

NEVER
STAND
STILL

DANCING AT
JACOB'S
PILLOW

A film by
Ron Honsa

74 minutes, English, Digital, 16:9, 2011, Documentary



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"An exhilarating documentary featuring every kind of dance form imaginable in rapid, kinesthetically gripping visuals."

– *San Francisco Examiner*

Synopsis

Legendary dancers and choreographers Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Suzanne Farrell, Mark Morris, Judith Jamison and Bill Irwin appear alongside new innovators to reveal the passion, discipline, and daring of the world of dance in *Never Stand Still*. Filmed at the iconic Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, this thrilling documentary features amazing performances by world-renowned dancers interwoven with intimate interviews, behind-the-scenes insights, and rare archival footage.

Founded in the 1930s by visionary dance pioneer Ted Shawn on a farm in the Berkshires, today the Pillow is an idyllic mecca for artists and audiences from around the world, a place where dance in all its forms – from ballet to jazz to contemporary – is studied, created, performed and celebrated.

Like Wim Wenders's *Pina*, *Never Stand Still* immerses us in the lives of extraordinary artists and the power of dance.



Filmmaker Bios

Producer/Director Ron Honsa

Ron Honsa founded Moving Pictures over two decades ago and has overseen hundreds of projects for the company's diverse clientele. Under his leadership, Moving Pictures has distinguished itself as a production company for original programming, music specials, documentaries, and sports entertainment. Its work has been recognized through the years by a wide range of industry awards, including the prestigious Peabody Award, a DuPont Award for Broadcast Excellence, and Emmy Awards.

Honsa's broad experience in film and television have taken him all over the world and placed him in almost every type of production environment. The company's production credits include: *The One Show*, *US Tennis Open*, *CBS Reports*, *The District*, *NOW with Bill Moyers*, *ESPN's Battle of the Giants*, *Road Dreams*, *One Life to Live*, *Sesame Street*,

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Live at Lincoln Center, Cosmic Café, Scavengers, Between the Lions, Girls on the Move, and America's Most Wanted.

Honsa has directed second-unit production for feature films including *Head of State, Cadillac Man, Fallen, Silence of the Lambs, She-Devil, True Colors, Quick Change, Jungle Fever, and Awakenings*. During his career, Ron has directed such well-known personalities as Lauren Bacall, Robin Williams, Bill Moyers, Nelson Mandela, Gladys Knight, Meryl Streep, Bill Murray, Jim Nantz, Deborah Norville, Alec Baldwin, and other celebrities.

Throughout his career, Ron Honsa has had a personal passion for producing dance for television. He produced and directed the award-winning documentary *The Men Who Danced*. He has directed television specials of *Dance Theatre of Harlem* and *Limon Dance Company* for Lincoln Center Dance Collection. An interactive video with Savion Glover, a profile of Paul Taylor, and Honsa's video work for the Balanchine Trust was profiled in *The Talk of the Town* for *The New Yorker* magazine.

Ron Honsa's documentary work has been honored with awards in the International Film and TV Festival of New York, the Chicago International Film Festival, the American Film Festival, Dance on Camera, and the Houston Film Festival.

Producer/Writer Nan Penman

As a founding partner of Moving Pictures, producer Nan Penman has worked as a team with director Ron Honsa for over 20 years. During this time the company's work has been honored with a wide range of industry awards, including the prestigious Peabody Award, a DuPont Award for Broadcast Excellence, and Emmy Awards.

Producer Nan Penman's first project with director Ron Honsa was the award-winning documentary *The Men Who Danced*. Since then they have collaborated on projects ranging from two short films for *Glamour's* Women of the Year, numerous USTA opening ceremonies for ESPN, an Outward Bound documentary *Girls on the Move*, a video series based on *Real Simple* magazine, a *Gladys Knight Special* for AMC, *The One Show*, the annual advertising award show, promos for PBS featuring Meryl Streep and Bill Moyers and the creation of two original shows – *Scavengers* for VH1 and *Cosmic Cafe* for WE Television.

Nan Penman began her career in NYC in the theater, assisting the legendary Broadway producer, David Merrick, on his productions of *42nd Street* and *I Won't Dance*. She also worked Off Broadway and at the Williamstown Theater Festival. She transitioned from theater to television with a position in program development at NBC and has done script development/research for HBO and Nederlander Television. In addition, she has coordinated live theatrical shows and fundraising galas for both corporate and nonprofit events and worked on the daytime series, *As The World Turns*.

