

Dance art with Saratoga ties leaps through three exhibits

Tresca Weinstein | June 7, 2022



Suzanne Farrell and Arthur Mitchell in "Metastaseis and Pithoprakta," choreographed by George Balanchine, 1968. This is part of the Robert Tracy collection, selections of which will be on display at the Tang Teaching Museum. Provided, photo by Martha Swope

How do you capture dance in a photograph? What defines a dancer when they're not in motion? And how can a still image comment on an art form that's all about movement?

Three exhibitions of dance photography, on view in Saratoga Springs' "Dance Around Town: A Photographic Celebration," explore those questions through three very different lenses. Each of the photographers has a unique connection to the city, to dance in general and to the New York City Ballet (NYCB) in particular.

IF YOU GO

Dance Around Town: A Photographic Celebration

Tickets: Free

Info: <https://spac.org/experience-spac/dance-around-town/>

"Robert Tracy on Dance"

Where: The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, 815 North Broadway, Saratoga Springs

When: Through Aug. 21; Thursdays, 12-9 p.m.; Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 12-5 p.m.

"Merce My Way"

Where: The Pines, Saratoga Performing Arts Center. 108 Avenue of the Pines, Saratoga Springs

When: Sunday, June 5, 2-5 p.m.; June 6-9, 12-5 p.m.; June 17-19, 12-5 p.m.; available for viewing for all ticketholders for SPAC's classical programming, plus additional viewing times to be announced.

"Ageless Dancers"

Where: Saratoga Arts, 320 Broadway, Saratoga Springs

When: June 18 to Aug. 13; Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturdays, 12-4 p.m.

"Merce My Way," a collection of images by Mikhail Baryshnikov, is on view at The Pines, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center's new education and event space, which started Sunday. Photos of George Balanchine's great ballerinas, as part of Robert Tracy's collection, will be showcased at the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, on display through Aug. 21. And "Ageless Dancers," a series of portraits by Betti Franceschi, opens at Saratoga Arts on Saturday, June 18.

"This project was born out of the history of Saratoga as a city of dance," said Christopher Shiley, vice president of artistic planning for SPAC, NYCB's summer home since 1966. "We really wanted to do something that spoke to that unique cultural component while activating different locations around the city."

"Merce My Way" is an homage to the choreographer Merce Cunningham, and the "complexity and beauty of his work," in the words of Baryshnikov. "He uses space, depth of field, unlike any choreographer in the world." The images in the series artfully convey that depth, along with a powerful sense of velocity and change.

"Watching Cunningham's dances through the eyes of the camera lens is a lesson in the extremes and

restraints of a dancer's body," Baryshnikov said in an email interview. "His works lend themselves beautifully to this medium. In photographing them, I try to decode the next movement — anticipating the dancers' moves in my own little dance with the camera, a halfway medium between video or film to capture movement."

Both the dance legend-slash-photographer and his subject have NYCB connections. Baryshnikov spent two years dancing for Balanchine and Jerome Robbins in the late 1970s. Cunningham's ballet "Summerspace," which was added to the NYCB repertoire in 1966 and has been revived intermittently since, will be featured during the company's run this summer at SPAC.

Tracy, who died in 2007, was a dancer, critic and partner of another ballet legend, Rudolf Nureyev. (While Nureyev never joined NYCB, Balanchine did create a piece just for him, which

debuted around the same time Baryshnikov was with the company.) Tracy's ties to Saratoga come through Skidmore, where he studied dance and classics; he later donated his dance photographs to the college.

"He's such an interesting figure with an incredible connection to city of Saratoga," Shiley said. "These photos are from his first book, focusing on Balanchine's ballerinas, the muses that inspired him throughout his time," including Alexandra Danilova, Suzanne Farrell and Melissa Hayden (who was also one of Tracy's teachers at Skidmore).

As for "Ageless Dancers," the seed of this body of work can be traced back to a 1983 City Ballet season in Paris. Franceschi's daughter was dancing with the company at the time, and Franceschi accompanied her for the run, which included a gala event. She was enthralled by the beauty and style of the retired ballerinas in attendance.

Three decades later, the idea for a portrait series came to her. The only problem? She didn't know how to use a camera. But once she'd conquered the technicalities, her background as both a dancer and a fine artist guided her approach—a dramatic portraiture style that highlights the grace and expressiveness of each dancer's personality and gestures. Her subjects have included Gus Solomons, Wendy Perron, Carmen de Lavallade and many others in their 60s, 70s and 80s.

"These dancers move with almost more authority than when they were young," Franceschi said in a recent interview. "They never lose their sense of line and drama. Every non-dancer who is around that age and sees these images, their first reaction is joy — oh, just because I'm old doesn't mean I'm *old*."

<https://www.timesunion.com/theater/article/Dance-art-with-Saratoga-ties-on-display-in-three-17217602.php>