

# Jacob's Pillow festival to honor Martha Graham, 'Women in Dance'

*Tresca Weinstein*

Lloyd Knight of the Martha Graham Dance Company in Hope Boykin's "En Masse."

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Luis Luque /Courtesy of Jacob's Pillow

Next year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Martha Graham Dance Company, and Jacob's Pillow is throwing a party. The Pillow's "Groundbreaking Women in Dance" series during the 2026 summer festival will pay homage to the woman known as the mother of modern dance, and also honor a few of the many choreographers who followed in her wake.

"We want to look back at the women who have shaped and are shaping dance in our nation, and that includes the greats like Martha Graham, who will anchor this celebration," Pillow executive director Pamela Tatge said in a recent interview, following a "sneak peek" announcement highlighting several of the artists performing next summer. "We're very excited to participate in the centennial and to do it in a big way."

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A major exhibition is planned for the campus in Becket, Massachusetts, depicting Graham's work and her connections to the Pillow: She was a member of the Denishawn Dance Company established by Pillow founder Ted Shawn and his wife, Ruth St. Denis, and Shawn is credited with recognizing and nurturing Graham's potential. The festival schedule also includes a new work created for the Martha Graham Dance Company, co-commissioned by the Pillow and Tanglewood.

Titled "En Masse," the piece was choreographed by former Alvin Ailey dancer Hope Boykin, set to a suite from composer Leonard Bernstein's 1971 work "Mass." In a way, the dance, which premiered in October in California, is a fulfillment of a collaboration that Graham and Bernstein had talked about but never followed through on. Bernstein even composed a 49-second musical fragment with Graham in mind, titled "For Martha," which Boykin's musical collaborator, Christopher Rountree, incorporated into the score for "En Masse."

For Boykin, “having the opportunity to create a work for the oldest modern dance company in the country is incredible. Dancing with the Ailey company for 20 years also teaches you about the importance of carrying on a legacy. But I also know that holding the weight of the word ‘legacy’ means to open a window for the future, and this thrilling opportunity has allowed me to do even more investigations in the world of these two genius icons of music and dance.”

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In addition to the Graham company’s weeklong run at the Pillow, the Boston Symphony Orchestra will offer a one-night-only program at Tanglewood featuring a performance of “For Martha” and a showing of Graham’s signature work, “Appalachian Spring.”

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“Groundbreaking Women in Dance” is just one aspect of the Pillow’s overarching intention for the 2026 season, which centers on connection —connections between people and between artists, connections to history and to the future of dance. Alongside the tributes to Graham and other women dance-makers, the festival will highlight both established luminaries and emerging artists.

The schedule includes the U.S. premiere of “White Space,” a new work from Kyle Abraham and his company A.I.M., and the return of the German troupe Gauthier Dance/Dance Company Theaterhaus Stuttgart. After opening this past summer, the new Doris Duke Theatre will host several companies that were scheduled to appear there last summer, before the Pillow cancelled all its August events following the [death of production manager Kat Sirico](#) in a work-related accident.

Jacob’s Pillow Award winner Faye Driscoll will present “Weathering,” a multisensory performance that explores the importance of interdependence between humans. Shamel Pitts also brings “Touch of RED,” which was the last piece danced in the old Duke theater before it burned to the ground in 2020. And Huang Yi’s “INK” will mark “the first time audiences at the Pillow see a robot interacting with a dancer,” Tatge said.

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Could Martha Graham really be the source for all this, the metaphorical “mother” of today’s experimental choreographers? Many college theses could likely be written on that topic, but Boykin summarized it neatly in reflecting on Graham, Bernstein and Ailey: “As a creator, it is imperative to know and understand the history, but to also make room for who I am, in this time. Their legacies are an influence to me, and then I must run with my own movement language to share.”

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## Photo of Tresca Weinstein

Tresca Weinstein writes about dance, visual art, and culture for the Times Union. She also writes, edits, and manages content for national corporations and organizations, with a focus on the arts, yoga, health and wellness, and positive psychology. Her favorite part of her job is talking to people who are passionate about making the world a better and more awe-inspiring place, whether that means creating beautiful things, researching the science of happiness, or doing eight pirouettes in a row.