

Asbury Park Dance Festival Returns With A World-Class Lineup

Discover Jersey Arts • August 20, 2026 • By Carolyn M. Brown

World-class dance is crashing onto the Jersey Shore for one night only this summer. The Asbury Park Dance Festival takes over the House of Independents on August 29, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., bringing a convergence of nationally recognized dance artists to local audiences. This isn't just a high-caliber dance showcase, it's a community-minded mission to support statewide advocacy for arts education.

Every ticket helps fund Arts Ed NJ, securing the vital creative resources the next generation of young artists needs to thrive.

This year's program pairs historic dance with contemporary artistry. Highlights include the Martha Graham Dance Company in its centennial year and the Paul Taylor Dance Company performing one of former Artistic Director Robert Battle's dynamic modern solos.

Balancing the modern masters is a heavy injection of classical brilliance and rhythm. New York City Ballet Principal Dancer Taylor Stanley will perform a solo by MacArthur fellow Kyle Abraham. The program also marks the return of NJ Ballet, alongside the physical poetry of Pilobolus, renowned choreographer and Dance Theatre of Harlem alum Ingrid Silva, a world premiere by Broadway dancer and choreographer Nick Alvino, and tap artists Demi Remick, Dario Natarelli, and Jessee Robinson.

A Historic Graham Solo Speaks Across Generations

For Martha Graham Dance Company dancer Anne Souder, the festival's breadth is part of its power. "The festival presents this opportunity to see many different styles and many different expressions," she says. "I think that is a unique opportunity that should not be passed up." Souder will perform *Immediate Tragedy*, a historic solo created by the modern dance pioneer Martha Graham in 1937.

Created in response to the Spanish Civil War, *Immediate Tragedy* was dedicated to the women of Spain, carrying both anguish and, as Souder puts it, "determination and defiance." Nearly nine decades later, she sees the solo as strikingly timeless: "It's a story of female struggle."

For Souder, performing historic works keeps Graham's legacy immediate and alive. Since joining the Martha Graham Dance Company in 2015, she has seen the company balance preservation with reinvention. "We do historic works from 100 years ago alongside choreography from today's top creators and choreographers."

Souder's path was shaped by similar opportunities. Originally from Tennessee, she studied ballet at age 6, earned a BFA through the Ailey/Fordham program, and joined Graham 2 after graduation. Seeing the Paul Taylor Dance Company as a young dancer made her think, "That's what I want to do." She adds, "I wouldn't be where I am today without festivals like the Asbury Park Dance Festival and education opportunities like those provided by Arts Ed NJ."

Ingrid Silva Brings Resilience and Brazilian Roots to The Festival

Ingrid Silva will present *As Ondas da Vida (Waves of Life)*, an original contemporary ballet piece exploring how people adapt, struggle, and learn to move with the tides of time and circumstance. Born in Rio de Janeiro, Silva began dancing at age eight through a community dance project and rose to become a principal dancer with Dance Theatre of Harlem in New York City. She also made history as the first Afro-Brazilian dancer to appear on the cover of Pointe magazine.

Silva describes *As Ondas da Vida* as a poetic exploration of connection, trust, vulnerability, and resilience. Set to an original score by Brazilian composer Leandro Albuquerque and performed with dancer Elias Re, the piece reflects how people navigate life's complexities, face choices, and grow together. "I am very excited to bring this piece to the Asbury Park Dance Festival," she says.

For Silva, the festival's partnership with Arts Ed NJ carries personal meaning. Having reached the global stage through a social dance project in Rio, she understands the impact of accessible arts education. "Knowledge is something that people can never take from you," she says.

Silva believes the arts open doors beyond technical training. "The arts are an incredible tool of transformation," she emphasizes. For audiences, she says, "seeing world-class dancers from international companies onstage in Asbury Park will be a real treat."

A Festival Rooted In Legacy, Access, and Community Impact

The ambitious scope of the Asbury Park Dance Festival directly reflects the distinguished backgrounds of its founders. Launched in 2019, the festival grew out of a community-minded collaboration between VJ Carbone, Michelle Fleet, Laura Halzack, and Michael Trusnovec. Fleet, Halzack, and Trusnovec are celebrated alumni of the world-renowned Paul Taylor Dance Company, bringing decades of global performance experience home to New Jersey.

Complementing their artistic pedigree is Carbone, whose 20-year career as a prominent Hollywood film publicist provides the promotional blueprint needed to maximize the festival's civic impact and reach.

As the festival evolved, the founders turned it into a nonprofit operation with a year-round community footprint, including free public workshops, student tuition assistance, and a partnership with Arts Ed New Jersey. The result is an annual showcase that also funds and protects arts opportunities for New Jersey students, artists, and culture lovers.

For Trusnovec and Fleet, the educational mission is personal. Fleet began dancing at age three and trained at Talent Unlimited High School and SUNY Purchase College before joining Taylor 2, the second modern dance company established by legendary choreographer Paul Taylor, shortly after graduation. For her, Paul Taylor's choreography is foundational. "It is deeply embedded in me at this point in time, and I love sharing it," she says, framing the dance festival as an extension of that lineage.

Trusnovec's path, by contrast, began in a rural Long Island community where local arts resources were scarce. He notes that the decision to partner with Arts Ed NJ was born from reflecting on those early limitations and recognizing that grassroots performance is only part of the solution. Describing dance as possessing "this very special magic power," Trusnovec was a principal dancer who spent two decades

leading the Paul Taylor Dance Company.

He emphasizes that Arts Ed NJ serves a vital role by “pushing to get funding to support bigger missions than even we could do.”

Ultimately, the festival turns high-caliber dance into active philanthropy. Fleet emphasizes that audiences can feel good knowing ticket proceeds support arts education. That belief is captured in the festival's motto, “We move you,” a statement of purpose that links performance, connection, and giving back. For Fleet, buying a ticket is more than attending a performance; it is an investment that goes “right back into the arts community” and can “help move someone along in their journey within the arts.”

Original article: Discover Jersey Arts — Asbury Park Dance Festival Returns With A World-Class Lineup

Published: August 20, 2026

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Source: JerseyArts.com / Discover Jersey Arts