

A Multi-Season Celebration of the Martha Graham Company at 100

Starting in fall, the company will present a three-year celebration featuring Graham classics and a new work by Jamar Roberts.



By Rachel Sherman

June 7, 2023 Updated 10:51 a.m. ET

A documentary, a coffee-table book, an international tour and an opera partnership will be some of the many homages to the Martha Graham Dance Company as it celebrates its 100th anniversary, starting this fall.

In 1926, the pioneering choreographer Martha Graham, just 31, founded her dance company and school, while living and working out of a studio apartment in Midtown Manhattan. The company, America's oldest dance troupe, has survived for nearly a century — a milestone it will commemorate with a three-season celebration, the company announced on Wednesday.

“The company has been part of the American conversation for 100 years — we needed at least three seasons to dive in,” said Janet Eilber, the artistic director. “We want audiences to have new points of access to the classics of modern dance, so they can recognize it as something relevant to themselves and to our current times.”

The lineup, which begins in September, will be broken into three parts, each with themes to “accentuate the eras that the company has been through,” Eilber said.

The 2023-24 season, “American Legacies,” will highlight Graham's social activism, Americana and modernism, with classic works including “Appalachian Spring” (1944), “Dark Meadow” (1946) and “Maple Leaf Rag” (1990).

The company will also present a new production of Agnes DeMille's “Rodeo” (1942) with a score by Aaron Copland, reorchestrated for a six-piece bluegrass ensemble by the composer Gabe Witcher; and a new work by Jamar Roberts with a score by Rhiannon Giddens, which will be presented alongside “Rodeo” as part of the company's season at New York City Center (April 17-24) and on tour.

The 2024-25 season, “Dances of the Mind,” will focus on Graham's psychological works and her longtime artistic partnership with the visual artist Isamu Noguchi. Works will include “Phaedra” (1962), “Errand into the Maze” (1947) and “Herodiade” (1944).

The 2025-26 season, “The Masterpieces,” will consider the question “What is an American?” from Graham's 1939 work “American Document.” Repertory will include “Cave of the Heart” (1946), “Night Journey” (1947) and “Primitive Mysteries” (1931) among other commissions.

Other projects around the anniversary include a three-season collaboration with the Long Beach Opera, exploring connections between dance and opera; a documentary in development with PBS about the current company, slated to premiere in the 2025-26 season; and a book by Deborah Ory and Ken Browar of NYC Dance Project, featuring today's Graham dancers and archival photos from the past 100 years, to be published in fall 2025.

“People should come expecting to see some of the most expressive and powerful dancers in the world today,” Eilber said of the multiyear schedule. “The dancers onstage today are jaw-droppingly beautiful and will launch this celebration in ways that are essential to dance itself.”