

PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

BY DAN JACOBSON

THE REMARKABLE STAYING POWER OF CREATIVITY IN ASBURY PARK

ASBURY PARK DANCE FESTIVAL PART OF A LONG ARC OF SUCCESS AGAINST CONFORMITY

A major narrative in these pages is how Asbury Park has stayed ahead of the conformist curve, despite the pressures that come with an economic boom. We make our point by telling the stories, week after week, that prove our point.

Of course, Asbury Park isn't the DIY punk-like artist paradise of 25 years ago. Sure, it was magical when a handful of creatives, and this Publisher, could sit outside the long-gone Be Gallery, where it all really started, on an empty Cookman Avenue on a Saturday night in the Summer of 2001.

We really had the place to ourselves. There were no cars around! A then, much younger, Bradley Hoffer — who's become a well-known Asbury artist since — would skateboard up the middle of that long block of Cookman (again, on a Summer Saturday night!) to Sonny's Southern Cuisine and back to bring us some barbecue. It was a small community of fun and hilarious, super-talented creatives in our downtown, that people began to find out about. Mainly because we put them on the front page of this newspaper.

You'd be a fool to think that would last forever. And those there still recall this Publisher telling everybody to really remember these moments, and that in future years this place would be packed. They were in their twenties. I was the wise older one around 40. Of course, I knew I'd be right. This Publisher knew what was coming. They thought I was crazy.

But today, instead of a story of all being lost since those glory days of 2000-2010, our city has become increasingly powerful over time as a leading arts and culture center in the state. Our offerings are now at the level you'd find in any major city. It's just different than those early days, and often at quite high levels. We always planned to position this newspaper to blunt the pressures of conformity and promote and preserve the cultural and creative in our city, in whatever forms it was meant to take. We just go with it. That's our job.

And that brings us to the Asbury Park Dance Festival (APDF) which celebrated its seventh year this past Saturday night. Man! The 11 performances were excellent, and anyone else in the standing-room capacity crowd of 200 at the House of Independents would agree. It was a fantastic evening, and we heard many attendees sharing that sentiment after the performance.

This is the best of Asbury Park today. We saw so many Asbury Park arts and culture leaders and creatives in attendance. We all watched 24 performers at the highest level of modern dance in this country. They were from the Paul Taylor Dance Company, the Martha Graham Dance Company, NJ Ballet, Pilobolus, Works and Process and the New York City Ballet, among others.

APDF is becoming an increasingly renowned dance festival with recognition beyond Asbury Park. A big reason is that three of the four founders were acclaimed

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members of the Paul Taylor Dance Company: Michael Trusnovec, Laura Halzack, and Michelle Fleet. Their connections across the modern dance community are vast. Those contacts have now been tapped for seven years, and all in attendance can see the result. (The three, all close friends, founded APDF just as they retired. The fourth founder is Trusnovec's husband, VJ Carbone, who is a long-time arts leader in Asbury Park and a veteran of the independent film industry. Trusnovec and Carbone are Asbury residents. As an experiment, we think non-dancer Carbone should have his own performance next year.)

The festival is even becoming a place to debut high-level work. For example, one performance was a first-look of a duet from the Works and Process-commissioned "Brokeback Mountain, The Ballet" choreographed by Pontus Lidberg. It's set to premiere at the Guggenheim in New York City in January 2027. The APDF founders were able to get it here first for their festival.

All profits from APDF go to Arts ED NJ, which helps preserve arts programs for public school students throughout the state. One hundred percent of the ticket sales go directly to that non-profit, with over \$70,000 raised over the past seven festivals.

After leaving the Saturday night performance, the streets of Cookman Avenue were packed. Of course, that often triggers my memory to go back to those early days of the triCityNews, which started in

January, 1999. Saturday nights in those first summers of the paper are still vivid in my mind.

A handful of us pretty much just owned the place. It was glorious. And it was always going to be a fleeting moment in time. But, as I always tell people now, this is a great moment in Asbury Park too. Just different. I also experienced that Saturday night at APDF.

DANCERS TADE BIESINGER AND ZACK GONDER (BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN, THE BALLET) DURING BOWS. PHOTO BY JOHN HERR

