



*Ice
Theatre
New York*

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF DANCE THEATRE ON ICE

By Daniel Gesmer

Thirty years. Not so many centuries ago, thirty years was more than the average human lifespan. Yet that is how long Ice Theatre of New York, the first nonprofit artistic ice dance company in America, has endured and thrived — thanks to the vision of founding artistic director Moira North, who remains tenaciously dedicated to developing skating as a medium for movement expression of the highest artistic caliber.

Three decades of continuous programming is an impressive milestone for any arts organization, even one with more generous funding. In Ice Theatre's early days, due to the scarcity and high cost of ice time, its artists had to rehearse

without pay in the middle of the night. But the company's longevity is now only rivaled by its list of accomplishments. These range from nurturing emerging artists and choreographers, to showcasing world-class talent, to becoming America's first artistic ice group to earn support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York Department of Cultural Affairs.

One of the company's early triumphs was *HARD EDGE*, produced in 1988 at the old Sky Rink on West 34th Street, with guest appearances by John Curry and lauded by New York Times dance critic Anna Kisselgoff. Legendary

skating innovator Gary Beacom calls that production "a highlight in my career. I still get compliments for the 22-minute solo that opened that show, which ITNY shared on YouTube."

As part of its mission to elevate the medium of artistic motion on ice, Ice Theatre has since collaborated directly with many notable modern and classical dance choreographers, including David Parsons, Edward Villella, Lar Lubovitch, JoAnna Mendl Shaw, Ann Carlson, Jacquelyn Buglisi, and Susan Marshall. The company has also helped gestate a new breed of skater-dancer-choreographer, such as Katherine Healy, David Liu, and Heather Harrington, who also dance





and choreograph for professional dance companies.

Among other notable alumni of the company are Judy Blumberg and Douglas Webster, who were Co-Ensemble Directors for many years. Judy, an Olympic ice dancer, became one of our leading ladies and choreography translators before settling in Sun Valley. Douglas started as a skater/performer, grew into a choreographer, and eventually became Artistic Director for several years before creating his own company.

According to Harrington, "Moir is a gift to the world of skating. She thinks of the impossible and does

it. She created a place where artists could gather and inspire one another to bring the medium beyond the usual competitive and ice show aesthetic. She saw what skating could be and had the vision, determination, and passion to bring it there, educating an audience to see differently.

Added Mendl Shaw, "Moir has done an amazing job of creating a community and viable possibilities for Ice Theatre to be a visible part of the cultural ecology of New York. Ice Theatre has brought ice dance to Chelsea Piers, Rockefeller Center, Wollman Rink in Central Park, and up into Harlem. This has been a very

important contribution to the delight of living in the city."

"Moir has also been tireless about supporting ice dance as an art form, giving skaters of all ages an opportunity to perform outside of competitions, and the older ones an opportunity to be part of her support network and board of directors."

North's grandest visions include creating a world-class performance facility in New York for theatrical ensemble skating, developing a viable paradigm for international touring, and performing at dance and arts festivals. Another dream is to collaborate with artists from the opera and theatre





domains, so that the ice medium can be used to explore bigger themes at major venues like the Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Of course such grand visions depend on significantly expanded support from both private and public sectors, in no small part because rehearsal time on ice rinks can cost 20 (or more) times as much as dance groups need to pay for studio space.

In the nearer term, Ice Theatre continues with its regular New York programming. This includes the City Skate Concert Series at Rockefeller Center and other metropolitan rinks, an outreach program for New York public school children (the New Works and Young Artists Series), and the Home Season performances next spring, which will feature a retrospective of select works from the past 30 years (over 70 pieces are in the repertory) along with exciting new choreography. Future collaborations include Improv Everywhere and the MIT Media Lab.

Said Executive Director Jirina Ribbens, "it's amazing how something that started in Moira's loft has survived 30 years and grown into, essentially, a large modern dance company. Moira has been fabulous at finding choreographers like Parsons and Buglisi, who don't know the medium but come to it with fresh, curious minds. Since our work straddles dance and sport, on the economic side our challenge is to find visionary funders who see in us the opportunity to create a new art form: dancing on ice, taking the virtuosic element of the sport of ice skating and expanding it to a soul-felt activity that goes beyond the physical."

Daniel Gesmer is the founder and owner of Seismic Skate Systems, a prominent brand manufacturer of high-end longboard skateboard products. He also writes about the arts for publications far and wide.

Ice Theatre of New York

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Moira North

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Jirina Ribbens

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WELCOME TO OUR 30TH ANNIVERSARY BENEFIT GALA

I am so glad you are here celebrating with us and I thank you for all of your past support. Ice Theatre of New York could not have reached this milestone without your generous backing.

With your help Ice Theatre will enter the next decade with renewed enthusiasm. We will not only maintain the important work that we have been doing, but also significantly increase our exploration of what is possible with theatrical dance movement on the ice.

I invite you to join us at our weekly Edge Classes at Sky Rink, our City Skate Concert Series at Rockefeller Rink, our outreach program, the New Works and Young Artists Series, as well as our Home Season in the Spring, which will be a celebration of all skating.

Skating: "... combines and surpasses the joys of flying and dancing; only in a certain try of a dream do we ever else attain a higher degree of the same ravishing experience of exultantly skimming the earth."

— Ernest Jones, Biographer of Freud

Join us as we glide gracefully into the next decade of choreography, collaborations and educational outreach programming.

Warm Wishes,

Moira North