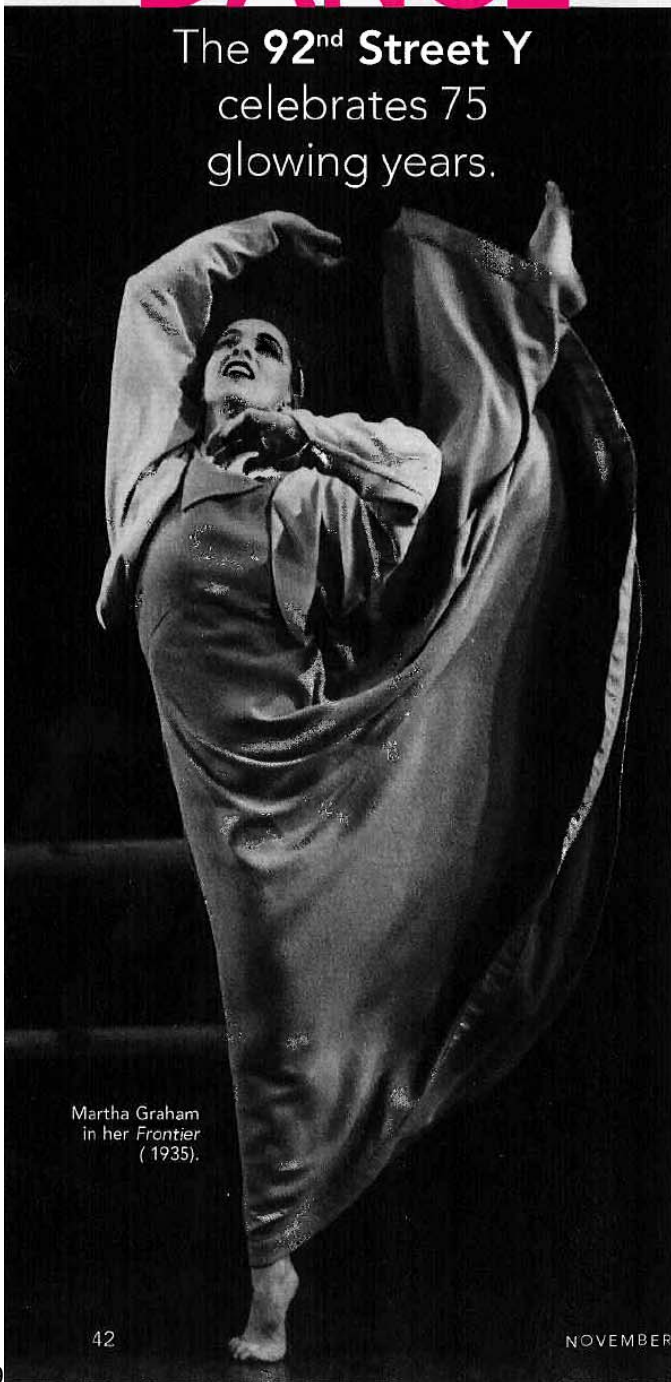


TEMPLE OF
MODERN
DANCE

The 92nd Street Y
celebrates 75
glowing years.



Martha Graham
in her *Frontier*
(1935).

BY EMILY MACEL

A 75-year history whispers through the photo-lined walls and worn wooden floors of the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center. Alvin Ailey premiered *Revelations* here; Anna Sokolow's *Rooms* and José Limón's *The Moor's Pavane* debuted here as well. Lincoln Kirstein's Ballet Caravan, a precursor to New York City Ballet, had its first performances at the Y; Katherine Dunham and Carmelita Maracci made their New York debuts here. And La Argentinita, Carmen Amaya, La Meri, and Jean-León Destiné all brought their international dance to the Y.

This month, the dance center's anniversary kicks off with a gala on November 5 that exemplifies the breadth and depth of its history. Among the works to be performed are *Frontier* (1935), by the Martha Graham Dance Company; Doris Humphrey's *Two Ecstatic Themes* (1931), by Lauren Naslund; excerpts from *Revelations* (1960), by Ailey II; David Parsons' *Caught* (1982); plus a piece by Doug Varone and Dancers. The Y's own Harkness Repertory Ensemble will perform Jerome Robbins' *NY Export: Opus Jazz*. And a plethora of events throughout the year will highlight the Y's mark on dance history.

