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*Bytes of Culture and Community*

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# Dance Emerges in the Hudson Valley...Brilliant and Mindful of Community

Catherine Tharin / July 7, 2021 / Music & Performing Arts, Northeast



Paul Taylor Dance Company, *Esplanade*, Photo by Paul B. Goode

Dance in the Hudson Valley, on both sides of the river, has gained traction and experienced a recent upsurge with the founding of new arts organizations which either feature or include dance. Chelsea Ainsworth's Arts on Site to Stephen Petronio's Crow's Nest to Chase Brock's Modern Accord Depot to the development of Jonah Bokaer's The Hudson Eye were founded in the past three years by working choreographers. PS21, Elena V. Siyanko, Executive Director and curator, has shifted programming to pan-arts since 2019. Bard's SummerScape Artistic Director, Gideon Lester, has programmed dance out-of-doors for the first time. Adrienne Willis at the Lumberyard Center, founded in 2018, has shifted to technical rehearsals only. Venues have responded differently to the limitations of the pandemic but all plan to be on track by 2022, including the Hudson Valley Dance Festival which is on hiatus.

The beauty of the Hudson Valley and the proximity to NYC attracts artists, those who serve and fund the arts and those who attend arts events. Most venues involve the local community and offer arts to underserved recipients. Organizations that sit on many acres are keenly aware of land stewardship and the link of the arts to the environment. To keep afloat, organizations developed for-profit enterprises on their premises that support their non-profit contributions. Despite COVID these organizations have kept afloat and are poised to offer even more robust programming in the future, if not already.

This article is an overview of what is happening in dance and performing arts in the Middle and Upper Hudson Valley. And, importantly, it includes the perspectives of the directors and founders who have been tirelessly giving of their time and resources. The article includes [Arts on Site Residency & Retreat Center](#), [The Hudson Eye](#), [Hudson Valley Dance Festival](#), [Lumberyard Center for Film and Performing Arts](#), [Modern Accord Depot](#), [Petronio Residency Center](#), [PS21: Performance Spaces for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#) and [SummerScape, Fisher Center, at Bard College](#).



Mr. Freidas Organic Garden at Petronio Residency Center Photo by Jean Marc Flack



Jaqlin Medlock of Stephen Petronio Company in residence at Petronio Residency Center. Photo by Dancing Camera

## West of the Hudson

**Stephen Petronio, Artistic Director/Choreographer, Stephen Petronio Company, Petronio Residency Center, Crow's Nest, Round Top, NY [www.petron.io/prc](http://www.petron.io/prc)**

Supporting its first artists in 2018, the Petronio Residency Center (PRC), known as Crow's Nest, was founded by preeminent choreographer Stephen Petronio, and sits on 175 wooded, peaceful acres in Round Top, NY, 20 minutes from Catskill and Hudson. The aim of PRC is to bolster support for dance artists and work together to create fluid, well-resourced pathways toward production and presentation.

PRC accommodates artists and their companies by providing accommodations, studio space, a stipend, travel expenses, and a private chef. Says Petronio, "My intention (when developing the retreat) was to treat dancers like the absolute stars they are and give them the most relaxed, private and well-fed experience outside their normal real-world working experience."

These residencies are without requirements, such as presenting work developed onsite, and therefore, allow artists to create in unencumbered freedom. "The research and development ethic at PRC is not glamorous and is hard to understand for many not in the profession. You can't see a tangible THING like sets or costumes, or other things people like to help fund. So, my life mission is to elevate the creative process and the most glamorous thing is the most valuable element in the equation.

I've been guided by this concept of "The Power of Zero," going into a free space without plan or expectation, quieting down and remaining open. All of that requires a lack of pressure to produce and deliver. And I believe strongly that being immersed in the amazing sea of green forest and mountain air at PRC will change them (the artists) in ways that are perhaps not so immediately obvious," states Petronio.

"Our Environmental mission is in tandem with our cultural one and we are at the beginning of developing this more fully. (PRC acreage will soon go into Conservancy.) Our goal is to match our Dance/Culture programming with an Environmental one," he added. Also, for \$15 for an entire week in July, PRC offers subsidized hip-hop, Indian classical, West African and choreography youth dance classes.



