is preparing for its 2nd virtual dance festival season. In total it will be THPAC's 45th Anniversary season. What a milestone!

We have presented the great and near great in dance over the decades. This season will not only enhance

our past performances but also will compliment and intensify them. The roster of choreographers for the season is presently in formation and will be finalized soon. The festival will feature 10 artists with a mix of those new to the field and those more established ones who have new works to present. The virtual season will be streamed over 4 days beginning on June 25 through the 28, 2021. We expect to return to having live audiences in theater in 2022--this is something we can all look forward to and rejoice in the prospect of its fulfillment.

This upcoming dance festival is relevant and necessary because it reflects our enduring mission and commitment, which is to present and preserve these artistic endeavors. Given the present economic and social upheaval we all find ourselves in, paradoxically the arts are needed more now than ever, while simultaneously arts are under siege and viewed as dispensable. A great question is how does art survive in a COVID-19 world? THPAC's dance festival and its continuance provide part of the answer.

Thank you,

Alex Smith, Jr.
Executive Chairman

Help THPAC continue its mission to present and preserve dance culture of artists of color give at: www.thelmahill.org

Why Talley Beatty's Stack Up Still Stacks Up



BY WALTER RUTLEDGE

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's revival of Talley Beatty's *Stack Up* became the undisputed hit of the 2018 New York City season. This posed the question, "What makes a dance a masterwork?" In other words, why does *Stack Up* still stack up?

Part of the answer is the most unforgiving four-letter word in the English vocabulary: TIME. Today in our fast-paced world with its changing social attitudes, and the need for immediate gratification and public acceptance, has virtually eliminated the critical maturation period. This is the time it takes the public (and critics) to develop the aesthetic acumen to understand and acknowledge that they are in the midst of something new, different and profoundly groundbreaking.

Created for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1983 *Stack Up* became an immediate hit. Jennifer Dunning reviewed *Stack Up* during the 1983 Ailey 25 season, commenting that "Mr. Beatty's tale of lost innocence is as fresh as if it were being told for the first time." Now 36 years later Dunning's comments still ring true; *Stack Up* had retained a freshness and renewed relevance.

The textured construction of the choreography included multiple layered movement sequences happening simultaneously. This created primary action, and both secondary and background movements similar to the configurations used in story ballet classics. Despite Beatty's repute the success of *Stack Up* sparked an unexpected comeback.

At age 64, Beatty had achieved choreographic acclaim over two decades earlier with his masterwork *The Road Of The Phoebe Snow* (1959). Notwithstanding his 1977 Tony nomination for *Arms Too Short To Box With God*, and several ballets in the Ailey repertoire, by the early 80's Beatty had become a dance dinosaur. Artists such as Elisa Monte (*Treading* 1981, *Pigs and Fishes* 1982), Bill T. Jones (*Fever Swamp* 1983) and Ulysses Dove (*Night Shade* 1982) had captured the public's curiosity, forging new ground; while relegating Beatty to the past. The

From the THPAC ARCHIVES



(June 17, 2012) ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL-(l-r) Alex Smith, Jr., Executive Chairman of Thelma Hill Performing Arts Center (THPAC), Ms. Valerie Simpson, and Tony award winning choreographer George Faison are all smiles after an exciting opening night. THPAC's opening night featured a new incarnation "Tilt" by Faison. This new rendition of Faison's 1973 classic dance theater work featured new costumes, projections, and an expanded cast. Faison has amalgamated ballet, modern, jazz and popular dance and set it to a great music score of songs by the Jackson 5, Labelle and Ashford and Simpson. Photo: Rodney Hurley

success of *Stack Up* revived Beatty's career with a Frank Lloyd Wright vengeance.

Beatty returned to the loss of innocence theme that propelled *The Road Of The Phoebe Snow*. Set with a soulful Westside Story flavor, "Phoebe" centered around young men and women who encounter gang violence. In *Stack Up* the male and female leads are confronted by a drug dealer while navigating the New York City underground club scene. Beatty did not relive his "Phoebe" glory, to the contrary, he did his research to create a new work for a new generation and a new audience.

Better Days, was a predominantly Black and Latino gay night spot, renowned for great music, dancing, drinking and plenty of shade. It's tucked away on 49th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue, an area notorious for strip clubs, prostitution and rat-infested tenements. The diminutive, but fearless sexagenarian (Beatty) became a fixture/voyeur at the club.

Beatty soaked up the music, dancing and atmosphere of the club and neighborhood. Social dances such as the Hustle and emerging hip-hop styles were deconstructed and eventually incorporated into his choreography.

As the curtain rose on the current production, the Romare Bearden backdrop (based on his watercolor *Under The Bridge*) brought us into Beatty's gritty urban environment. The Bearden backdrop, part a of series featured in the 1980 John Cassavetes film *Gloria*, seemed a little faded and in need of sprucing up. For-

tunately, this was the only element of this production in need of a facelift.

From the moment the curtain rises we are immediately pulled into the hustle and flow of the vibrant NYC night culture. Dancers spill onto the stage introducing themselves; and immediately establishing their characters through both movement and



attitude. With an amalgam of movement styles including; Dunham, Graham, Ballet, Jazz and current street/vernacular dances, the Louisiana native created an exciting dance "Gumbo". The abstract narrative ebbed and flowed like a theatrical roller-coaster of falling and rising action. This was balanced by Beatty's strong dance theatre prowess.

The final scene takes us to the club complete with a disco mainstay mirror ball. Beatty masterfully builds the work to a frenzied crescendo, ending

with an arresting final tableau- blackout! Encompassing the four elements of good storytelling; intrigue, seduction, betrayal and mysticism, *Stack Up* remains a powerful social commentary, made more prevalent due to the present Opioid crisis.

Video link
<https://youtu.be/GuJe4moXomU>