

# The Star-Ledger

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## Retaining an edge in the modern world

Risky moves bring  
rewards to choreographer

### DANCE

#### Garth Fagan Dance

**Where:** The Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue at 19th Street, New York

**When:** Tuesday-Nov. 11. 7:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday; 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday; 7:30 p.m. Sunday; 2 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

**How much:** \$25 Sunday evening; \$44 all other times. Call (212) 242-0800 or visit [www.joyce.org](http://www.joyce.org)

BY ROBERT JOHNSON

STAR-LEDGER STAFF

NEW YORK — When you're hanging on to the edge of something, don't let go. That's good advice, courtesy of master choreographer Garth Fagan, whose Garth Fagan Dance returns to the Joyce Theater on Tuesday.

The members of Fagan's exquisitely poised contemporary dance troupe hug the borders of the stage and cling to precarious balances in "EDGE/JOY," the latest dance to join Fagan's fun-filled but challenging repertoire. Soloists must also hold on to their focus amid the jangling rhythms and other distractions Fagan places in their path.

"I thought about all the edgy things we do in life that bring us joy," says Fagan, explaining his impulse to create a piece in which most of the dancing takes place

along the periphery of the stage.

This season, "EDGE/JOY," with a complex, rhythmic score composed by Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon, joins the revival of Fagan's fluid 1978 dance "From Before," which he describes as "a spin on African movement, without the straw." Another revival, "Earth Eagle First Circle," has a Native American theme.

The season also includes Fagan classics such as an excerpt from "Griot New York" and recent works like "LIFE: DARK/LIGHT."

Now 67, the Jamaican-born choreographer, whose company is based in Rochester, N.Y., feels a grandfatherly moral responsibility to guide the young by sharing the fruits of his experience.

Well, some of his experiences, anyway.

When asked about his riskiest moves, Fagan says, "You and I can talk about it privately, but we shouldn't put it in print," and then he chuckles. "Everybody knows I'm a celibate monk, kneeling at the altars of the divine." Maybe not. Fagan is willing to admit, however, to the wisdom of making a rapid exit under trying circumstances.

"When I left Jamaica, that was



STEVE LABUZZETTA

An excerpt from "Griot New York" is part of the Garth Fagan Dance repertoire at New York's Joyce Theater.

real edge, but it was the best thing I ever did," Fagan says. He explains that his late father was determined his son would pursue a Ph.D. in psychology, not a dance career. "He thought that modern dance was just fat girls running around the room," Fagan says. "When I decided to go against him and do dance, as opposed to psychology, that was another edgy thing. But look at the rich, wonderful career it has given me." Eventually, his father agreed.

Fagan also admits that at first

he was attracted to dancing for "vain, shallow" reasons. Recalling his early mentor, Ivy Baxter, and her company, he says: "They were a fast crowd in Jamaica. They wore beautiful clothes, drove fast cars and were taking trips out of the island." It wasn't until Baxter showed him a film of Martha Graham that Fagan says he understood the intellectual possibilities of dance.

Now the speed, the glamour — and that intellectual rigor — are all a part of the dances he makes. In

the new work "EDGE/JOY" Fagan risks dividing the audience's attention and giving us partial views of the action, while offering images of unflappable persistence. There is "a constant struggle between balance and relevé, and freedom," Fagan says.

He admires his dancers' fearlessness. "I love that in dancers," he says, "because that helps me find the new and the different."

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