Stephen Petronio Company in residence at Petronio Residency Center. Photo by Dancing Camera.



Stephen Petronio at Petronio Residency Center. Photo by Claire Flack

**Adrienne Willis, Executive and Artistic Director, Lumberyard Center for Film and Performing Arts, Catskill, NY <https://www.lumberyard.org/>**

Lumberyard's mission is to serve the NYC performing arts community as a location for more affordable production residencies before premiering at prominent institutions nationwide. Recently announced, Lumberyard has decided to "focus exclusively on technical rehearsals because equitable and affordable access to safe technical rehearsal facilities, especially now, is essential for a strong American performing arts ecosystem." Adrienne Willis explains, "Our mission has always been to help artists make the work they've imagined. To ask them to perform this summer, without adequate rehearsal and development time, would have been counterproductive. Now, more than ever, artists need affordable access to technical rehearsals."



In addition to residencies and a film initiative, Lumberyard is committed to positive social change. It subsidizes tickets for Greene County audiences who cannot afford tickets, and is, according to Willis, “particularly focused on our Fresh Start program, which brings working artists from New York City to work with incarcerated teenagers across the state, using the power of the arts to cultivate expression skills, in turn reducing recidivism.”

Affirms Willis, “It is our hope that this moment of pause will allow the industry to address the more serious systemic issues that block equal access to resources like Lumberyard.



Ephrat Asherie Dance performs a work-in-progress showing of Underscored. 2019 at LUMBERYARD in Catskill, NY. Photo by Elizabeth Ibarra



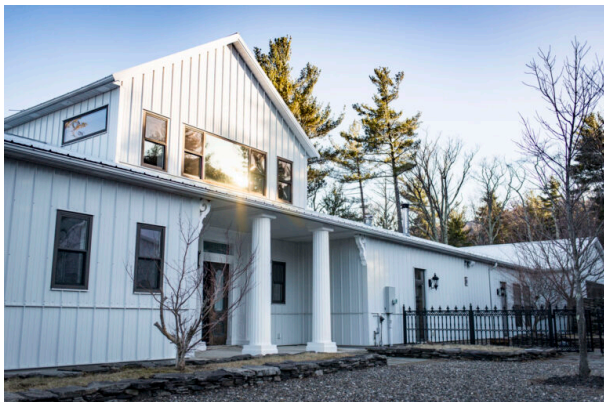
Brooklyn-based The TEAM performs a work-in-progress showing of Reconstruction (Still Working but the Devil Might Be Inside), directed by Tony Award-winner Rachel Chavkin (Hadestown). 2019 at LUMBERYARD in Catskill, NY. Photo by Alon Koppel

**Duke Dang, Managing Director, Works & Process, Guggenheim Museum and Denise Roberts Hurlin, Founding Director, Hudson Valley Dance Festival – Dancers Responding to AIDS, Catskill, NY**

<https://dradance.org/category/post-event/hudson-valley-dance-festival/>

Says Duke Dang, “As we emerge from the pandemic, supporting New York-based artists and performing art cultures that were created in, and nurtured by New York, will be a priority. I believe it will fuel the recovery and bolster the spirit of New York. Being a resident of both New York City and the Hudson Valley, I’ve always believed in the robust art making ecosystem tied together by the Hudson River. The pandemic and how the residencies in the Hudson Valley provide a safe home for dancemaking

to continue, amplified my belief. My hope is to continue to nurture that ecosystem.”  
*The Hudson Valley Dance Festival, set among the gorgeous fall foliage of Catskill, NY, will return to the Hudson Valley in 2022.*



Petronio Residency Center. Photo by Claire Flack



Petronio Residency Center Summer Dance Intensive for Ages 9-13. Photo of Elena Mosley teaching African dance. Photo by Alon Koppel.