Director's Statement

As someone who has spent his life working in a visual medium, capturing the human form moving through space has always fascinated me. The trick is how to capture the ephemeral experience of dance in a two-dimensional medium that is caught in time. As a young filmmaker in New York City, I was hired to film the Lar Lubovitch Dance Company at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in the early 1980s. I was struck by the beauty and intelligence of the work that was taking place at this secluded dance festival. I began to learn about the Pillow's unique history and met one of its earliest dance pioneers, Barton Mumaw. This ultimately led me to the making of the award-winning documentary *The Men Who Danced* – the story of Ted Shawn and the first all-male dance company in America.

Many years passed as I worked in the New York film industry and established my company Moving Pictures. When I learned that the 75th Anniversary of Jacob's Pillow was approaching, I was eager to return to the Pillow. Producer Nan Penman and I met with Ella Baff, Executive and Artistic Director of Jacob's Pillow and this meeting began the journey of *Never Stand Still*. Filmed over several seasons, the documentary shows the passion, discipline and sense of whimsy that is demanded of those who choose a life in dance. Perhaps this love for dance can only be experienced in the body of a dancer. And yet, this film is a humble attempt to document what this art form demands.

From the youngest dancers in this film to the legendary masters of the dance, it was obvious to me that a deep and creative vibration has always resonated at Jacob's Pillow. This mighty international dance festival captured my heart many years ago. *Never Stand Still* is a love letter to a rare place and the dancers who dare to express the inexpressible through movement.

Dancers and Choreographers Featured

Marge Champion, Film dancer during MGM's Golden Age with partner Gower Champion; star performer on Broadway and television

Merce Cunningham, Founder and Artistic Director of Merce Cunningham Dance Company; National Medal of Arts recipient; Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur (France)

Suzanne Farrell, Artistic Director, The Suzanne Farrell Ballet; National Medal of Arts recipient; Former Principal Dancer, New York City Ballet

Diane Ferlatte, Storyteller, National Storytelling Network's Oracle Circle of Excellence Award; National Association of Black Storytellers Zora Neale Hurston Award

Frederic Franklin, Co-founder, Slavenska-Franklin Ballet; Founding Director, National Ballet in Washington; Former Principal Dancer, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo

Joanna Haigood, Artistic Director/Co-founder, Zaccho Dance Theatre; United States Artists Fellowship Award; Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships

Anna-Marie Holmes, Former Artistic Director, Boston Ballet; Former Dean of Faculty, Boston Ballet Center for Dance Education; Ballet Program Director, The School at Jacob's Pillow; Dance Magazine Award; Emmy Award

[Nikolaj Hübbe](#), Artistic Director, Royal Danish Ballet; Former Principal Dancer, New York City Ballet; Silver Medal in the Paris Ballet Competition; French Critics Prize

[Bill Irwin](#), Performer/Choreographer/Director, Tony Award for Best Actor in a Play; National Endowment for the Arts Choreographer's Fellowship; MacArthur "Genius" Award winner; Guggenheim and Fulbright Fellowships

[Judith Jamison](#), Artistic Director Emerita, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; Kennedy Center Honors recipient; National Medal of Arts recipient; American Choreography Award

[Bill T. Jones](#), Artistic Director, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Tony Award-winning choreographer and director of Fela!; MacArthur "Genius" Award winner and Kennedy Center Honors recipient

[Jomar Mesquita](#), Artistic Director, Mimulus Dance Company, SESC/SATED Best Choreographer

[Mark Morris](#), Artistic Director/Founder, Mark Morris Dance Group; MacArthur "Genius" Award winner; Leonard Bernstein Lifetime Achievement Award for the Elevation of Music in Society

[Gideon Obarzanek](#), Artistic Director/Founder, Chunky Move; Bessie Award for Outstanding Choreography and Creation; two Helpmann Awards (Australia)

[Jens Rosén](#), Artistic Director of Stockholm 59° North; Répétiteur, Royal Swedish Ballet

[Shantala Shivalingappa](#), Dancer/Choreographer; former performer for Pina Bausch, Maurice Béjart and Peter Brook; soloist at worldwide festivals

[Paul Taylor](#), Founder, Paul Taylor Dance Company; Kennedy Center Honors recipient; National Medal of Arts recipient; MacArthur "Genius" Award winner; Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur (France)

[Linda Tillery](#), Founder/Member, Cultural Heritage Choir; Grammy-nominated; Parents Choice Award

[Rasta Thomas](#), Artistic Director/Founder, Bad Boys of Dance; Former dancer with Kirov Ballet and American Ballet Theatre; appearances on Broadway and in films

Quotes from Never Stand Still

For those of us who choose a life in dance, we have to insist on taking risks. Risks of ideas and what the human body can express. There's a place called Jacob's Pillow where artists have done just that: taking leaps of faith, setting new ideas in motion, because dance can never stand still. – **Bill T. Jones (opening voiceover)**

