

A dance to Bach: Paul Taylor Company in 113th Bach Festival



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO The Paul Taylor Dance Company, 113th Bach Festival, Ifor Jones Chamber Music Concert, live-streaming, 7:30 p.m. May 14, Zoellner Arts Center, Lehigh University.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO The Paul Taylor Dance Company performs “Brandenburgs Opus 88” and “Esplanade,” live-streaming, 7:30 p.m. May 14, Zoellner Arts Center, Lehigh University.

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It's probably not often that you can see a free performance by The Paul Taylor Dance Company.

The New York City-based dance ensemble performed in 113th Bach Festival For Jones Chamber Music Concert, live-streamed, 7:30 p.m. May 14, Zoellner Arts Center, Lehigh University.

"Our Foundation has performed in Bethlehem since 1996, when Taylor 2 [the Foundation's second company] first performed at Moravian College," says Paul Taylor Artistic Director Michael Novak.

"We are thrilled to have the Paul Taylor Dance Company come to Bethlehem for the first time and mark their debut with the 113th Bethlehem Bach Festival," says Novak in a phone interview.

"Brandenburgs, choreographed in 1988 to Bach's Brandenburg Concerto Number 6, movements one and two, and Brandenburg Concerto Number 3, is famous for its fusion of elegance and athleticism, full of gorgeous patterns, musical syncopation and technical precision," Novak says.

"Esplanade, choreographed in 1975 to Bach's Violin Concerto in E Major and Double Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, Largo and Allegro, is considered by many to be one of the most seminal dances ever made in the 20th century.

"Inspired by a woman running for a bus, Paul Taylor decided to choreograph a dance entirely with pedestrian movements - walks, skips, gestures, jumps and falls.

"The fusion of simple, everyday movements with Bach's music results in a work that is playful, somber, romantic and explosive, and affirmed Taylor as one of the world's greatest choreographers," Novak says.

Novak is the second artistic director in the history of the Paul Taylor Dance Foundation, appointed in September 2018 after the death that year of Paul Taylor Dance Foundation Founding Artistic Director Paul Taylor.

Novak, a native of Rolling Meadows, Ill., began studying dance at age 10. At 12, he developed a severe speech impediment that required intensive therapy. Dance became a liberating and vital force for self-expression.

"I wanted nothing more than to achieve in dancing that sense of effortlessness and grace that were so difficult for me to find while speaking aloud," says Novak. "With dancing, there were no limits to what I could express."

Novak received a Presidential Scholarship to attend The University of the Arts in Philadelphia in 2001. The following year, he undertook an apprenticeship at the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Society, where he remained until 2004.

Novak attended Columbia University's School of General Studies where he was awarded scholarships for academic excellence. He then became a member of the Columbia Ballet Collaborative, the university's critically-acclaimed resident company. Novak became immersed in the study of dance history, which ignited his passionate devotion to modern dance.

In 2008, Novak graduated magna cum laude from Columbia. Novak's Paul Taylor Dance Company debut in the 2010-11 season earned him a nomination for the Clive Barnes Foundation Dance Award.

When asked why the particular Bach works were chosen for the dance company to perform at the festival, Novak says that during Paul Taylor's 64 years as founder, he created nearly 150 dances, which garnered him critical acclaim. While known for his broad range of works, in mood, music and choreography, Taylor's dances to the music of Bach hold particular resonance.

"Brandenburgs and Esplanade were selected for not only their artistic brilliance, but also to show audiences how different styles of movement can translate to Bach's music," says Novak.

"Whereas the former is technical and almost balletic in its formalism, the latter is utterly human, pure and unaffected. This contrast is but an example of the range Paul Taylor used in choreographing to Bach," Novak says.

The Taylor Company was expected to perform with 15 dancers in Zoellner's Baker Hall.

The dancers were to perform to recorded music of Bach's "Brandenburgs Opus 88" and "Esplanade Opus 61."

The second piece to which they were to perform is Bach's "Flute Sonata in E-flat Major," with music recorded by Robin Kani, flute; Greg Funfgeld, keyboard, and Loretta O'Sullivan, cello.

Members of the Paul Taylor Company are: Eran Bugge, Michael Apuzzo, Heather McGinley, Christina Lynch Markham, Madelyn Ho, M.D., Kristin Draucker, Lee Duveneck, Alex Clayton, Devon Louis, John Harnage, Maria Ambrose, Lisa Borres, Jada Pearman, Shawn Lesniak, Adam Dickerson and Jake Vincent.

The Bach Choir of Bethlehem is holding its first-ever virtual Bethlehem Bach Festival, offering live-streamed concerts and events.

While audiences won't attend performances in person, patrons could enjoy them via the Choir's live-streaming partner, WFMZ.

WFMZ General Manager Barry Fisher was looking forward to sharing the event online.

"The Bethlehem Bach Festival is such a quintessential piece of Lehigh Valley tradition. WFMZ is thrilled to play a part in keeping the tradition alive," Fisher says.

The 113th Bach Festival is presented at no charge. The modified festival is one weekend only, May 14 and 15, with events being streamed from Zoellner Arts Center in Bethlehem, and St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Allentown and Germany.

Information: Audiences can register for free for a Festival All-Access Pass for the 113th Bethlehem Bach Festival: <https://bach.org/tickets/>