## **Chase Brock, Choreographer, and Rob Berman, Conductor, Modern Accord Depot, Accord, NY**

<https://www.modernaccorddepot.com>

Located in the Middle Hudson Valley, this 1902 train depot building was reimagined in 2019 into a contemporary performing and living space. The Modern Accord Depot, preserves New York, Ontario and Western Railway architecture, artifacts and history while offering artist residencies. Choreographer Doug Varone and company are in residence at present in the studio, once a baggage room. A series of free indoor/outdoor house concerts are by invitation. To receive an invitation, subscribe to the mailing list. Chase Brock, Co-Founder of Modern Accord Depot, is an acclaimed Broadway choreographer who will be featured in future Side of Culture offerings.



Arts on Site. Photo by Kyle Netzeband



Arts on Site. Photo by Kyle Netzeband

**Chelsea Ainsworth, Choreographer, Executive Director, Founder and Kyle Netzeband, Visual Artist, Builder, Founder, Arts on Site Residency & Retreat, Kerhonkson, NY**

<https://www.aosrr.com/>

Arts on Site, a thriving production and performance venue in NYC, opened its Middle Hudson Valley extension on 20 marginal acres abutting Minnewaska State Park in 2018. Chelsea Ainsworth and Kyle Netzeband rehabilitated the acres in accordance with environmental directives of the Catskill Watershed Foundation. The land, once an eyesore, has become a verdant enclave supporting a variety of artists.

Arts on Site Residency & Retreat offers residencies to artists in exchange for working on the property. Bunked in circus-like tents, yurts, and cabins, artists share communal indoor and outdoor kitchens. During the pandemic, 12 artists lived at the residency in a bubble community. Exudes Ainsworth, "We made meals together, we gathered, there was a sense of community. What I learned was that together, as artists, our work has a place. We belong to a group of artists who support one another, and this is important."



Photo by Jeremy Jacob



Pam Tanowitz and Jessie Montgomery  
Bard SummerScape presents "I was waiting for the  
echo of a better day." Photo by Jeremy Jacob

Pam Tanowitz and Jessie Montgomery. Bard SummerScape presents "I was waiting for the echo of a better day." Photo by Jeremy Jacob

## East of the Hudson

**Gideon Lester, Artistic Director, Summerscape, Fisher Center, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY <https://fishercenter.bard.edu/>**

SummerScape comprises the annual Bard Music Festival (BMF) and seven weeks of opera, dance, music, theater, cabaret, and film. Third-year Choreographer-in-Residence Pam Tanowitz, and Composer Jessie Montgomery, present this weekend: *I was waiting for an echo of a better day* out-of-doors at Montgomery Place, an historic estate, that sits on Bard College's 380-acre campus.

Gideon Lester describes the opportunity to "site the dance against the landscape of the Hudson Valley with the river and the mountains behind the performers. There is a relationship of the dancers and musicians to the (ever-changing) light and the ways the light reveals the dancing body. The 45-minute dance will span the time of the sunset over the Catskills. The audience is located on the westward facing lawn, in the hilly open landscape and will sit all around."

Originally an actor and director from London, who was encouraged by his parents to study the arts, Lester promotes all the performing art disciplines. He "fell in love with American artists" as a young man, particularly post-modern and contemporary dance. Says Lester, "The way dance creates space and time between dancers, and the relationship between dancers and the audience, unfolds in a work. Dance as a non-narrative form is wonderfully rich and wonderfully theatrical." It has been



Lester's life's work to create a dignified and gracious environment in which American artists can work.



Skyla Schreter. Photo  
Courtesy of the Artist



Monèt Noelle Marshall.  
Photo by Caroline Cockrell



David Norsworthy. Photo by  
Colton Curtis

**Jonah Bokaer, Choreographer, Jonah Bokaer Choreography, and Director, Jonah Bokaer Arts Foundation, and Aaron Levi Garvey, Chief Curator, The Hudson Eye, Hudson, NY**

<https://www.thehudsoneye.com/about-1>

The Hudson Eye is an artist-driven 10-day annual public program and urban showcase, with a focus on dance, music, performance, film and visual art. This program aims to celebrate the arts community in Hudson and help stimulate creativity and connectivity.

Jonah Bokaer, the noted choreographer and founder of performance spaces, Chez Bushwick (2002) & CPR (Co-Founded 2008), adjacent affordable studios in Brooklyn, and Space 428 Hudson (2016): incubator of The Hudson Eye, realized that there was a need for arts expansion in the city. In 2019, The Hudson Eye kicked off its annual programming and concentrated on global topics on the local level. Hot Topics, the free panel humanities series that represents the diversity of Hudson, is co-organized by Operation Unity NY, a local youth services non-profit.

