

# THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF CREATIVITY IN ASBURY PARK

SECOND ANNUAL ASBURY PARK DANCE FESTIVAL  
SET FOR SEPTEMBER 25



**Michael Trusovec, Laura Halzack, VJ Carbone and Michelle Fleet in front of mural in Asbury Park**

ASBURY PARK — With the surging popularity of our beloved little city of Asbury Park — along with the surging popularity of the Jersey Shore — it's more important than ever to embrace and boost arts and culture here.

After all, arts and culture were so critical in bringing Asbury Park back from the dead. Now, they're just as important in keeping our city from becoming a dead zone of conformity.

Change here was inevitable. Years ago, we had a DIY creative culture when all of us pretty much owned the place, as the city was vacant. Today, Asbury Park is known nationally, if not internationally, and can attract the highest level of creative talent in any field. That's what we need to build on now.

Attracting the highest levels of artistic talent in all fields to Asbury Park is important to combat the pressures of conformity that come with economic growth. It's equally important to serve as a magnet to keep young, progressive-minded creatives in our area. After all, it's the triCity region of eastern Monmouth that this newspaper is all about — an area with enough physical space, cultural venues, natural beauty and creative people to compete with any vibrant small city. Asbury Park and Red Bank power it all forward.

With that introduction, we turn to a perfect example of this highest level of talent attracted to Asbury Park — the second annual Asbury Park Dance Festival. The

event has just been announced for Saturday, September 25 at the House of Independents. Tickets will go on sale in July. Visit [apdancefest.org](http://apdancefest.org) for more details.

This event was founded by those at the highest level of modern dance in this country — three long-time veterans of the Paul Taylor Dance Company: Asbury Park's Michael Trusovec, along with Michelle Fleet and Laura Halzack. The fourth founder is VJ Carbone, who is Trusovec's husband and a long-time beloved arts leader in our city.

In the relatively tight-knit dance community in this country, the festival founders have drawn on all their contacts to attract top talent. The first festival in 2019 sold out at the House of Independents. It was widely praised by those who attended as a remarkable display of modern dance in our city. (Obviously, last year the festival could not be held.)

The festival also fulfills the promise of nourishing our local talent by holding master classes by the dancers performing in the festival, as well as by the founders. Teaching is a big part of the life of experienced dancers. The three festival founders from Paul Taylor are all recently retired from the company, and all three of them continue to engage in the teaching of modern dance.

And because this is one of the first fully live and in-person dance events in the New York area, the organizers report that they've gotten tremendous interest

*continued on p.47*

This is an ugly situation. But it's the logical outcome of Red Bank's absurd one-party Democratic machine. Fortunately, this year should be the end of it. The all-Democratic Mayor and Council have agreed to start the process that should lead to non-partisan elections in Red Bank, which has been an obsession of this Publisher for years. Mayor Menna, along with Triggiano and Yassin, are responsible for getting this reform to move forward.

In non-partisan elections, all candidates run in one column without party affiliation. Everyone has an equal shot. Asbury Park and Long Branch have had non-partisan elections for decades and voters get real choices. No one has to kiss the ass of a Democratic organization to get a party nomination, which is normally tantamount in Red Bank to winning the seat. Instead, all the voters in Asbury and Long Branch choose who represents them.

Contrast that to Red Bank, where a small group of party apparatchiks usually decide who gets the Democratic nomination. In overwhelmingly Democratic Red Bank, those candidates almost always win. This year, however, the party is split down the middle and the nomination will be settled in the Democratic primary, which has never happened in the past. It's nonsense, and even the Democratic now see it.

If all goes well, this year should be the last under the partisan election system and 2022 should see non-partisan elections in Red Bank. Here's the process to get there: The Mayor and Council are authorizing an election in November for a five-member charter study commission. The commission can recommend changes to Red Bank's government organization and elections — such as a switch to non-partisan elections. Those recommendations are then submitted to voters for their approval and enactment.

There is now broad public support for non-partisan election reform in Red Bank, and a charter study commission will likely recommend it. Voters would approve it in a landslide.

Otherwise, get ready for more Democratic Party infighting in the future, like this year's spectacle of the party's old guard trying to dump two promising young Democratic officeholders. And that infighting is not going to stop if partisan elections remain.

By the way, we're not critical of any individuals here. It's the system of partisan elections that we condemn. That's the problem.

