

One giant leap for TBA, and other daring steps
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"Famous Russian dancer."

That's PICA guest artistic director Mark Russell's sly shorthand for the elephant in the living room of this year's Time-Based Art Festival.

While talking about highlights of the fifth edition of the festival, he describes a new work by choreographer Donna Uchizono, without mentioning the work's star by name. A few minutes later, he lets it slip: Baryshnikov.

Yes. That Baryshnikov. The one named Mikhail, who electrified the dance world when he defected from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and became an international ballet sensation.

The new piece, "State of Heads and Leap to Tall," marks Baryshnikov's first return to a Portland stage since 1999, and it continues his exploration of modern dance with Uchizono's distinctive choreography, known for its grace and beauty. It will be performed over two nights at the intimate Newmark Theatre and is likely to be one of the most sought-after tickets in this year's festival.

Famous Russian dancer aside, the TBA '07 lineup is less about big names than in years past. There will be fewer headlining acts at the festival, which runs Sept. 6-16, with the lineup to be officially unveiled at a party for donors tonight. But TBA won't be less interesting or absorbing. Russell says it will be more plugged in to the city's eastside alternative arts scene. More performances will be held in smaller eastside venues, for example, and the festival moves its late-night party zone, The Works, deeper across the river to Northeast's Wonder Ballroom.

"This is a continuing dialogue with Portland," says Russell, who is in his second year running the festival.

The festival kicks off with a massive free concert in Pioneer Courthouse Square, featuring hundreds of voices from Portland choirs performing a newly commissioned work by Rinde Eckert, the enigmatic composer, director, actor, singer and dancer.

Acts new to the festival include Elevator Repair Service, which PICA last presented here in 2000, performing "Gatz," a verbatim reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" over six hours by 13 performers. Writer/director Young Jean Lee explores Korean-American identity with the elaborate and sarcastically titled "Songs of the Dragon Flying to Heaven." And things take a participatory turn with "Haircuts by Children," a performance art work by Mammalian Diving Reflex in which audience members get actual haircuts, with scissors in the hands of 8- to 10-year-olds.

Returning artists include Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, New York performance artist Taylor Mac and Portlander Andrew Dickson. Last year, Nature Theatre was one of the most popular acts with an hourlong sendup of modern dance. This year, it's something entirely different, with "No Dice," a more theatrical piece running 4 1/2 hours (including a break for ham sandwiches). Mac, who was a standout of last year's late-night offerings, gets a solo show combining music and spoken word. And Dickson offers musings on balancing his life as an artist with a recent foray into the advertising business in "Sellout."

Like the performances, this year's visual arts shows for the festival will have a more theatrical bent, according to Kristan Kennedy, PICA's visual arts program director. Kennedy's programming once again embraces the avant-garde. Among the dozen or so works: the local collaboration Sincerely John Head offers "Studio Sessions," a participatory work celebrating the 30th anniversary of the "Foghat LIVE" recording; and Gary Wiseman's "Tea Parties," an improvised conceptual piece comprising tea parties that will be held in unusual public spaces.

Moving The Works and its late-night performances to the Wonder Ballroom simplifies things for PICA. During previous festivals, massive warehouse spaces have been utilized, and the reimagining of those spaces was as much a work of art as the performances they contained. At the Wonder, Kennedy says, they'll be able to focus manpower more on content than the cosmetics of the place.

And for Russell, content is what this edition of TBA is all about.

"It's a festival that will sneak up on you," Russell said. "There are a lot of

amazing nuggets in it."