This year, the curatorial vision, according to Aaron Levi Garvey is “a bit lanky” but according to Bokaer, “Aaron uses the city as a canvas. The programming is hyper-local.” Garvey is interested in what artists “are able to show when they have the time to think and decompress (as a result of the pandemic pause). 2020 was a year of catastrophic loss but people were able to get back to themselves; there has been a loosening of strings.” Both Bokaer and Garvey are interested in partnering with local organizations “in order to highlight multiple voices and develop a true community of people from all walks of life and background...Artists find one another through The Hudson Eye.”

Bokaer and Garvey both grew up in families who support the arts, and that outlook has influenced their visions: “Preserve the past for the present and the present for the future...Bring about a better world. Right now, there is so much focus on difference. We’re not working on difference but on commonality and being radically present.”



Jonah Bokaer Choreography. Photo by Julie Lemberger



Paul Taylor Dance Company 2 at PS 21. Photo by Paul B Goode

**Elena V. Siyanko, Executive Director, PS21: Performance Spaces for the 21st Century, Chatham, NY**

<https://ps21chatham.org>

Nestled in 100 acres of breathtaking rolling green fields and a 19th century apple orchard, PS21 presents, by turns, gutsy, playful, classic, and daring curation by Elena V. Siyanko, that includes dance, theatre, music, circus, and opera. PS21 also offer movement classes for adults, programs for young people and residencies for artists. Performances take place on PS21’s 2018 state-of-the-art open-air proscenium stage that converts to a geothermal heated and air-conditioned black box theater, in

the Dance Barn and along the extensive trails on the property. Remarkably, the Chatham Farm Animal Rescue is also housed at PS21. "All are welcome; this is a space for everybody," beams Tristan Geary, Production Associate.

The Paul Taylor Dance Company, one of America's most illustrious dance companies, in residence, performs three iconic Taylor dances and a new staging of Kurt Jooss's *The Green Table* from 1932. Siyanko comments that the Jooss dance is "truly political and apt for post-Trump America." Presenting the Taylor company is an appreciative nod to PS21 founder, Judy Grunberg, and her supporters.

"Community outreach is," says Siyanko, a "hugely important mission of PS21 as underserved youth and families are subsidized yearly. PS21 partners with innovative organizations both locally and in NYC." This energized outlook is due to Siyanko's unique background as a young resourceful radical in the Soviet Union who gravitated to non-traditional American artists, including Merce Cunningham and John Cage, rather than to the tradition of the Bolshoi. Russian children are introduced by the State to the importance of music, dance, theater and the arts. Siyanko hopes to provide enlightening arts to a broad audience.

The aforementioned organizations' founders, directors and curators, express a desire to maintain New York City ties while providing an opportunity for artists to decompress from the heightened requirements of the performing arts profession. As well, there is a deep desire to develop ties with the local communities, and build artist communities. New venues will surely change the landscape of the arts in the Hudson Valley while the established venues will provide an artistic foothold. The power of transformative arts to edify, satisfy and challenge appears to be a tenet of these organizations where distinctive artists who have the power to impact audience and community are nourished and supported.

Please also note the article on [Kaatsbaan](#), the dance center and cultural park, that Side of Culture featured in the March issue.



Paul Taylor Dance Company at PS21. Photo by Paul B Goode



Arts on Site Studio Doors. Photo by Kyle Netzeband

Catherine Tharin, former dancer with the [Erick Hawkins Dance Company](#) and former senior adjunct professor of dance at Iona College, recently completed 15 years as the influential curator and programmer of dance and performance at the [92nd Street Y](#). She is now an independent dance curator, choreographer, teacher, writer and dancer.

[#Dance](#), [#Hudson Valley](#), [#Performance](#), [#Upstate New York](#)

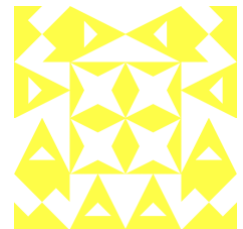
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