It all began in 1934, when William Kolodney, the newly appointed educational director of the Y, had a vision: He wanted dance to be part of his humanistic center for education. Perhaps it was fateful that his first choice for adviser, renowned ballet choreographer Michel Fokine, said he wasn't interested. When Kolodney next went to John Martin, chief dance critic of *The New York Times*, he was pointed in a more modern direction. Martin suggested Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman—who had worked together that summer to form the Bennington School of the Dance—be at the core of the Y's dance center as teachers and performers. The rest, as they say, is history.

In addition to the gala event, the Y's Sundays at Three and Fridays at Noon series will honor the Y's history as well. These two series were started more than 20 years ago by dancer-turned-Alexander-practitioner Jane Kosminsky and Ilona Copen (who also founded the New York International Ballet Competition). "They recognized the need for artists to have a space where they could try out their ideas and stay in dialogue with their peers," says Renata Celichowska, director of the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center. During the anniversary year, Sundays at Three presents re-creations and reconstructions, including performances of the de Mille legacy by the New York Theatre Ballet, the Erick Hawkins Centennial Celebration, an Anna

Photography by Barbara Morgan

Below: Pearl Lang. Right: Alvin Ailey with Loretta Abbott in *Revolutions*.

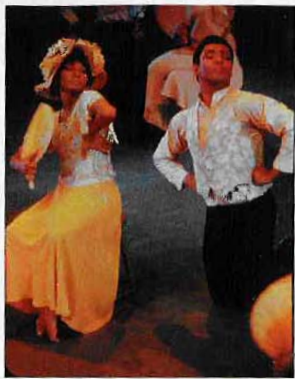


Sokolow Birthday Tribute, and performances of Jean Erdman's work. The Fridays at Noon programs will represent more contemporary artists like David Parker, Doug Elkins, and Keely Garfield.

This spring's Harkness Dance Festival will span five weekends and will take place at the Y for the first time in its 15-year history. The festival was the brainchild of then-director Joan Finkelstein, with the support of the Harkness Foundation. (In 1994, the dance center was renamed in honor of the Foundation, and it is now known as the Harkness Dance Center.) In the beginning, the festival was meant to be an intimate event, so the Y's 900-seat Kaufmann Concert Hall wasn't the right venue. Finkelstein searched for off-site venues and found the 91st Street Playhouse. The festival later moved to the Duke Theater, and recently to the Ailey Citigroup Theater. In this anniversary year, the organization is bringing the festival home to their upstairs studio theater, Buttenwieser Hall.

As part of this year's festival, *From the Horse's Mouth*, an exuberant traveling show designed by Jamie Cunningham and Tina Croll, will bring more than 30 dance artists onstage to improvise and tell stories. The Limón Dance Company, Doug Varone, Yoshiko Chuma, and Molissa Fenley will perform during the festival as well. (See sidebar for a partial list of dates and events during the anniversary year.)

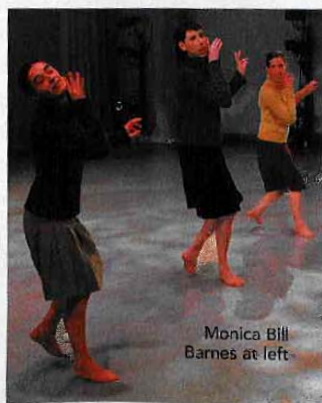
As the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, the Y's Jewish roots are reflected in the dancers who have chosen to perform and work



here, like Anna Sokolow, Pearl Lang, and Sophie Maslow. Naomi Jackson wrote in her book, *Converging Movements: Modern Dance and Jewish Culture at the 92nd Street Y*, about Kolodney's "desire to bring together the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. He fervently believed that within the American context, with its potentially pluralistic society, this difficult act of integration could be achieved with joy and mutual benefit."

In the 1960s a new movement was brewing downtown, influenced by Merce Cunningham and John Cage. When budding dancemakers Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Steve Paxton auditioned their minimalist pieces at the Y, they were turned down. And thus began a new style, which evolved into postmodern dance, based in Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village during the '60s. The dance center at the Y was no longer the place to be.

