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CHICAGO DANCING FESTIVAL IS ON ITS TOES

By HEDY WEISS

The most crucial statistics have already been trumpeted, beginning with the one for that blissful night in the summer of 2007, when the very first Chicago Dancing Festival drew an audience of more than 8,000 people to the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park. The festival's creators, who hadn't known quite what to expect, were thrilled by the response to this free and impressively sophisticated concert of ballet, contemporary and ethnic dance by some of the country's most exemplary troupes. And they immediately promised a second season.

Last summer, by the time dance fans had elbowed their ways into a seat, or claimed a spot on the lawn, the audience (an arts demographer's dream in terms of diversity of age, background and economic status), had grown to 12,000. And several satellite events at the Harris Theatre for Music and Dance and the Museum of Contemporary Art Theatre -- where tickets also were free, but had to be reserved in advance -- were quickly snapped up. Fast forward to the summer of 2009. This time around, five events have been scheduled as part of the third Chicago Dancing Festival, which will run Aug. 18-22. Tickets to the indoor programs -- two at the Harris Theater, and one at the MCA (which once again required advance reservations) -- were completely spoken for within three hours of becoming available. And it's a good bet the only thing to keep the gala Millennium Park performance on Aug. 22 from breaking another attendance record will be rain. (The show will go on no matter what, so bring your umbrella.)

Conceived and curated by Chicago-bred, New York-based choreographer

Lar Lubovitch, dancer Jay Franke and executive director Gregory Russell, the Chicago Dancing Festival aims to serve up a smorgasbord of styles and companies.

"I think we've come up with a very strong mix for the big Celebration of American Dance night in Millennium Park," said Franke, who also performs with Lubovitch's company. "It's got a lot more than mass appeal; there is quite a bit of meat on this program. And our goal has always been to vary the dynamics of the pieces performed as much as possible, and to make sure there is a good mix of music, too. There's also a matter of which pieces are best suited to a particular venue. Some flourish out of doors; others need a traditional indoor stage."

Added to this year's lineup will be a "New Voices" program featuring works by the younger generation of American choreographers.

"This was very important to us, and we see it as a wonderful complement to the '20th Century Masters' program we started last summer," said Franke. Here's the complete lineup for the Festival week. It is "come one, come all" to the Aug. 22 program in the park. All indoor events are technically "sold out," but go to www.chicagodancingfestival.com for the policy regarding last minute returns and possible availability for these programs.

CELEBRATION OF AMERICAN DANCE (7:30 p.m. Aug. 22 in Millennium Park):

The program includes the Chicago Human Rhythm Project's presentation of Jakari Sherman's "Passing 15," a work inspired by the percussive dance tradition devised by African-American fraternities and sororities; the Houston Ballet, the powerhouse regional company, in William Forsythe's stunning neoclassical work, "The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude," set to music of Franz Schubert; the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company in a "sneak preview" of "Coltrane's Favorite Things," Lubovitch's newest work, set to

jazzman' John Coltrane's iconic riff on Richard Rodgers' "My Favorite Things"; "Cry," that quintessential female solo created by Alvin Ailey and performed here by Linda-Denise Fisher-Harrell; the flamboyant "Le Corsaire" pas de deux, danced by Hee Seo and Cory Stearns of American Ballet Theatre; the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company in "Vespers," a work about black church women by Ulysses Dove, the late dancerchoreographer associated with the Ailey company, and Les Ballets Grandiva (the campy all-male comedy troupe), in "Star Spangled Ballerina," set to the music of John Philip Sousa.

NOTE: As a prologue to this program, Twyla Tharp's "The One Hundreds," an interactive performance led by members of DanceWorksChicago (a lab supporting the artistic growth of dance artists in early career), will be staged at 12:30 p.m., 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. on Aug. 22 at various Millennium Park sites. Tharp's unique creation, comprised of 100 different seconds' long phrases using simple activities like walking, throwing a ball and typing, is appropriate for all ages and ability levels.

NEW VOICES (7:30 p.m. Aug. 18 at the Harris Theatre, 205 E. Randolph): This program highlighting works by a new generation of American choreographers will include "To Familiar Spaces in Dream," Jessica Lang's work to the music of Philip Glass, danced by the Richmond Ballet; "Train," Robert Battle's dynamic piece to Les Tambours du Bronx, danced by the River North Chicago Dance Company; "Just," Trey McIntyre's driving ballet to the music of Henry Cowell, performed by Oregon Ballet Theatre; "Ah! Crude," Baryshnikov protege Aszure Barton's work for her own troupe, set to Renee Fleming's recordings of Handel, and "The Age of Innocence," Edwaard Liang's stunning recent work for the Joffrey Ballet, set to music by

Philip Glass and Thomas Newman, and evoking ideas about romance as expressed in Jane Austen's novels.

MODERN MASTERS (7:30 p.m. Aug. 20 at the Harris Theatre):

This program of repertoire by master 20th century choreographers will include Jose Limon's magical "There Is a Time" (1956), to the music of Norman Dello Joio, performed by Chicago's Luna Negra Dance Theatre; "Slingerland" (2000), William Forsythe's piece to a Gavin Bryars string quartet; "Jangle (Four Hungarian Dances)," Lubovitch's work to music by Bela Bartok; "In the Night," a Jerome Robbins masterpiece for three couples, set to Chopin and danced by the Joffrey Ballet; "Liturgy" by Christopher Wheeldon to be danced by New York City Ballet artists Wendy Whelan and Albert Evans, and "Gnawa" Nacho Duato's mesmerizing piece to North African music, performed by Hubbard Street Dance Chicago.

WORKSHOP: THE ART OF THE DUET (6 p.m. Aug. 19 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago):

A lecture demo and rehearsal curated by Ashley Wheeler, artistic director of the Joffrey Ballet, featuring excerpts from "In the Night," "Jangle" and a Christopher Wheeldon work.