



WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

DANCE
THEATRE *of*
HARLEM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 6, 2026

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DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM & WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS
CO-PRESENT THE ACCLAIMED

FIREBIRD,
Donizetti Variations, and Return

Longtime Artistic Partners Celebrate More than 50 Years of Presenting
World-Class Ballet to Washington-Area Audiences

September 25 at 7:30 p.m. and September 26 at 2:00 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.
The National Theatre

(Washington, D.C.)—Washington Performing Arts opens its 61st season by welcoming longtime artistic partner Dance Theatre of Harlem back to Washington, D.C., with a co-production of a special three-performance engagement at The National Theatre. The program is anchored by the celebrated return of *Firebird*—Geoffrey Holder’s acclaimed reimagining of the Russian folktale set in a lush Caribbean landscape featuring **John Taras**’s choreography and **Igor Stravinsky**’s iconic score—and also includes **Robert Garland**’s electrifying *Return* set to the music of Aretha Franklin and James Brown, and **George Balanchine**’s *Donizetti Variations*.

After more than two decades, *Firebird* returned to the Dance Theatre of Harlem repertoire this year to overwhelming audience and critical acclaim, with packed houses in Detroit, Paris, Norfolk, and New York. The production—a tale of love and transformation and is described as “a show-stopping piece...danced with power and attitude” (*Interludes*)—has reemerged as a signature work for the company, blending classical ballet with rich cultural storytelling through a distinctly diasporic lens.

“We can’t wait for our audiences to see these performances,” said Washington Performing Arts President & CEO **Jenny Bilfield**. “The legendary virtuosity and brilliance of Dance Theatre of Harlem’s artists is matched by the urgency of the company’s historic vision and the decades-long intersection of purposeful collaboration between us. And, there is an additional point of resonance in our selection of The National Theatre for these performances. It was there, in 1935, that Todd Duncan—the eminent baritone, first interpreter of Gershwin’s *Porgy*, and the founding board chair of Washington Performing Arts—led a strike to desegregate the audiences attending performances of *Porgy and Bess*. This history reminds us that excellence and inclusion are inseparable.”

Geoffrey Holder’s vibrant sets and costumes bring John Taras’s choreography to life while the dancers perform to Stravinsky’s classic score in a recording by the University of North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA) Symphony Orchestra, conducted by **Mark A. Norman**, and released by UNCSA Media. Invited guests from the UNCSA School of Dance will perform in the *Firebird* corps de ballet. This exclusive D.C. engagement marks the latest chapter in a 50+-year history of collaboration between Washington Performing Arts and Dance Theatre of Harlem, dating back to when Washington Performing Arts first presented the company in 1973.

Dance Theatre of Harlem Executive Director **Anna Glass** shared, “There is something truly special about performing for the DMV audiences. Over the course of our long partnership with Washington Performing Arts, we’ve built a relationship rooted in shared values, artistic excellence, and a belief that ballet belongs to everyone. It’s a joy to return with a program that reflects the breadth of who we are as a company.”

DTH Artistic Director **Robert Garland** added, “Each ballet on this program tells a different story, but together they reflect Dance Theatre of Harlem’s artistic identity—grounded in classical excellence, enriched by cultural perspective, and always looking forward. It’s a program that celebrates the many ways ballet can inspire, surprise, and connect with audiences.”

In addition to *Firebird*, the program also includes dynamic works ***Return*** by DTH Artistic Director Robert Garland and George Balanchine's ***Donizetti Variations***.

Choreographed for DTH's 30th anniversary in 1999, *Return* is a soulful, high-octane celebration to the timeless sounds of James Brown and Aretha Franklin. Staged for 12 dancers, Garland calls the ballet's style "post-modern urban neoclassicism—an attempt to fuse an urban physical sensibility and a neoclassical one." A series of effervescent dances set to Donizetti's *Don Sebastian* opera, *Donizetti Variations* is a masterclass of elegance and endurance showcasing the technical demands of its dancers.

Performance Schedule:

Dance Theatre of Harlem and Washington Performing Arts present
Firebird
Dallas Morse Coors Legacy Performance

Choreography by John Taras
Music by Igor Stravinsky (1945 version)
Original Costume & Set Design by Geoffrey Holder
Original Costume Execution by Grace Costumes, Inc.
Costume Recreation Executed and Supervised by Katy A. Freeman, Leo Holder, and Vernon Ross
Costume Execution for *Firebird* and the *Princess of Unreal Beauty* by John Kristiansen New York Inc
Lighting Design by Clifton Taylor

Additional Repertoire:
Return (Brown and Franklin/Garland)
Donizetti Variations (Donizetti/Balanchine)

Friday, September 25, 2026, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, September 26, at 2:00 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.
The National Theatre

LISTINGS:

WHO: Washington Performing Arts and Dance Theatre of Harlem

WHAT: Three-performance co-production of the critically acclaimed ballet company Dance Theatre of Harlem's ***Firebird***, Dance Theatre of Harlem's iconic reimagining of the Russian folktale, along with dynamic works ***Return*** by DTH Artistic Director Robert Garland and George Balanchine's ***Donizetti Variations***.

WHERE: The National Theatre, 1321 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Washington, DC 20004

WHEN: Friday, September 25 at 7:30 p.m. / Saturday, September 26 at 2:00 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.

TICKETS: Tickets start at \$78 and are available for purchase on The National Theatre's [website](#). Group tickets (10+ seats) available through Washington Performing Arts at (202) 785-9727.

FUNDING CREDITS

Dallas Morse Coors Legacy Performance: In remembering Dallas Morse Coors, we celebrate a visionary who understood that supporting the arts is supporting excellence, the human spirit, and connection. The presentation of Dance Theatre of Harlem is the third-annual Dallas Morse Coors Legacy Performance, made possible through the Dallas Morse Coors Legacy Endowment at Washington Performing Arts.

Visionary support for *Firebird* provided by Jody and John Arnhold and the Virginia Arts Festival, with major support from the Thomas S. Kenan Institute for the Arts as part of a multi-year partnership between Dance Theatre of Harlem and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

Washington Performing Arts and Dance Theatre of Harlem gratefully acknowledge members of the Host Committee who have provided additional support for these performances.

ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for 60 years with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, international genres, and more. We also have an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence online, envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events online and in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

Our achievements have been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with four Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

Follow Washington Performing Arts on Social Media:

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ABOUT DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

Dance Theatre of Harlem is a leading dance institution of unparalleled global acclaim, encompassing a world-class company, a professional studio school, a leading arts education program—Dancing Through Barriers®—and community engagement activities. Founded in 1969 by Arthur Mitchell and Karel Shook, the organization has grown into a multicultural

institution with a legacy of providing access, opportunity, and excellence in the performing arts worldwide.

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