But eventually downtown dancers found their way back up to the Y. For David Dorfman, the first time he visited the Y was to take a class with David Parsons in the 1980s. "I used to joke about needing a visa to go uptown," he says. "The moment I set foot in the Y, it



Monica Bill Barnes at left

Top left: DM Archives; Top right: Nicola Cammisch; Courtesy AADDF; Bottom: Julie Lamberger; Courtesy 92nd Street Y

reminded me of a Jewish community center in my hometown of Chicago," says Dorfman. "But this was so much more cosmopolitan. It's a grand building with all this history." He has continued to give workshops and performances at the Y. The historical significance of the Y is not lost on him. "Like at ADF and Connecticut College, these pioneers and master teachers and thinkers and innovators taught at the Y. So any time I get to rub my feet and do a little rhythm on the same floors they did, I feel honored."

The Y also welcomed black dance artists. Katherine Dunham gave her first New York performance there in 1937 with Asadata Dafora, an immigrant from Sierra Leone who first brought African dance to the concert stage. When the Y hosted Dunham's 90th birthday celebration decades later and she was asked how it felt to be back, she replied, "I'm home." Alvin Ailey, too, found his first New York home at the Y when he debuted his company in 1958. Carmen de Lavallade, who was an original member in his company, says, "The 92nd Street Y was the hub. It was the place to be seen in the '50s. If you performed on the Y stage it was like you'd arrived."

Sharon Gersten Luckman, executive director of Alvin Ailey Dance Foundation, ran the Y dance center from 1978-86. Her personal history with the Y began when she took classes as a child in the '50s. "My mother wanted me to have the best training, so she brought me to the Y." She went on to teach at the Y and eventually took over as the director. "The Y had very good teachers who really cared about the individual. Modern dance was at the core, but we started doing ballet, and the adult program became very popular as well—like the Ailey Extension is now."

Celichowska says the Y has sustained Kolodney's mission to support dance through the years. It now offers almost 100 dance classes a week in not only

Partial List of Anniversary Activities

Nov. 5 > Harkness Dance Center Gala
Oct. 23-Dec. 10 > 75th Anniversary Exhibit

FRIDAYS AT NOON

Nov. 20 > David Parker Presents
Dec. 18 > Claire Portar Presents
Jan. 8 > Partnership with DTW
Feb. 19 > Legacy Performance:
Sophie Maslow and May O'Donnell
April 16 > Doug Elkins Presents
April 30 > Keely Garfield Presents
May 14 > Legacy Performance:
Diversity at 92Y

SUNDAYS AT THREE

Dec. 11-13 > Women in Dance at the
92nd Street Y: Heidi Latsky, Ze'eva
Cohen, Risa Jaroslow, and others
Jan. 8-10 > Erick Hawkins Centennial
Celebration
Feb. 14 > Anna Sokolow Birthday Tribute

92ND STREET Y HARKNESS DANCE

Feb. 26-28 > From The Horse's Mouth
March 5-7 > Limón Dance Company
March 12-14 > Doug Varone Curates
March 19-21 > Yoshiko Chuma
March 26-28 > Molissa Fenley

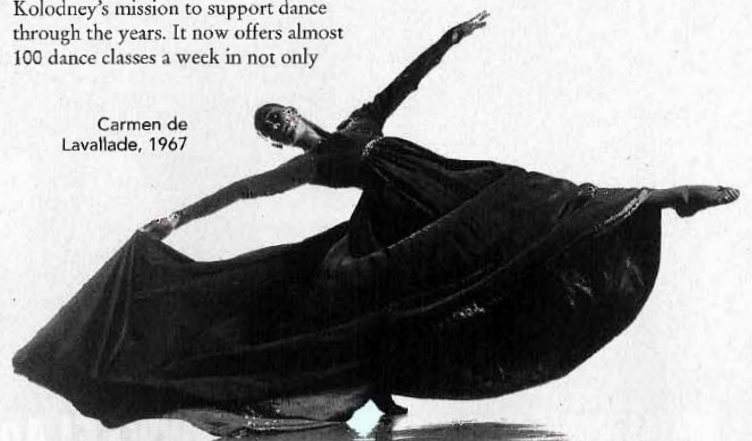
For complete listing, see www.92y.org/content/75th_dance_events.asp

modern dance but also Afro-Caribbean, Israeli folk dance, flamenco, swing, tango, and salsa classes to more than 1,000 students of all ages. The center does ballet outreach to public schools and offers the Dance Education Laboratory, a series of workshops for educators to develop dance in their curriculum.

The 92nd Street Y dance center has a great history, and Celichowska wants people to know: "We're still here."

Emily Macel, former associate editor of DM, is a writer based in Washington, DC.

Carmen de Lavallade, 1967



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