

NEW YORK'S RISING STARS

Giving leg up to those who've gotta dance

Jonah Bokaer, 29

Choreographer, CHEZ BUSHWICK

TRACKING DOWN JONAH BOKAER could take a detective. The independent choreographer is on tour 30 weeks of the year. Last month, Mr. Bokaer was in Avignon, France, rehearsing a new work commissioned for a prestigious festival there. Before that, the in-demand artist toured the U.K. In January, he presented a film in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

Mr. Bokaer, who at 18 became **the youngest dancer ever hired by Merce Cunningham** for his troupe, spent eight years performing with the company, to stellar reviews. That spurred him to strike out on his own.

Now the soft-spoken Ithaca, N.Y., native choreographs Robert Wilson's operas, which are seen around the world. He was recently chosen by the National Academy of Sciences to create a duet, the first work of dance commissioned by that agency. The piece, *Replica*, debuted at the New Museum and has been performed in seven countries so far.

While most choreographers are focused on advancing their own work, Mr. Bokaer also seeks to help others succeed. He founded two nonprofit organizations in Brooklyn: Chez Bushwick, where dancers can rent rehearsal space for \$5 an hour, and

the Center for Performance Research, for which he and a colleague raised \$1.2 million. Both are thriving.

"He is dedicated to **creating a community and a platform for fellow artists**," Mr. Wilson said. "To have a vision to give back to the community at a young age is quite extraordinary."

Mr. Bokaer—whose father is a screenwriter and whose mother is a theater director—is just warming up.

"I don't sleep a lot," he said. "But the gift is to keep working."

—MIRIAM KREININ SOUCCAR