Jacob's Pillow [is] a kind of a conduit, you know, to get things moving.
– **Judith Jamison**

It was a place where people could, quietly or not, think differently and act differently.
– **Merce Cunningham**

Jacob's Pillow is known as the keeper. – **Gideon Obarzanek**

Ted Shawn set out to make male dancing acceptable. I find myself doing the same thing, and find that truly inspiring. – **Rasta Thomas**

I'm interested in a big picture of dance and feel that the Pillow has always shown a variety of people—different companies, different styles of dance, and people from different places. – **Mark Morris**

I don't think everything's for everybody. I like that people specialize and have specific interests. I like the idea that people remain curious. I like to say that my work is not for everyone—it's for anyone. – **Mark Morris**

[Ted Shawn] made a functional place for dance at a time when there were very few, if any, places like that. – **Merce Cunningham**

To have a dance come from here and be elaborated on here, you'll be able to grow here, you have time to hone your skills, you're choreographing, you have time to stretch yourself, grow emotionally and physically and spiritually—it's magical. – **Judith Jamison**

[Dance is] a young career. You don't have forever. – **Suzanne Farrell**

[Dance is] not for anybody who wants to be sure and safe. – **Marge Champion**

Dancing takes tenacity, determination, but also interest in movement—that's what it's about. – **Merce Cunningham**

My feeling, traveling in North America, is that there is a much richer history of modern dance. I continue to learn and understand more, because that's what, really, modern dance is about—it never stands still. – **Gideon Obarzanek**

It's part of the charm at the Pillow...the intimacy up there, when you work with a small group like that, in the studio, the direct and close contact you have with a dancer, with a student; it's as if it's choreographed. It becomes very intimate. – **Nikolaj Hubbe**

The word sanctuary kept coming to me...this place really has that safe feeling.
– **Joanna Haigood**

[Dance] should be fun, and it should be a give and take on the part of the teacher and the student. – **Suzanne Farrell**

When I came and danced here, I could feel what I call the dust of the performers who had been here before, and I like to think that I left some of my own dust back in 1976, and that everyone here that dances feels the same way. We need to dance. We would dance even if no one came. We want to give, and that's our purpose. – **Suzanne Farrell**

[The Pillow] is one of the few places you can come and really feel and understand the past in order to move into the future. – **Gideon Obarzanek**

I don't see any reason why one should think at any moment that one is any better or any worse than any other. It's just what you do with it. – **Merce Cunningham**

You have to touch the human spirit, don't you? What's the point otherwise?

– **Judith Jamison**

I encourage people to dance because dancing is direct and honest. I'm encouraging others to dance and take some interest in it not in order to build my company or even build my audience, but to build peoples' awareness and interest in the culture of dance.

– **Mark Morris**

When we dance, it's not only for entertainment, it's not only for enjoyment, it's a moment of sharing something with an audience and of experiencing through the tools of dance and music—maybe opening up into a different dimension in all of us.

– **Shantala Shivalingappa**

If life were perfect, we would all paint, we would all play an instrument, we would all dance. But because we know that life isn't always perfect, we have to have dance, we have to have music, to remind us how good life can be. – **Suzanne Farrell**

From the beginning, it has been a place about inspiration and devotion, and through the decades, people from all over have gathered here. One step, one dance, one season at a time. – **Bill T. Jones (closing voiceover)**

Jacob's Pillow History

Jacob's Pillow began in 1790 as a hard-scrabble mountaintop farm at the top of a twisting, climbing stagecoach road between Boston and Albany. Local folk viewing the zig-zagging road from the bottom of the hill thought it resembled the rungs of a ladder, so these biblically minded New Englanders dubbed it "Jacob's Ladder". Boulders dotted the farm pastures, among them a curiously-shaped one located behind the farmhouse. Given the rock "pillow" and the farm's proximity to "Jacob's Ladder", the Carter Family, who settled the property, furthered local allusions to the Book of Genesis (which tells of Jacob laying his head upon a rock and dreaming of a ladder to heaven) by giving their farm the name "**Jacob's Pillow**". The Pillow has long been a site of pioneering spirit, even before its establishment as a dance organization; in the mid-1800's the farm was known as a stop on the Underground Railroad for slaves escaping to Canada.

In 1930, modern dance pioneer, **Ted Shawn**, bought the farm as a retreat. At that time, Shawn and his wife, **Ruth St. Denis**, were America's leading couple in dance. Their Denishawn Company had popularized a revolutionary dance form rooted in theatrical and ethnic traditions rather than those of European ballet. Their trailblazing work and cross-country tours paved the way for the next generation of legendary modern dance pioneers such as Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey, who were all Denishawn members. But Shawn and St. Denis were soon separated, personally and professionally, and in the fall of 1931, Shawn conducted the last rehearsals of the Denishawn era at Jacob's Pillow.

