

DANCE 08/16/2016, 05:00pm

For 25 years, troupes help fund AIDS care through Dance for Life



Visceral Dance Chicago's Paige Fraser in choreographer Nick Pupillo's "Vital." (Photo: Cheryl Mann)

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It happens each year, for just one night in August. But if you are a dance fan with a philanthropic streak you are sure to be there. The event is Dance for Life — the program that began 25 years ago as a benefit for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, and has since grown to embrace other organizations dedicated to supporting dancers faced with a range of serious health issues beyond HIV/AIDS — people who often are the hardest working but most underpaid artists around.

As it happens, the Dance for Life concert also offers one of the finest opportunities to get a crash course on the state of Chicago's dance community. And this year's quarter-century landmark performance — Aug. 20 at the Auditorium Theatre, 50 E. Congress — will showcase a typically wide-ranging array of dance techniques and choreographic styles as showcased by some of Chicago's top companies, including the Joffrey Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Giordano Dance Chicago, Visceral Dance Chicago and Chicago Dance Crash. And, as always, the concert will gather together some of the city's finest freelance dancers and company members for a performance of two specially created pieces — a first act closer by choreographer Harrison McEldowney and a grand finale by Randy Duncan.



Giordano Dance Chicago will pay homage to Gus Giordano with a performance of "Sing, Sing, Sing," part of Dance for Life 2016. (Photo: Houston Downs/Gorman Cook Photography)

In addition, this year's big night, to be hosted by The Second City's Carisa Barreca and Tim Mason, will honor long-time supporters of Dance for Life, including the fervent dance supporter Fred Eychaner, and his Alphawood Foundation, Barbara Kipper (a major force behind the Joffrey Ballet's move to Chicago), and Scott Silberstein and Matt Hoffman of HMS Media, the company with a unique gift for filming Chicago dance.

The celebratory evening, presented by Chicago Dancers United (the nonprofit umbrella organization for Dance for Life and its year-round activities), will begin at 5 p.m. with a gala reception at the Hilton Chicago, 720 S. Michigan. It continues at the Auditorium Theatre at 7:30 p.m.

Giordano Dance Chicago, which has performed at Dance for Life since its inception, will help commemorate the special occasion with two numbers, including Gus Giordano's signature piece "Sing, Sing, Sing" and Kiesha Lalama's "Alegria."

The Joffrey Ballet will perform Gerald Arpino's "Round of Angels" (the first piece the company ever performed at a Dance for Life concert, set to the haunting Adagietto from Mahler's "Fifth Symphony"), with dancers Jeraldine Mendoza and Fabrice Calmels, as well as Derrick Agnoletti, Edson Barbosa, Stefan Goncalvez, Graham Maverick and Paulo Rodrigues.

Hubbard Street Dance Chicago will perform an excerpt from "Solo Echo," a piece by the brilliant Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite. And Visceral Dance Chicago will perform an excerpt from "VITAL," artistic director Nick Pupillo's work set to a fierce percussion piece played live by the astonishing Peter Ferry. Chicago Dance Crash, the fusion dance troupe that blends hip-hop and concert dance techniques, will perform "Heard That."

Closing out the first act of the show will be a world premiere by the always ingenious Harrison McEldowney. And in what has come to be a Dance for Life tradition, the finale will be a world premiere work by Randy Duncan (set to an original score by Andy Mitran). Duncan, who each year gathers a large, diverse group of dancers together, invariably taps a spiritual vein. (And note: In a new collaborative effort, Duncan's finale piece also will be performed on Aug. 27 at the gala finale of the 10th annual Chicago Dancing Festival in the Jay Pritzker Pavilion of Millennium Park. Admission to *that* event is free.)

As Anthony Guerrero, executive director of Chicago Dancers United, summed it up: "'Dance for Life' is not just a name for an event, it is an act of truly bringing people together to dance for the lives of those who can't themselves."

Tickets for both the gala reception and performance are \$250 – \$600, or \$15 – \$75 for the performance only. Call (312) 341-2300, visit www.chicagodancersunited.com, or go to the Auditorium Theatre Box Office. Group tickets (for 10 or more) are available by calling (312) 341-2300.