

The Generosity of Performance Mix 40

The 2026 Performance Mix Festival showcases a large and diverse community of artists through experimental works, with central themes of force, reaction, and organic movement.

By Jen C. George



Tatiana Desardouin & K'niin Abbrey/Passion Fruit Dance Company in RESONANCE, Performance Mix Festival, Abrons Arts Center, N

The 40th Annual Performance Mix Festival is nothing if not generous in scope. Presented by New Dance Alliance and performed at Abrons Arts Center over four heavily scheduled days in June, the festival transcends conventional concert dance with a wide array of performances and workshops delivered by over thirty-five choreographers and performance artists. (Diversity and experimentation appear to be enduring themes for the festival, hearkening back to its first iteration in 1986.) Abrons Arts Center, the interior of which feels like being inside a particularly cozy cinderblock, is now clearly populated with friends and kin of the performers; exclamations of greeting and support bubble forth before, after, and even during the show. We consume the mix in bite-sized chunks of three-ish performances per show, thoughtfully curated to balance deeply quirky work alongside technically complex creations and solid crowd-pleasers. Despite disparate styles among the artists, the 2026 festival relays an overall sense of groundedness and reactivity to literal and figurative external forces.

RESONANCE, created and performed by Passion Fruit Dance Company (Tatiana Desardouin & K'niin "TPM" Abbrey) provides a dreamy exploration of bodies reacting to each other's physical and energetic space. Under a slow-strobing light, the dancers skim across the stage. They flow through choreography with the rhythm of street dance and the composition of a disconnected tango. The dancers push and pull their arms through space, spiraling off each other's movements with their unbuttoned shirttails swirling like falling flower petals.



Amy Gernux, Ariel Lembeck, Jo Warren, Marin Day, and Laura Osterhaus in James Barrett's *Panoramic Fashion*, Performance Mix Festival, Abrons Arts Center, New York, 2026. Photo: Elyse Mertz Photography.

In comparison, James Barrett's delightful *Panoramic Fashion* creates a tableau in which the ensemble of dancers reacts to a seemingly invisible force billowing around the space. They assemble themselves in a clump, at times grasping each other's limbs, then stumble through space as if shoved toward earth.

Sporadically, the dancers escape their headwinds, singing in unison about the difficulty of having a body and muscles as they execute a crisp walking phrase punctuated by small tilts and precise head movements.



IV Castellanos in *Leche Hervida en Vivo*, Performance Mix Festival, Abrons Arts Center, New York, 2026.

Photo: Elyse Mertz Photography.

In other work, Performance Mix offered themes of overcoming external pressures in a more sociopolitical sense. *Fuegos salvajes y turista !!* by Antonio Ramos in collaboration with Saúl Ulerio, addresses the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The dancers cavort in laps around the stage and up and down the stairs, nude save a couple of white wigs. Freewheeling turns and legs lifted in jaunty attitudes precede the appearance of a kiddie pool, where one dancer douses another with watery liquids. In perhaps the most hands-on interpretation, *Leche Hervida en Vivo*, IV Castellanos solicits volunteers to write messages on slim white squares, then punch through them. Laden with a microphone, hand-held light, and jangling metal loop around their neck, Castellanos presents as a human kinetic sculpture on the otherwise dark stage. The low light and sound limits perception and prompts questions for the viewer: Should we be able to see everything, identify everything, hear everything? Or are the limitations the point?



Mutsuyo Omatsy Isaacs, Johanna S. Meyer, Madelyn, and Nami Yamamoto in Yamamoto's *Future Memory*, Performance Mix Festival, Abrons Arts Center, New York, 2026. Photo: Elyse Mertz Photography.

Pressures and limitations become corporal in Nami Yamamoto's *Future Memory*. The work explores and memorializes the aging process of the physical body, and is fittingly subtitled in the program as "a work in progress." Dancers run and roll like logs, finding similar stances in standing and lying orientations. Partnering looks like grappling: dancers tussle over who should lift and be lifted, who should support versus hold down. A circular social dance midway through the piece feels incongruent, though interesting. Eventually, one dancer steals another's sneaker and dons it, wrapping up the multifaceted work on a note of transition.

Given the framing of many of the works as studies of influence and effect, choreographic choices skew toward the reactive: dancers run, stumble, scuffle, crawl, fall, and generally find themselves in the thrall of forces greater than themselves. Improvisational traveling wins out over complex technical phrases. Hand-held props fuel pedestrian movements. Costumes appear budget-friendly and utilitarian; most dancers could have easily worn the same outfit commuting to the theater as they did

on-stage. Among all that, Julia Antinozzi's *Tarantella* lands as a welcomed divergence. Sienna Russo and Paulina Meneses execute balletic port de bras with precise directional changes and two-footed turns. The satisfying swish of bare feet slides them through deep lunges and into wide arabesques. Toward the end of the piece, the dancers seem intentionally heavy on the stage (perhaps signaling that the proverbial tarantula is near), heels striking when they hop into generous second pliés.



Alexandra Albrecht, Hannah Franzen, and Nola Sporn Smith in Stacy Grossfield's redux, Performance Mix Festival, Abrons Arts Center, New York, 2026. Photo: Elyse Mertz Photography.

Interestingly, only one overtly political work finds its way into the program on the evenings I happened to attend: Stacy Grossfield's uncanny portrayal of several women central to the MAGA movement. A pantsuited Karoline Leavitt figure repeatedly explains to the audience that Americans are doing better, while a progressively creepy Erika Kirk caricature peers through her legs and tells us about her husband. A fitness influencer punctuates the scene with lunges and leg lifts while she cheerily addresses the crowd. It feels both inevitable and appropriate for our

current political moment, and extremely on-brand for a festival that advertises itself as a forum where “artistic risk-taking is not only welcomed but celebrated.”

Overall, the fortieth Performance Mix festival presents a largely successful offering. Chameckilerner’s *Transmission* is a good analogy for the whole show: scrappy, budget-conscious, and human. In it, we watch participants in a park replicating clips of choreography that have been shown to them, everything from disco to ballet to tap, morphing over iterations. Some participants definitely don’t nail it, but that’s not the point. They delight in trying something in the sunshine, along with others who aren’t taking themselves too seriously. And perhaps that’s the real theme underlying *Performance Mix*: artists acknowledging the weight of the world today, and finding generosity and joy in creation, anyway.

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