Shawn had long harbored a dream of legitimizing dance in America as an honorable career for men. In 1933, he recruited eight men, including Denishawn dancer [Barton Mumaw](#) and several physical education students from Springfield College--then a men's school--for his new company. The tall and burly Shawn and his athletic dancers were intent on challenging the "sissy" image of men in dance; they forged a new, boldly muscular style in dances celebrating Pawnee braves, toiling Black sharecroppers, and Union machinists. In their "off-time", they built many of the structures still used today at Jacob's Pillow.

1933-1942: Festival Roots

In July 1933, Shawn and his Men Dancers started using [the deck](#) in front of the [Bakalar Studio](#) to give public "Tea Lecture Demonstrations" to promote their work--and to pay the grocer! The first audience of 45 curiosity-seekers expanded weekly so that by summer's end, people were turned away: roots for what was to evolve into the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival were established.

From 1933 to 1940, a period Shawn termed "seven magic years", [Shawn and his Men Dancers](#) toured throughout the United States and Canada, Cuba and England, performing more than 1,250 times in 750 cities. All the while, they continued the summer "Tea Lecture Demonstrations" at the Pillow. With the Selective Service Act of 1939, Shawn felt his personal and professional crusade had been a success--the public, press, and educators were accepting the dance as an honorable profession for men. In May of 1940, The Men Dancers disbanded and joined the armed forces.

Deep in debt, Shawn proposed selling Jacob's Pillow to Mary Washington Ball, a dance teacher who leased the property with the option to buy, and who in 1940 produced the Berkshire Hills Dance Festival on site. Shawn credited Miss Ball for beginning the diverse programming that was forever after the Pillow's hallmark, but the summer was a financial disaster. Shawn leased the Pillow again in 1941, this time to British ballet stars Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin.

Their International Dance Festival was so successful that local supporters formed the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Committee, raising \$50,000 to buy the property and build a theatre (performances had been held in the barn studio). Shawn was made director in 1942. Despite wartime hardships, such as gasoline and tire rationing, audiences climbed the hill on foot and horseback to attend a wide array of programs: ballet, modern dance, mime, ballroom, folk, and classical dance of many cultures.

1942-1997: America's First Dance Theatre

On July 9, 1942, [the Ted Shawn Theatre](#), the first theatre in the United States designed specifically for dance, opened its doors. Architect Joseph Franz, who also built The Music Shed at Tanglewood, had agreed with Shawn that the theatre exterior must harmonize with the existing farmhouse and barns. Franz also handcut the weathervane atop the theatre, which depicts [Barton Mumaw](#), Shawn's leading dancer. Within the

theatre, and flanking the proscenium, are life-size paintings of Shawn in his Hopi Indian Eagle Dance, and [Ruth St. Denis](#) as Kwannon--the Japanese Goddess of Mercy. Both were painted during the Denishawn era by Albert Herter (whose son won greater fame as Governor of Massachusetts and later as Secretary of State under Eisenhower).

Aside from a one-year sabbatical for an Australian tour in 1947, Shawn remained at the helm of the Pillow until his death in 1972 at the age of 81. For a time the future of Jacob's Pillow seemed uncertain. Shawn's designated successor, John Christian, was unable to serve more than one year (1972) due to illness. Next was dance critic Walter Terry (1973), but a huge deficit sent the Pillow's board of directors searching again, and in the interim Charles Reinhart took on the Pillow in addition to the American Dance Festival (1974). A measure of stability came with the appointment of Norman Walker (1975-79), who revamped and upgraded the Pillow's educational and presentational standards.

Liz Thompson (1980-90) initiated an artistic resurgence by welcoming new artists and audiences. Her innovations, such as the popular "Inside/Out" presentations and open access to the grounds and studios, are today an integral part of the Pillow's personality, and Thompson was also the catalyst for the construction of the Studio/Theatre, now known as the [Doris Duke Theatre](#). Samuel A. Miller, who had worked in partnership with Thompson since 1986, followed in her footsteps (1990-94) with the sorely needed renovation and enlargement of the [Ted Shawn Theatre](#) and the installation of [Blake's Barn](#).

From 1995 through 1997, Sali Ann Kriegsman led the Pillow through a difficult period, eliminating a potentially disastrous \$4.8 million debt and then orchestrating a range of new projects to celebrate the 65th anniversary season. After Kriegsman's tenure ended successfully in 1997, the Board launched an extensive nationwide search and selected Ella Baff to guide Jacob's Pillow into the 21st century.

