

IMPRESSIONS: New York Theatre Ballet Celebrates 45th Anniversary with "Legends & Visionaries"

The Dance Enthusiast's Brand of Review/Thoughts on What We See



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Gabrielle Lamb's "Minetta Creek." Photo by Hisae Aihara

Artistic Director: Steven Melendez

Reflections - Choreography: Marco Pelle // Music: Frederico Pelle // Costumes: Carmelia Lauer and Marco Pelle

Laughing Matters- Choreography: James Sutton // Music: Ludwig van Beethoven // Costumes: Carmelia Lauer

Minetta Creek- Choreography: Gabrielle Lamb // Music: (Live) Paulina Kim Harris and Jesse Stiles with (Recorded) Coleman Itzkoff, KiYoung Kim, Shayna Dunkelman, and Kevin Ramsay // Costumes: Carmella Lauer

Scramble- Choreography: Merce Cunningham (staged by Jennifer Goggans) // Music- Toshi Ichiyanagi (in this performance, used a recording of a live performance by John Cage, David Behrman, David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, Malcolm Goldstein, and Max Neuhaus) // Costumes: Carmella Lauer after the design by Frank Stella

Lighting Design:Derek Keifer

Dancers:Charlotte Anub, Julian Donahue, Giulia Faria, Ethan Huffman, Jonathan Leonard, Mónica Lima, Kieran McBride, Nathan Rommel, Charles Rosario, Sarah Stafford

*dancers in the title picture are Mónica Lima and Jonathan Leonard

New York Theatre Ballet (NYTB) presented *Legends & Visionaries* on February 29 and March 1, 2024 at Florence Gould Hall. The performances featured two pieces of repertory: Merce Cunningham's *Scramble* and James Sutton's *Laughing Matters*, and two world premieres: Marco Pelle's *Reflections* and Gabrielle Lamb's *Minetta Creek*. Each work painted a landscape of metaphor, connection, and vigor.

NYTB at 45, remains dedicated to presenting dance in accessible forms to audiences throughout New York City and beyond. As stated by the company's artistic director, [Steven Melendez](#), the company is also committed to

commissioning new choreographic and musical voices. Uniquely, both premieres of the season involved choreography and music being created simultaneously. This approach of "people working in the studio together" allowed the works, "to continue pushing all of us forward," explained Melendez.



Charles Rosaria, Jonathan Leonard, Nathan Rommel in Marco Pelle's "Reflections." Photo: Hisae Aihara



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In [Marco Pelle's *Reflections*](#), the first piece on the program, Pelle collaborates alongside his brother [Frederico](#), who created the work's music. *Reflections* is the third iteration of a multi-year, multi-disciplinary NYTB commission entitled "Letters to My Father," which invites male-identifying choreographers to create a new work addressed to their fathers.

In *Reflections*, Nathan Rommel captures a stoic and strong Father. Joined by Mónica Lima as the Mother, Jonathan Leonard, as the Older Brother, and Charles Rosario, as the Younger Brother, the family dynamic depicts moments of sensitivity, playfulness, conflict, and love. The partnering feels personal; the technical feats offer care. Notably, the dance opens and concludes with an embrace, which Pelle, the choreographer, described as being one of the most important, memorable aspects of his relationship with his father.





Mónica Lima and Nathan Rommel in in Marco Pelle's "Reflections." Photo: Hisae Aihara

[James Sutton](#)'s *Laughing Matters* , a jovial duet danced by Jonathan Leonard and Mónica Lima and set to Ludwig van Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata", takes place almost entirely on two chairs. The pair evoke the awkward, sheepish flirting which might occur between adolescents (such as the classic attempt to surprisingly put an arm around an unaware love interest.) Endearing, sweet, and amusing, Leonard and Lima remain as committed to their characters' coquetry as to their deliberate dancing which follows the suspensions and stillness of the familiar Beethoven score.



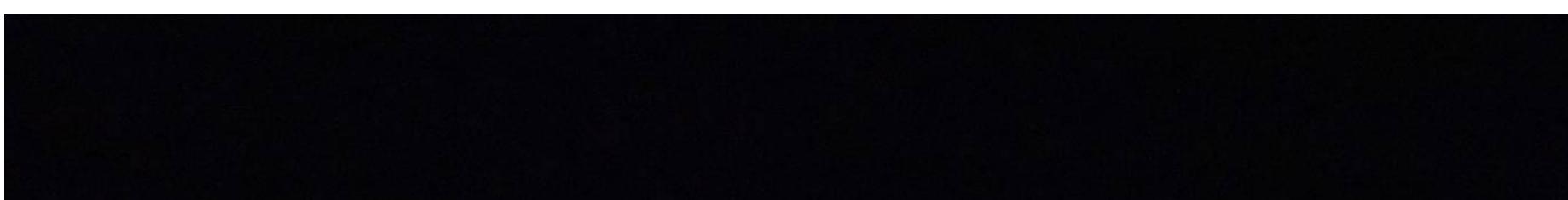
Mónica Lima and Jonathan Leonard in James Sutton's "Laughing Matters." Photo: Hisae Aihara



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[Gabrielle Lamb's](#) *Minetta Creek* carries the audience into an entirely different atmosphere. The dance, organic and mysterious in nature, draws inspiration from Minetta Creek (originally called Manetta Creek by the Native Americans) which today lies buried under the pavement of New York City's West Village. Manetta translates to "evil spirit" or "snake water." This historic, lost geographical location continues to evoke curiosity.





New York Theatre Ballet with Violinist Kim Harris in Gabrielle Lamb's "Minetta Creek." Photo: Hisae Aihara

Set for five and interpreted by Giulia Faria, Jonathan Leonard, Mónica Lima, Sarah Stafford and Charles Rosario, this dance brings a mystical energy to the program. The dancers move through contorted, inverted shapes; their pathways winding and snaking like ravines under the rubble. Violinist Pauline Kim Harris and electronics musician Jesse Stiles play live, interacting directly with the dancers. At one point Kim Harris walks through the five dancers causing them to pause their meanderings and move with her in sustained unison - a memorable moment.

[Merce Cunningham's Scramble](#), staged by Jennifer Goggans, concluded the *Legends & Visionaries* program on a triumphant note. The dance offers an array of solos, duets, trios, and group sections — at times synchronizing unpredictably, and at other times remaining distinctly separate. In each phrase, the eight dancers embody the bold, big, and brave Cunningham technique.





New York Theatre Ballet in Merce Cunningham's "Scramble." Photo: Richard Termine



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Stepping and leaping beyond themselves, the dancers keep the audience incredibly curious. How far can they lunge forwards or backwards? How long can balances be sustained? How quickly can a dancer scooch under the high-lifted leg of their partner? Amongst the cast, the energy was high, supportive, and tremendously engaged.

While each work on the program became more abstract in terms of narrative, New York Theatre Ballet clearly demonstrated the intent of their choreographers. From the warm embrace of a father, to the stumbling attempts at embrace of those new to romance; from water flowing through the passage of time, to dancers bubbling and meandering in the work of a post-modern master, each dance in its own manner drew from history to carry us forward.

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