

Jones

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which decades ago was a tour stop for the country's top companies.

Jones calls his company's absence in Rochester "a mystery."

"I'm very proud of the fact that Bill T. Jones is the headliner this year because Bill's work is always interesting, riveting, physical and intellectual and laden," says Garth Fagan, one of Jones' former teachers who will participate in a panel discussion with Jones during the festival. "I'm proud of his contributions to the field."

Dance choreography was far from Jones' mind growing up in Wayland, but he did find an artistic outlet through an adventurous theater teacher at Wayland High School, Mary Lee Shapee.

"She was my most sophisticated performing arts person I knew growing up," he says. "She encouraged seriousness as an actor and director and gave me opportunities to do public speaking."

That experience left him with an open mind as he entered State University of New York at Binghamton on an athletic scholarship. One day, his niece, also a student at Binghamton, encouraged him to skip practice to check out an African dance class.

Its physicality intrigued Jones enough to enroll in dance classes. "I started getting the idea of the sweat of the dance studio at those dance classes at the studio and became more interested," he says.

His first dance teacher at Binghamton, Linda Grandy, "was a tough and formidable teacher who didn't indulge self-involved young men like myself. She let me know what I didn't know, and I gained a kind of respect for the form, the field and the history."

He says his early trysts with Broadway and acting in high school shifted into something more abstract and poetic once he found dance.

Binghamton was a place of



Jones' *Serenade/The Proposition*, which will be staged at Nazareth, juxtaposes the words of Abraham Lincoln with abstract movement. TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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JANET WONG

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company executive director

PAUL B. GOODE



Above, dancers Paul Matteson and Jennifer Nugent perform *Blauvelt Mountain*, created by Jones and Zane (pictured below at left in an undated photo) and named for the small town north of New York City where they once lived.



LOIS GREENFIELD

discovery for Jones in more than one way — it was where Jones met his life partner, Arnie Zane, a dancer and photographer with whom he started his dance company. Zane died of AIDS in 1988. (Jones currently carries the human immunodeficiency virus but is healthy.)

While Jones' memories of Rochester are limited to visits with relatives and soaking up Rochester's hippy counter culture, once he met Zane, Rochester became more significant. Rochester was the home of George Eastman.

Jones remembers one trip: "We jumped the gate to photograph with a handmade pinhole camera in the garden of the Eastman House there."

Jones' ignited passion for dance led him to study dance at The College at Brockport, where he began developing his modern style, working with an influential avant-garde dance collective and taking classes with Garth Fagan.

"I was just greatly impressed," says Fagan, who remembers teaching Jones in a technique class

and composition class, prior to forming Garth Fagan Dance. "First of all, Bill's physicality was amazing."

Eventually Jones and Zane moved to New York City to participate in the experimental arts scene in the late '70s. In 1982, Jones and Zane founded their dance company, which has since performed worldwide, building an enduring reputation as one of New York City's most important dance companies.

"To have somebody of that caliber of recognition right here in Rochester, I'm not sure Rochester understands how lucky they are," says Jamey Leverett, artistic director of Rochester City Ballet.

Jones' early beginnings, both as a curious child in Wayland as well as his early contributions and developments in the New York City avant-garde dance scene, will be represented at his company's performance at Nazareth College next week. The July 15 program, called "Body Against Body,"

is an evening of duets created by Jones and Zane.

One of the duets, created in 1978, *Monkey Run Road*, was named after a street in Livingston County, "where my mother and father used to go over to. There were very few places that black people would congregate. ... As a young child, I had all these fantasies about what was going on on Monkey Run Road."

Another duet, *Blauvelt Mountain*, "was a small town just north of New York City where we moved when we left Binghamton in 1978 and moved closer to NYC to participate in the downtown performing arts world."

The titles, he says, don't reveal the content of either work, but express an emotional marker for him. Both works, he says, are "rigorous, formal in structure, and very demanding on the performer."

He says the movement is repetitive and built around the dancers' bodies and his and Zane's personalities. The choreography is also steeped in a

style called contact improvisation, a revolutionary technique at the time, that "allowed a very small person to lift a very large person, like jujitsu or martial arts. It was a way that broke down barriers about gender and size."

"I love them," says Janet Wong, the company's executive director, of the two duets. "I find that these works have not aged, like some of the works that come from that era and later. They were young men back then. The world wasn't used to seeing people like them — 6 foot 1 and 5 foot 4 — dancing together, being intimate on stage. At that time, it was not common. They were very interested in visual arts and avant-garde."

Jones' progression in choreography from his early days to his work today can be seen throughout his two-night run in Rochester. The program on July 16 will feature Jones' more recent company work, *Serenade/The Proposition*, a large-scale company work created in 2008 as a commission from the Ravinia Festival in Illinois. It's a dance-theater work to celebrate the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, which features Jones' most recent experiments with juxtaposing text, Lincoln's words here, with abstract movement.