1998-present: A Dance Continuum

Ella Baff's record-breaking seasons have confirmed that her adventurous ideas and wide-ranging knowledge of the field are perfectly at home here. She is leading the Pillow in new directions while honoring the traditions that have made the Pillow a unique institution for over seven decades: to present and preserve a wide-ranging variety of dance forms, a diversity unparalleled among American dance festivals.

The Pillow's national status was underlined in 2000 with two noteworthy distinctions: it was included on the [Dance Heritage Coalition's](#) list of America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2003, the federal government named Jacob's Pillow [a National Historic Landmark](#) for its importance in America's culture and history, thus distinguishing the Pillow as the country's first and only Landmark dance institution. In 2007, the Pillow was formally dedicated as a site on the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail, which celebrates people and places that hold pivotal roles in key national and international events of African American heritage. In 2011, President Barack Obama honored the Pillow with the

prestigious National Medal of Arts and the Pillow launched [Virtual Pillow](#), a collection of online dance resources and videos.

Quick Facts on Jacob's Pillow

- Jacob's Pillow, founded by Ted Shawn in 1933, is the first dance festival in the history of the United States, as well as its longest running. The Pillow operates year round and is most famous for its annual international Festival which spans three summer months and features more than 50 dance companies from around the globe as well as more than 300 free and ticketed events.
- In 2003, Jacob's Pillow became the first and only dance institution to be named a National Historic Landmark.
- Jacob's Pillow was once a stop on the Underground Railroad. In 2007, Jacob's Pillow was formally recognized as a site on the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail.
- In 2011, Jacob's Pillow was presented with the prestigious National Medal of Arts by President Barack Obama at the White House. The Pillow is the only dance presenting organization to have received this honor.
- In 2012, the Pillow will present its 80th Anniversary Season.
- The Carter family, the original settlers on the Becket site in the 1790s, gave the site its name "Jacob's Pillow." The farm was reached by a switchback road that had been dubbed Jacob's Ladder (now also known as Route 20), after the Biblical story of Jacob's dream of ascending to heaven. The property's name subsequently derived from a large rock behind the main farmhouse (aka "Jacob's Pillow").
- An abandoned New England farm, Jacob's Pillow was first a retreat for Ted Shawn's company of Men Dancers. The Festival's first performances took place in 1933. The first classes of what is now The School at Jacob's Pillow began in 1934.
- Built in 1942, the Ted Shawn Theatre was the first venue in the U.S. to be constructed specifically for dance presentation. It was made of pine, so as not to use war-restricted materials. Its architect was Joseph Franz, an electrical engineer from Stockbridge who also designed the Music Shed at Tanglewood.
- The Archives at Jacob's Pillow hold a significant portion of the history of the institution (and of dance), with 8,610 films and videos from 1894 to present, 45,000 historic dance photos and negatives, 323,000 pages of unique printed materials, 27 trunks of costumes dating from 1915, and 2,272 books accessible to the public. Virtually every public performance at Jacob's Pillow since 1982 has been documented on videotape.

- In 2011, the Pillow launched Virtual Pillow, a collection of online dance resources, videos, and talks including Jacob’s Pillow Dance Interactive, called “a priceless treasury of history and art” by *The Washington Post*.
- A number of companies and performers have given their first U.S. performances at Jacob’s Pillow, including Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Ballet Rambert, the National Ballet of Canada, Balasaraswati, Danish Dance Theatre, Stockholm 59° North, Canada’s Royal Winnipeg Ballet, Mimulus, Hofesh Shechter Company, DanzAbierta, and many others.

Quotes about Jacob’s Pillow

“Jacob’s Pillow is one of America’s most precious cultural assets — a haven for choreographers and dancers and an environment that nurtures the creation of new work.”
– **Mikhail Baryshnikov**

“The dance center of the nation and possibly the world”
– **Jennifer Dunning**, *The New York Times*

“The quality of the work was simply stunning and I think that the Pillow represents for me the very finest of arts centers that can exist.”
– **Jane Alexander**, Chairman Emeritus of the National Endowment for the Arts

“The hub and Mecca of dancing in North America.” – *TIME*

"Two-plus months, more than 300 total dance-related events, companies traveling from all over the globe: the Pillow isn't messing around."
– **Claudia La Rocco**, *The New York Times*

“[The Pillow] is like a cathedral of dance. Going to Jacob’s Pillow is going to a place that feels like home...there’s a receptivity, a warmth, a familiarity.”
–**Alonzo King**, choreographer

“Jacob’s Pillow is like a banner on the battlement of our country’s cultural edifice. The winds whip it every which way, but still it is there, glorious and as bold as its programming, as vital as the armies of choreographers and dancers that move through it, as open and receptive as its audiences and as steadfast as its administration and the vision that drives it.” – **Bill T. Jones**, choreographer and artistic director

“The most prestigious dance festival in the United States.”
– **Victor Swoboda**, *Montreal Gazette*

“Dance fans love to revel in the festival’s history, because its story is a good one...Amid the illustrious names, the Pillow itself is always one of the chief attractions. It’s simply lovely to be there.” – **Jack Anderson**, *The New York Times*

“Jacob’s Pillow has evolved into one of the world’s foremost venues for high-caliber dance. Its calling card is not just quality, but diversity. Under the artistic directorship of Ella Baff, the festival has become international in scope.”

