

Dance

Pas de chat

Jay Franke

By Zachary Whittenburg



KEEP IT KEEN “Above all else,” Franke says, “we’re trying to present the best dancers and dance companies that are out there.”

Photo: Todd Rosenberg

Choreographer Lar Lubovitch and performer-and-more Jay Franke launched the Chicago Dancing Festival in 2007, but their week of dance really hit its stride last summer. Not only are its programs now on par with the best of the country’s galas, they’re uniquely choreography-driven, rather than presentations of whatever happens to be up and running when companies are invited to perform.

“We ask for very specific pieces,” Franke, 35, says by phone from New York, “and if they say, ‘That’s not available,’ we say, ‘Okay, we’ll call you next year.’ To grow our audience, we have to have a sharp eye when it comes to curation, so it’s not a free-for-all.”

Lubovitch and Franke stay abreast of the world’s stages by employing what the latter calls a “divide-and-conquer” approach. Though he keeps a home in Chicago, Lubovitch spends most of his time in NYC, seeing as many performances as he can while directing the dance company he based there. Chicagoan Franke catches shows in Australia, Denmark and wherever else he happens to be. During the planning process, both hold onto a sky’s-the-limit slate for as long as possible. “What we pitch to our board is from a very fantastic place,” Franke explains. “Like, ‘I’ve always wanted to see [George Balanchine’s] *Agon* paired with, say, this trio by Forsythe.’” They draw up their wish list of pieces and venues, “and then we start making phone calls and finding out what everything will cost.” Of the pair’s collaboration, Franke says, “In the end, it’s 50/50.”

If you aren't one of the 2,000 folks who snapped up tickets—which *are* free for all—to the festival's indoor programs Thursday 26 (at the [Harris Theater](#)) and Friday 27 (at the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#)), you can still stake a claim on the Pritzker Pavilion's lawn in [Millennium Park](#) Saturday 28 to catch seven pieces performed by dancers from the Joffrey Ballet, New York's Mark Morris Dance Group, London's Royal Ballet and more. Don't worry about grabbing a program: Joel Cory, who's done voiceover work ranging from the Hamburger Helper hand to Rice Krispies' "Pop," lends his famously booming voice to the event, announcing each dance as it takes the stage.

While Chicago Dancing Festival, like Colorado's Vail International Dance Festival, provides avid dance fans an opportunity to survey the field in a beautiful outdoor setting, Franke and Lubovitch are clear about what they hope their undertaking will accomplish long-term for its host city: incubation of a local audience informed and passionate about dance, eager to support its favorite artists and proactive about discovering new ones.

"Are we successful in getting [festival attendees] to see shows at Columbia or Links Hall or buy tickets to the ballet some night?" Franke wonders. "Because that's what we're truly hoping to do."

Time Out Chicago / Issue 287 : Aug 26–Sep 1, 2010

Read more: <http://chicago.timeout.com/articles/dance/88547/jay-franke#ixzz0xdJ1hYT3>

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