"It's much more lush," says Jones, comparing it with his early duets. "The technical level of the dancers is much higher than Arnie and I ever had. It is more about the formal qualities of movement. There are men and women, as compared to two men. The music oscillates between music, spoken word and classical music. Lincoln was a great fan of Mendelssohn — Mendelssohn and Mozart are an underpinning to it."

He is careful not to call it a biographical work, or a historical analysis. Rather, "the purpose of it is a poetic response to it. The poetry comes from the individual, in this case myself, the community, the multi-racial, multi-ethnic group of movers pondering what is history and how do we know it. Repetition in art mirrors or diverges from our ideas in society. What does memory mean in art, what does it mean in the study of history? These are the questions in this work."

Costumes are seemingly period costumes, though modified for dancers. "If you look closely," says executive director Wong, "they're all very raggedy, but if you look from far away, they're actually very elegant. There's elegance and roughness about it."

Both works reveal not only Jones' development as a choreographic voice, but also the extraordinary range of his movement.

Performances by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company cap Nazareth's nine-day dance festival, which also features local-based dance companies Garth Fagan Dance, Rochester City Ballet and Futur-Pointe Dance, and will include performances by a number of local dance companies on Nazareth College's lawn. It will be the second year, out of two, that Nazareth reflects on local connections with its headliner.

"It's very interesting that both last year's artists Elizabeth Streb and Bill T. Jones were students of Brockport," says Fagan. "They've both gone on to wonderful, cutting-edge careers." □

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DANCE FESTIVAL

The Nazareth College Dance Festival runs from Friday through July 16, with master classes, community performances and more. Here are highlights from the schedule. Go to go.naz.edu/dancefest for complete information. A pass to all performances is available.

Friday

8 p.m.: Garth Fagan Dance (with a pre-performance lecture by the company's Natalie Rogers-Cropper at 7 p.m.) at Callahan Theater, \$30 to \$50.

Saturday

11 a.m.: Dance Walk on ArtWalk featuring Daniel Gwartzman Dance Company. Gwartzman is a Brighton native. Free and open to the public, it starts at Starry Nites Café and ends at Memorial Art Gallery. Followed by performances. If it rains, the parade will be canceled and dance performances and activities will be held at Village Gate Square.

8 p.m.: Rochester City Ballet with Futur-Pointe Dance (with a post-show talkback) at Callahan Theater, \$30 to \$50.

Next Sunday

1 p.m.: Strolling on the Canal at Schoen Place in Pittsford (rain space at Eastview Mall) with FuturPointe.

6 p.m.: Dancing on the Grass I — Free performances by Flower City Ballet, Drumcliffe Irish Dance, The College at Brockport Department of Dance and Shaolin Academy Lion Dancers at outdoor stage by Golisano Academic Center at Nazareth (rain space in Callahan Theater). Followed by panel discussion.

July 11

6 p.m.: Dancing on the Grass II with Da Igramo, Frances Dances, Daystar and LehrerDance at outdoor stage. Followed by panel discussion.

July 12

6 p.m.: Dancing on the Grass III with PUSH Physical Theatre, followed by artist conversation with PUSH's Darren Stevenson and local artist Thomas Warfield.

July 13

6 p.m.: Community dance featuring square dancing, swing and Broadway

styles at Nazareth's Otto A. Shults Community Center.

July 14

8 p.m.: Free artist discussion with Bill T. Jones and Garth Fagan in room A14 of the Arts Center.

July 15

8 p.m.: Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, program A in Callahan Theater with pre-performance talk at 7 p.m. in A14 and post-show discussion, \$50 to \$65.

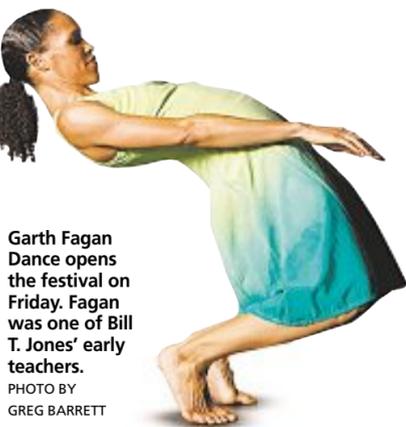
Saturday

8 p.m.: Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, program B in Callahan Theater with pre-performance talk at 7 p.m. in A14 and post-show discussion, \$50 to \$65.

10 p.m.: Party in the Garden (included with Saturday performance tickets) in the Wegman Family Sculpture Garden; rain space is Jayne C. Summers Hall.

ART EXHIBIT

Throughout the festival, the Colacino Art Gallery at the arts center will feature "Of Flight and Shadow," an exhibit of photographs by Ken Riemer of Futur-Pointe Dance. Hours are 5 to 8 p.m. (and by appointment).



Garth Fagan Dance opens the festival on Friday. Fagan was one of Bill T. Jones' early teachers.

PHOTO BY GREG BARRETT