– **Karen Campbell**, *Boston Globe*

“A pilgrimage to the Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival is almost always a pleasure. There is the quality of the performances of course. But there are also the bucolic grounds of this Berkshires retreat, along with the ever-present aura of dance history.”

– **John Rockwell**, *The New York Times*

Credits

Directed by	Ron Honsa
Produced and Written by	Ron Honsa, Nan Penman
Cinematography by	Jimmy O’Donnell, Etienne Sauret
Edited by	Charles Yurick
Narrator	Bill T. Jones
Featured Artists	Marge Champion, Merce Cunningham, Suzanne Farrell, Diane Ferlatte, Frederic Franklin, Joanna Haigood, Anna-Marie Holmes, Nikolaj Hübbe, Bill Irwin, Judith Jamison, Jomar Mesquita, Mark Morris, Gideon Obarzanek, Jens Rosén, Shantala Shivalingappa, Paul Taylor, Linda Tillery, Rasta Thomas
Executive Producer	Ella Baff
Camera	Jeff Hodges, Ron Honsa
Sound Mixers	Jason Gillet, Chip Hogg
Production Managers	Peter Hastorf, Sean M. Stack
Gaffers	Nicholas O. Langholff, Robert L. Saba
Camera Assistants	Clair Popkin, Claudia Woloshin
Additional Camera	Peter Hastorf, James Honsa, Nel Shelby

Select Press

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debra-levine/post_1787_b_830561.html

HUFFPOST ARTS

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Receives

National Medal of Arts

Debra Levine

Posted: March 4, 2011 12:32 PM

We caught up with Ella Baff, executive and artistic director of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Massachusetts, who spoke by phone from Washington D.C.

Baff, a petite powerhouse, had only hours before accepted a National Medal of Arts on behalf of her organization, the enduring and prestigious Berkshires summer dance festival known intimately to dancers as "the Pillow."

Among the ten arts-world awardees, including Van Cliburn, Meryl Streep, Sonny Rollins, Quincy Jones and James Taylor among others, Jacob's Pillow was the sole organization to be honored. It's the only dance presenter to garner the medal since the awards were first handed out in 1984.

Founded in an idealistic spirit of communal living and creativity in 1933 by Ted Shawn, a pioneer of American dance, Jacob's Pillow is home to the nation's longest-running international dance festival. A charming cluster of vintage New England structures that have been impeccably maintained and re-purposed as studios, living, and performance spaces, it also houses The School at Jacob's Pillow, among the most prestigious dance training centers in the world, and rare and extensive dance archives dating back to the early 1900s, overseen by Director of Preservation Norton Owen since 1976. This dance mecca is also home to the ghosts of Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Alvin Ailey, Jose Limon, and Merce Cunningham, who waft around the Berkshires' humid summer air.

A frisson of shock and joy jolted the national dance community at the Pillow's recognition. Even Baff was overjoyed: "I am absolutely proud and utterly humbled to have represented the Pillow, the dance world, the performing arts, and all those who value and support culture in our society," she said.

"Less is known about dance than the other art forms, and there are many reasons why. I hope this visibility will carry meaning beyond the day, and that people will become more aware about dance," she added. "It's a real profession, and it's made an important contribution to our world."

Clearly on a high after her White House visit, Baff went on: "President Obama visited us in the Green Room prior to the ceremony; we didn't expect that. There were Pulitzer-, Emmy- and Grammy-award winners, people who have conquered creative worlds, and yet you could hear people say 'Oh my god!' Everyone stood up and he was so immediately gracious and relaxed 'Oh, sit down,' he said, 'you don't have to stand up for me.'

"He came up to each of us and indicated he knew who we were and what we do. Certainly he knew what Jacob's Pillow was. He said, 'Congratulations. We'd love to go there... but they don't let me out of here very much.'

"Everything that he said felt so completely genuine. He is an educated man, a warm person; he is a citizen of the world. It gave me hope. He was overwhelmingly gracious, and we were so impressed he took the time he gave us, considering the affairs of the world and his schedule.

