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"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition
New York: Today, plenty of clouds, a few showers, high 84. Tonight, mostly cloudy, low 72. Tomorrow, partly cloudy, high 81. Yesterday, high 80, low 74. Weather map is on Page B18.

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ONE DOLLAR

At an Annual Festival of Dance, Jazzy Is as Jazzy Does. And It Does and Does.

By ERIKA KINETZ

CHICAGO, Aug. 7 — People have asked for decades what jazz dance is, yet basic questions about it remain unresolved: Does it belong to the jazz music? Should it be art or entertainment? Historically, it has been a free (think Elvis, idiosyncratic (think Fosse) and urban (think Savoy Ballroom) form, based in rhythm and feeling. The pelvic has always been important.

The most recognizable piece of jazz dance on display this weekend at the 14th annual Jazz Dance World Congress here was "Giordano Moves," a tribute to Gus Giordano performed on Friday night by Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago, the company he founded in 1962 and that his daughter Nan now directs. The music was by George Minton. The dancers wore jazz shoes. Their sleek lines and high, stilet jumps had the feel of a well-oiled 1958 Chevrolet. Impassioned, a pure expression of another era and something we remember as historically very.

Mr. Giordano's company was perhaps the first to dedicate itself to the art of jazz dance and, in 1980, he founded the Jazz Dance World Congress to help elevate the form. This year, the congress was held from Wednesday through Sunday in Chicago. In addition to the festival performances, which mostly filled the Harris Theater, there was a barrage of dance classes that drew some 100 participants from more than 28 countries.

The congress took an inclusive view of what qualifies as jazz dance, offering straight African dance and tap pieces, as well as choreography by Jerome Robbins, Mia Michaels — who choreographed Celine Dion's show at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas and is now working on Fox's new "So You Think You Can Dance?" reality show — and work by companies like Philadelphia and Philadelphia Dance Company that identify themselves as "modern" or "contemporary." Even jazzercise, the exercise program founded by a Giordano company alumna, showed up, and on Sunday offered a cardio/strength/stretch class on the great green lawn of Chicago's Millennium Park. There was precious little jazz music to be heard at any of the events.

Jazz dance itself has always been a hybrid. "That's the wonderful thing



The Philadelphia troupe of Philadelphia performing "Blues" by Christopher L. Higgins, at the annual jazz dance festival, this year in Chicago.

about jazz," Robert Battle, the artistic director of Philadelphia, said in an interview. "Not to be patriotic, but it is what this country is supposed to be founded on." In 1945, The New York World-Telegram described Philadelphia's dances for "On the Town" as a "rich new blend of classic technique, fire, tap and what is accessibly called adagio." Cut the "and," change jazz to hip-hop, and that's not such a bad description, even today.

If the festival is any indication, jazz, like America itself, remains adaptable. Kuriko Sakamoto, the artistic director of the Masashi Action Machine, based in Nagoya, Japan, studied traditional Japanese dance as a child and discovered jazz

in Sweden as a teenager. "That was the first time I learned to freely express myself instead of having strict rules," she said in an interview. In the early 1960's, she and Masashi Mishiro, the troupe's choreographer and star dancer, came to the United States in search of what Mr. Sakamoto calls "real jazz dance." They ended up studying with Frank Hatchet at Broadway Dance Center. The legacy of those years, as well as Mr. Mishiro's early training in gymnastics, judo and karate, are all evident in the choreography, which he likes to describe as having "Western style and Japanese soul." The group has performed at the festival every year since its inception,



Masashi Action Machine in "Japanese Businessmen" by Kuriko Sakamoto and Masashi Mishiro.

though never in New York. "Victorio Bagli, who danced for Lincoln Center and directed the Lyon Opera Ballet, brought his Rome-based company, Danza Frustrata. Victorio Bagli, to the festival for its third appearance in the United States. An otherwise vibrant man, he looked frankly exhausted when asked to categorize his work. "It is not classical," he said. "It is not jazz. It is not."

Perhaps the important question these days is not what jazz dance is, but what its legacy should be retained. America's early jazz dancers said so in Harlem, bonded, fought it wars and with each other. When they danced, they did it for fun and for money, which meant that it had to be entertaining. Cynicism had not been educated into them, and the competitive, childlike thrill of figuring out how to spin on one's chin had not been educated out. It was a deeply human endeavor.

That's not quite the case today: some choreographers seem overly dazzled by the impressive technical capabilities of their dancers' beautiful legs.

One can only hope they paid close attention to Robbins's "Passage for

Two" cast from "NY Export: Opus Jazz," which was danced Saturday night by Erikka Kineta and Samuel Pergande of the Jeffrey Ballet. Robbins possessed a serene, smothering belief in the power of gesture, a confidence that some contemporary choreographers seem to lack.

We also have jazz to thank for unlocking certain blockages suffered

With hundreds of feet a-stomping, who has time to define a style?

through much of modern history, namely the frozen pelvis of polite society. That has laid the ground for many other things, one of the good ones being Mr. Battle's "Strange Emotions," a duet for two men set to music by John Macley, which was performed Friday night. Mr. Battle, who is a Juillard graduate and formerly with the Parsons Dance Company, said he devised the dance at 3 a.m., while on tour, and it does have a late-night rawness about it. His dancers

fall flat on their backs. They exhale, mouth agape, in sharp breaths. This kind of great bowles the deepest separation of life: the lungs and, maybe, the heart itself.

Meanwhile, the afternoons were filled with the muted throb of several hundred pairs of feet hitting the carpeted floor of the Grand Ballroom of the Palmer House Hilton. The dancers were so young, most of them, and they had to move so fast, arms akimbo as they scrambled after the music, that there was no space for self-consciousness — or for musing over questions of what jazz is or isn't.

Some of the movement felt bland and derivative: how on earth did the dark exhalations of the old Savoy Ballroom end up diffused among smelly rococo arches with painted peacocks and noble stone horses? But there was much sweat and effort all around, and there is beauty in that. Moves with overcoiled rings the balcony above. If this is jazz dance as it is lived today, at the least it may serve as a reminder that there is absolutely nothing wrong with giving all you've got, whether to God, an audience or your mother.

2005年8月、Jazz Dance World Congress 世界大会に出演中、あの『NYタイムズ』よりオファーがあり、約1時間にも及ぶ単独インタビューを受け、8月8日発売のNYタイムズの紙面を大きく飾り、本文にて紹介されました。(写真:右 MASASHI ACTION MACHINE)