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## ADF 'PAST/FORWARD' PROGRAM TO TAKE STAGE

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**WHAT:** The American Dance Festival presents "PAST/FORWARD."

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. today (Monday, July 19) through Wednesday.

**WHERE:** Duke University's Reynolds Industries Theater, Bryan Center.

**TICKETS:** Call (919) 668-2233 or visit [www.tickets.duke.edu](http://www.tickets.duke.edu).

By SUSAN BROILI

Special to The Herald-Sun



**DURHAM --** The Jets and Sharks rumble with high-flying kicks as they engage in some serious stage fighting. When it's over, they glisten with sweat.

Their chests heave. Then, they head straight for a water fountain.

Despite the fact that these 30 American Dance Festival students were rehearsing "Cool" at Duke University's Brodie Recreation Center recently, there was nothing cool about what it takes to perform this number from Jerome Robbins' "West Side Story Suite." Knee pads, taped ankles and toes testify to the hard knocks they take in this high-energy, non-stop work.

"It's very aggressive so it's hard on the body. It takes a lot of stamina," "West Side Story" dancer Ryan Ghysels said in a recent interview. He has been teaching the work to these students over the past five weeks. They perform it for the ADF PAST/FORWARD program that starts today and also features students in Merce Cunningham's 1983 "Inlets 2" and Russian choreographer Tatiana Baganova's "Sepia," a world premiere.

Robbins' work demands sharp, precise movements full of emotion to tell the story of two rival, ethnic gangs in 1950s New York, Ghysels said. This requires acting skills -- something harder to teach, he added. "I asked them to think about if they've ever experienced racism or discrimination and how that makes them feel," Ghysels said.

The physical rigor makes them feel tired. To gear up before a recent rehearsal, some students rested while others consumed high-energy drinks.

Tatiana Baganova, 42, knows the toll that dancing takes. "After 2006, I did not perform," she said in a recent interview. (ADF audiences saw her that year in "Post Engagement," created as part of the festival's International Choreographers Commissioning Program.) Her daughter Shasha's birth in 2005 had something to do with her decision to stop dancing and so did her diminished stamina, she said.

So, last season, when Netherlands choreographers Uri Ivgi and Johan Greben created a new dance for Baganova's company and asked her to dance in it, she said "no." At their insistence, she gave it a try and at first felt like giving up because of the physical demands. Yet, she persisted. "I understand I still have enough power to dance. This year, I had so much pleasure," she said.

ADF audiences saw her perform part of that dance, "This Is Not a Love Song," with company member Oleg Stepanov, at the Faculty Concert earlier this summer.

In "Sepia," she draws on what she's learned as an older dancer. "Do not resist the time -- a law of nature. Be more flexible and follow this time. Don't try to be younger than you are," she said.

Her new dance also reflects time's fleeting nature. "If something happens, it never happens again," she said.

The late Merce Cunningham packed a lot of dance-making into his time on earth, premiering a new dance, "Nearly Ninety," on his 90th birthday, April 16, 2009. He died on July 26 that same year. Jean Freebury, who danced in his company from 1992 to 2003, has taught 14 ADF students his "Inlets 2" which she performed. "It is a really beautiful piece," she said in a recent interview. It's also technically challenging.

"The music is very quiet," Freebury said.

The music, composed by John Cage, consists of the amplified sounds of swirling water inside conch shells. Curious about the music, ADF audience members visited the orchestra pit when the company performed this dance at the 1984 festival. Cage explained that chance played a role in his music even when he uses conchs. "You can't control the conchs," he said.

But musicians do have to handle these shells -- something a group of Duke music students, under the direction of Scott Lindroth, will be doing for this performance. They haven't had to rehearse with the dancers, however. In the 1950s, Cage and Cunningham came up with the idea that time is the only thing

dance and music have in common. So, when Cunningham asked Cage to compose music for a dance, he only told Cage how long the dance would be. Dancers did not hear the music until the dance premiered.

That's why ADF students rehearsed in silence recently in the Ark on Duke's East Campus. Sometimes, they looked like long-legged ibis wading in water. After a run-through, they did it again with Freebury calling out suggestions. "Just let your joints relax. Feel the floor.

Let your weight take you around. Really feel like you're pushing water or something behind you."

And, they did.

For ADF reviews, see Susan Broili's blog at [www.heraldsun.com](http://www.heraldsun.com) online.

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