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## Festival brings a taste of the Big Apple to Florida

By Kate Mattingly  
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One of the goals of the Florida Dance Festival is "to offer students exposure to different techniques and methods for creating work," says festival director Tom Thielen. To that end, the event features classes in modern dance, improvisation, jazz, hip-hop and ballet, taught by New York-based artists such as Ben Munisteri, Larry Keigwin and David Dorfman, as well as Florida-based teachers Dale Andree, Octavio Campos and Tina Santos-Wahl.

This year, for the first time, a Festival Finale showcase will give participants from the workshops a chance to perform at the New World Dance Theater on July 1.

Thielen is passionate about the importance of exposure for Florida's dance scene. "In New York, there's such a plethora of small contemporary modern companies, that this awareness of other artists and other types of work helps to move the art form forward," he notes. "Choreographers and performers are going out to see other artists, and whether or not they like the work, it doesn't matter, because it exposes them to a level of work that, perhaps, inspires them. It helps them to grow as artists."

But starting this week, Florida Dance Festival's classes, workshops and performances will afford Miami's artists and audiences a similar density of display. Indeed, the festival will be even more concentrated than usual, as this year's edition has been condensed from a 14-day to a 10-day event.

The festival has presented 120 dance companies since 1987, and a new offering this year is the "Off the Wall" anthology, a collaboration with Artemis/PS 742.

Choreographers from Florida, New York and California have been invited to show their pieces inside a gallery in Miami's design district, DotFiftyOne. By placing professional dancers inside this space, literally taking the art "off the wall" onto the floor, the performance aims to alter the traditional view of dance on a proscenium stage.

"I was intrigued by the alternative gallery space," explains one of the choreographers, Sara Baird. "Because the piece that I'm presenting, *Lacuna*, incorporates visual projections with bright color and texture and a sculptural plastic gown, it seems fitting to show the dance in the same way that you exhibit an art piece."

Other attractions in the festival's performance series include the Miami Contemporary Dance Company, Tampa's Moving Current Dance Collective and the New York-based Ben Munisteri Dance Projects, as well as the group showcase "Florida Dances" and the improvisational evening "Countdown 3 ... 2 ... 1."

One of Thielen's favorite performers, Dorfman, joins his frequent collaborator, Dan Froot, for a show called *Live Sax Acts*.

"I'm a great admirer of David's work and the two of them together, it's such a perfect match," Thielen says. "Their 20-plus years of friendship helps that, and the element of fun and comedy [in their piece] adds to the mix of the festival."