"So many [fellow medalists] came up to me and said, 'I've heard of Jacob's Pillow and I've never gone.' Now they are excited about visiting. It was great. People seemed genuinely happy that dance was being recognized.

"When he gave me the medal (and it's quite heavy), President Obama said, "You seem like you were probably a dancer.' I replied, 'So do you.'"

"There was really a sense of pride and camaraderie [among the artists in the East Room]; it was a very beautiful feeling between us. It was unreal."

Debra Levine blogs about dance, film, music and urban culture on arts•meme.

<http://blogs.barrons.com/penta/2012/02/07/jacobs-pillow-a-laboratory-of-ideas/>



February 7, 2012, 10:59 A.M. ET

Jacob's Pillow: A Laboratory of Ideas

By Richard C. Morais

Late last month I attended the screening of [Never Stand Still](#) at Lincoln Center, a Ron Honsa directed documentary about the [Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival](#), that pod of farmhouse barns in the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts that has, against the odds, become one of the world's leading centers for contemporary dance. Last year, President Obama awarded the Pillow, as it is called, the National Medal of Arts.

Founded in the midst of the Great Depression by the modern dance pioneers, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, this summer retreat for world-class dance talent has for the last 80 years defied gravity by producing one cutting-edge dance work after another. In this Honsa documentary, a mix of present day interviews and historic footage, dance luminaries like Mark Morris, Judith Jamieson, and Paul Taylor explain both the historic importance of Jacob's Pillow and why it continues to produce cutting-edge work today.

Therein a valuable lesson on "innovation" for every business in America: business leaders who want to create truly new products out of the ether could do worse than emulate the Pillow's formula of gathering together the most eclectic and unusual talent from around the world, in a safe haven free from the pressures and distractions of the outside world, and simply telling this hot-house of orchids to have fun creating a completely original work for their discerning peers, after just a short bit of rehearsal time. In the case of Jacob's Pillow, what is spat out in terms of originality and quality, year after year, is simply jaw-dropping. My wife is the dance aficionado in our household but the Pillow has helped make even this plebeian a convert.

The Pillow is the Formula One race track of the dance world, where ideas are tested before making their way into the world. My favorite scene in the Honsa film occurs when elderly Frederic Franklin, a former star of the Ballet Russe Monte Carlo, tells the story of how he kept injuring himself during barnyard rehearsals in the Pillow's early days. A peculiar and persistent man on the sidelines kept correcting the star and telling him how he could avoid future injuries. Franklin ignored him at first but eventually began to listen. The odd man finally introduced himself as Mr. Pilates. That was about 40 years before the Pilates technique of stretching, toning, and exercising became known throughout the world.

I walked out of the Lincoln Center film bouncing up and down on the balls of my feet, as I do after a Jacob's Pillow performance, energized by the spectacle of seeing diverse talent struggling to create work that matters in this bleak and muddled world. But the bitter reality of a January walk down Columbus Avenue quickly intruded, and I began to dream generally of balmy summer nights and Berkshire lawn parties and concerts at Tanglewood.

On a bleak February night a few weeks later, the images of a Western Massachusetts summer refusing to fade, I called up my friend, Hunter Runnette, a Lenox resident who is a member of the Jacob's Pillow board. I asked Hunter to give me the inside scoop on what he thinks will be the must-see pieces of the Pillow's 2012 summer season, officially the farm's 80th.

Hunter says he is most excited by the works that will show at the smaller Doris Duke Theater. Last year's Pillow winner, [Kidd Pivot in Dark Matters](#), is returning to the Duke (June 27-July 1) by popular demand. Choreographer Crystal Pite is a Canadian with a Frankfurt-based company that has created a "narrative Frankenstein story" about a man who builds a puppet. "There are huge sets, puppetry, and you don't know where it is going." Eventually the puppet takes over, and at the end of the piece there is a "*pas de deux* of the most beautiful dancing I have ever seen. It sweeps you away." The piece, he thinks, is about "man's insignificance in the universe."

Hunter has, in recent years, been taken by Israeli dance companies. There is "something about the country," he says, that is producing works that "are always interesting." The Pillow is showcasing two Israeli troupes (July 4-8) this year: [Vertigo Dance Company](#) and [LeeSaar the Company](#) (an Israeli company that has moved to the US.) Another choreography getting buzz inside the Pillow is, *From The Horse's Mouth: The Men Dancers* (July 11-15), an homage to founder Ted Shawn's original all-male troupe from 80 years ago. The Pillow's executive director, Ella Baff, is quietly ferreting in "surprising" and "extraordinary" male guest dancers for this work.

