

Seattle International Dance Festival highlights both local and international companies

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June 6, 2019 at 6:00 am Updated June 6, 2019 at 11:10 am



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Booking big names is not the goal of the Seattle International Dance Festival (SIDF). “We’re not necessarily programming the national export product of a country,” says Cyrus Khambatta, founder-director of the SIDF. Instead, he says the festival looks for working artists “who may be well known at home but are a discovery here.”

Now in its 14th year, the SIDF runs June 7-22 at venues on Capitol Hill with two parallel performance series. “Inter|National” matches foreign and U.S.-based dance companies on a single bill, while “Spotlight on Seattle” showcases both established and emerging local artists, with a special focus on contemporary ballet.

Discovering international dance companies

Among the “Inter|National” performances this year, Italy’s Equilibrio Dinamico is paired with the local Julie Tobiason Ballet. Tchekpo Dan Agbetou combines modern dance and contemporary African dance in works for his German company Tchekpo, which the SIDF pairs with Molissa Fenley and Company out of New York. Khambatta’s own dance company will also perform.



Khambatta Dance Co. (Marcia Davis)

The festival always faces bureaucratic challenges bringing so many performers from abroad. This year, Sumeet Nagdev Dance Arts from India dropped from the program due to visa issues. In its place will be Ishita Mili, who fuses traditional Indian dance, street style and contemporary dance. Despite the difficulties, Khambatta remains committed to the festival's format. "It's rare to find a festival that mixes the local and international," says Khambatta. "We're encouraging people through the split bill evenings to see art created in different cultural contexts. Audiences can travel, in a sense, without leaving their own backyard."

Cultivating local choreography

The James Ray Residency cultivates dance in that backyard. The residency grants five Seattle-based artists a suite of support services over a full year. "We really try to help them free their time to focus on the creative process," says Khambatta.

All five will premiere new work at the festival as part of the "Spotlight on Seattle" series. This series also includes programs focused on contemporary ballet, with new works from independent choreographers and artists who dance with ballet companies like Pacific Northwest Ballet.

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"We try to encourage artists to self-define 'contemporary ballet,'" says Khambatta. "We get really diverse works." After five years of spotlighting contemporary ballet at the festival, "We're seeing development and growth, hopefully as a result of this festival, of contemporary ballet in Seattle and even internationally." Khambatta says he was recently contacted by a producer in South Korea who programmed a Seattle artist he first saw at the SIDF.

Festival details

The festival opens June 7 with "Shuffle," a performance of dances created in one week by randomly paired dance artists and local musicians.

On June 8, SIDF's free outdoor "Art on the Fly" event at Denny Park in South Lake Union will include food trucks, live performances and free dance classes. The Insta-stage will provide improvised music for dancers and other performers selected through social media (instructions at seattleidf.org/insta).

"The idea is anybody can make a dance and perform on stage accompanied by a musician. It's like open mic," says Khambatta.

The "Inter|National Series" includes six programs over three weekends at the Broadway Performance Hall. "Spotlight on Seattle" features James Ray Residency performances June 11-13 and contemporary dance on June 14 at Erickson Theater. Contemporary ballet performances are June 18-19 at Broadway Performance Hall.

Seattle International Dance Festival, June 7-22; Broadway Performance Hall, 1625 Broadway, Seattle, and Erickson Theatre, 1524 Harvard Ave., Seattle; single tickets \$18-\$25, passes \$40-\$145; 888-377-4510, seattleidf.org. Also: "Art on the Fly," noon-3 p.m. Saturday, June 8; Denny Park, 100 Dexter Ave. N., Seattle; free; seattleidf.org/aof.

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