Councilmembers Zipprich and Ballard just can't get along with fellow Democratic Councilmembers Triggiano and Yassin. The only way, under the current system, to resolve this conflict is through Zipprich putting forward two candidates in the primary that he and Ballard can work with to take out Triggiano and Yassin.

And it goes both ways: Last summer, the Triggiano-Yassin faction of the party tried to take out Zipprich as Democratic Chairman by running the beloved Ben Forest against him. Zip prevailed. He's tough!

So let's see if Ed Zipprich is tough enough to take out the two young incumbent Councilmembers — backed by the Democratic Governor and the popular local Democratic State Senator, as well as Mayor Menna — in Tuesday's primary!

Stay tuned.

from top modern dancers in the city to come down and resume live performing.

"The interest we've been getting is incredible," said Trusnovec.

"The thing that's key here is the word community," Halzack said. "That's what we all have been lacking, this sense of connection. Yes, this is a dance festival, but it's also about coming together. The New York and New Jersey dance community have yet to come back together and get in touch."

"For the past year, we've had nothing," Fleet added. "The few live performances were with limits, sometimes at events with people in their cars."

With the announcement of the festival in September, the organizers now really get in gear. A particularly important task is attracting individual and corporate sponsorships, which range from \$500 to \$5000. Also volunteers are needed to help put on the event, and hosts are sought to house the 20-25 participating dancers. Again, visit [apdancefest.org](http://apdancefest.org) to help out, or to become a sponsor.

All proceeds from the festival will go to Arts Ed New Jersey, a non-profit advocacy group fighting to keep arts programs in the public schools. Both Trusnovec and Halzack said that they suffered when their high schools cut back or eliminated various arts programs, and they know the impact it can have on youth from non-wealthy school districts that always look to cut the arts first.

To understand the roots of this festival, it's important to understand how close the four organizers are as friends of many years. The concept of a festival was one that started off as a light-hearted suggestion years ago.

"What inspired us to start the conversation initially was a joking thing," Trusnovec previously had told us. "We kept joking about let's start a festival."

But then their conversation got more serious as Asbury Park got more serious as a destination for the creative and artistic, and the city's revitalization accelerated.

"What could we bring that the community hasn't yet seen?" Trusnovec said. "There's music. There's art. We're so close to New York City. We have such great connections to some of the most incredible dancers. We've all been part of other festivals. Why not create an environment in which we can do this?"

Here's what's scheduled so far for this year's festival, with more performers to be announced as the event gets closer:

Cunningham Centennial Solos - Merce Cunningham, Choreographer

## TO UNDERSTAND THE ROOTS OF THIS FESTIVAL, IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW CLOSE THE FOUR ORGANIZERS ARE AS FRIENDS OF MANY YEARS.

Merce Cunningham, considered the most influential choreographer of the 20th century, was a many-sided artist. He was a dance-maker, a fierce collaborator, a chance taker, a boundless innovator, a film producer, and a teacher. During his 70 years of creative practice, Cunningham's exploration forever changed the landscape of dance, music, and contemporary art.

About the Centennial Solos: In celebration of Cunningham's 100th birthday on April 16, 2019, a one-night only three-city Night of 100 Solos: A Centennial Event, featured some 100 dancers, musicians, and artists in the largest Cunningham Event ever created. It was designed to demonstrate the breadth of his work and the viability of its performance by diverse cohorts of dancers, and was live-streamed to more than 20,000 viewers around the world.

This specially arranged Asbury Park Dance Festival version, coordinated by former Cunningham company member Andrea Weber, will feature 3 dancers reprising the solos they danced during that celebratory event (freelance dancers Erin Dowd and Burr Johnson; and Tamisha Guy — Dancer with Kyle Abraham's A.I.M.).

Xin Ying: Principle Dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company - dancing *Spectre-1914*...This is one section from the original 1936 work *Chronicle* with a score by Wallingford Riegger and a set by Isamu Noguchi.

Ephrat Asherie: New York City-based b-girl (breakdancer), dancer, and choreographer and a 2016 Bessie Award Winner for Innovative Achievement in Dance. She is the Artistic Director of her own company, Ephrat Asherie Dance, and creates high energy, hybrid work. Recently commissioned by Guggenheim Works and Process in NYC.

Tap Dancer Maurice Chestnut: A Newark native tap artist, recruited by tap master Savion Glover to join the national touring company of the Tony Award winning *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*. He continues to perform and teach in New Jersey and beyond.