Bringing up the rear, but no less thrilling, will be the [Royal Winnipeg Ballet](#) that had its "debut at the Pillow in 1964" and hasn't been back since. The Royal Winnipeg is performing Maurice Wainrot's *Carmina Burana* (Aug 1-5), which, according to early rushes, looks like a showstopper. But for "pure joy and life-affirming fun", Hunter insists, the [Trey McIntyre Project](#) (Aug. 8 - 12) will be pretty impossible to beat.

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/festival-captures-all-of-dance-s-great-motions-1-1959327>



Festival captures all of dance's great motions

By Kelly Apter

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Among the DANCE:FILM festival's host of great films are two that show radically different worlds united in passion and commitment to the art

THERE is a moment, during the opening sequence of Ron Honsa's documentary film *Never Stand Still*, when the late Merce Cunningham sums up its subject matter perfectly.

"It's a place," he says gently, "where, quietly or not, you can think differently and act differently." He's talking about Jacob's Pillow, a former farm turned dance centre in Massachusetts, and a veritable Mecca for the modern dance fraternity. Since its formation in 1930, "the Pillow", as it is affectionately known, has welcomed countless students, professional dancers and choreographers, including some of the greatest names of the art.

Capturing the beauty of the location, the hard work that keeps the centre going, and the creativity it helps foster, Honsa's documentary offers an insight not just into Jacob's Pillow, but dance itself.

"I wanted to make a film that would take dance and make it a little more accessible to a broader audience," he says. "I've always felt that there's a certain lack of understanding of what these dancers actually do and why they do it. And if you have a window into something, you can start appreciating it, or at least know what you like and don't like."

Honsa spent three summers at the Pillow, interviewing dancers and choreographers from around the world. Modern dance giants Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Mark Morris, Judith Jamison (of Alvin Ailey) and Suzanne Farrell (George Balanchine's muse) sit alongside relative newcomers such as Rasta Thomas, the man behind this year's Edinburgh Fringe hit *Rock the Ballet*. Without ever dumbing down, Honsa keeps the film at a level where those with only a passing interest in dance will be just as entertained as aficionados.

"One of my concerns was I didn't want it to be too promotional about the Pillow," says Honsa. "I really wanted it to have a subtext and be credible to the dance world and people interested in the art of dance. My real audience isn't hardcore dance community people who may already know more than this film shares. I wanted to attract an interest, excitement and curiosity around something. As Mark Morris says in the film, the work isn't for everyone but it is for anyone."

Never Stand Still is just one of a plethora of documentaries, features, shorts and workshops programmed at this year's DANCE:FILM festival in Edinburgh. From ballet to contemporary, hip hop to flamenco, the eight-day event aims to capture the diversity of dance, whilst celebrating the work of those who portray it on screen – never an easy task with such a physical pursuit.

Opening with the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers classic, *Shall We Dance*, the festival closes the following weekend with *Dance Till Dawn*, a 1980s all-nighter at the Cameo, featuring *Footloose*, *Xanadu*, and *Dirty Dancing* – dressing up for the occasion is positively encouraged (and they don't mean pyjamas).

For DANCE:FILM director, Steph Wright, giving festivalgoers a behind-the-scenes insight into the dance world was one of the top priorities. As well as *Never Stand Still*, there are documentaries on Pina Bausch, Bill T Jones, Australian choreographer Tanja Liedtke, whose life was tragically cut short in 2007, *Mariemma*, the woman who shaped 20th-century Spanish dance, and Berlin-based hip hoppers the Roc Kidz Crew.

Just as *Honsa* shines a light on the world of modern dance in *Never Stand Still*, director Fabian Kimoto does the same for breakdance in his fascinating and inspiring documentary, *The Rising Sun*. In 2008, he and his fellow dancers in Roc Kidz Crew left their homes in Germany, packed their lives into a colourful campervan, and hit the road. For 18 months, they travelled through France, Holland, Spain and Italy, performing their phenomenal breakdancing as street theatre, surviving on whatever onlookers threw in the hat that day. When he wasn't dancing, Kimoto was behind the camera, capturing not just the jaw-dropping headspins and backflips, but the minutiae of daily life, from doing the laundry to rehearsing on the beach.

Most importantly for him, the film also shows audiences how much hard work and dedication goes into being part of a breakdance crew.

“There aren't many movies that really tell the story of breakdancers,” says Kimoto. “And the big blockbusters that do show it don't really tell you what it's like. So we wanted to show the beauty behind this dance, and the life and the experiences that it allows you to have.”

As an observer watching their road trip progress, I couldn't help but wonder if the film only shows one side of the story. Apart from a single injury, nothing bad ever appears to happen, and enough money is always made to eat, have fun (lots of it) and dance. Could it possibly have gone so smoothly?

“Yes,” laughs Kimoto. “Many people ask me that about the film, but the road trip was wonderful – it really was that perfect.”