



**DON'T MESS WITH THE BEST** Jones, with shaved head, and dancers, get ready to battle.

## In vogue

Choreographer Darrell Jones strikes a new pose.  
By Sarah Best

As a dancer, Darrell Jones has toured with the internationally renowned companies of Ronald K. Brown, Ralph Lemon and Bebe Miller. But for the past year he's been researching and participating in Chicago's underground vogue balls—runway-style dance contests in clubs or alternative spaces where participants (usually gay, black men) compete in different style categories. They show off their dance moves, fashion sense and/or ability to “pass” as a woman or a straight man. Voguing, the “strike a pose” dance made famous by Madonna, provides the overarching aesthetic.

Voguing has a long history and an intricate culture, some of which was documented in the 1990 film *Paris Is Burning*. It took Jones awhile to get up the courage to “walk a ball” (compete). His now-or-never moment arrived during a showcase for veteran contestants. “Where did she come from?” the MC screeched. (Voguers are often addressed with the feminine pronoun, despite their “natural” gender). But by the time the DJ cut off the music, Jones was in a groove and the sharp-tongued emcee relented, “We need a category for this!” (ball lingo for needing a term to describe a new style). We recently sat down with Jones to discuss his new work, *third Swan from the end*, premiering Friday 21 at the Galaxie.

### When did you get into the vogue scene?

I think I've always been interested in voguing, but I never really had the guts to do it. I felt like, if I did it, I would lose something about my masculinity. But when I applied for a Chicago Dancemakers Forum grant last year, I realized that it would give me permission to approach voguing with a research eye.

### How would you describe voguing?

It's a series of dramatic, angular poses that are woven together through dance, gymnastics, martial arts and other types of movement. I would also describe it as a hypermasculine take on femininity. If you have a limp wrist or make a flourished gesture, you might be called a sissy. But when you amp these movements up to a ten, they have power behind them. You own it, and aren't making apologies for them.

### What's the story behind the title of your show, *third Swan*?

At a production of *Swan Lake*, I noticed a woman near the end of a line of 20 or 30 “swans.” She was just working it. What was it that made her so riveting? I came to the conclusion that it wasn't necessarily something that she was doing, but something that she had lived or experienced that she brought to this abstract movement. That's what I think of when I see voguing done really well. It's not about striking a pose. It's living in the moment and working hard to capture the attention of the judges.

### Are you interested in re-creating a ball experience for the audience?

I've moved away from that and have moved towards creating a choreographed, theatrical production. But I've invited the House of Avant-Garde to throw a miniball after the show on Saturday. I've become interested in looking at voguing like an anthropologist would. Where does a movement like the duck-walk come from and what other dances does it look like? It looks a little like Cossack dancing from Russia, which is a dance of strength and virility. In a vogue competition, you want to take a movement and make it your own. But I want to extract and simplify the movement to better understand it.

### Are you trying to bring voguing to a wider audience?

I have a really specific audience in mind and they're all black gay men. Sometimes when you try to make something universal, you dilute what you are trying to say. I hope that by sticking to my guns, and creating a work with specificity, other people will be able to extract something as well.

There might be some resistance [in the ball community] to the work. Voguing has developed into something that has really specific rules. For me, this project has been about pushing some boundaries. Let's not just stick with the things that we know. Let's make new categories.

*third Swan from the end* is at Galaxie Friday 21 and Saturday 22.

## Listings

### If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (dance@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Asimina Chremos**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue with cross streets, nearest El station or bus routes, contact information and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 10am on Monday, ten days before publication date.** Incomplete submissions will not be included, and information will not be accepted over the phone. Listings are free but, as space is limited, inclusion is not guaranteed.

\* Recommended or notable

### Thursday 20

**The Other Dance Festival—Week Three** Hamlin Park Fieldhouse Theater, 3035 N Hoyne Ave between Wellington and Barry Aves (773-880-5402, brownpapertickets.com). Bus: 50, 76, 77 (24hrs). 7:30pm; \$15, \$12 students and seniors. This annual festival showcases some of the city's independent choreographers and small troupes that roughly fit into the “modern dance” box. This third and final week includes works by the Dance COLlective, JulieAnn Graham, Thread Meddle Outfit, Jyl Fehrenkamp and a preview of *Cinderbox 18*, the piece that Lucky Plush Productions will premiere at the MCA later this fall.

### Friday 21

**The Flaming Dames: Bump & Grindhouse** The Spot, 4437 N Broadway between Montrose and Wilson Aves (773-728-8934). El: Red to Wilson. Bus: 36 Broadway, 78 Montrose. 7:30pm, \$15. Leslie Kerrigan started the Flaming Dames in 2003 to serve her obsession with burlesque, old-school striptease and pop culture. This show, *Bump & Grindhouse*, plays on the trendy grindhouse film revival in a multimedia theatrical revue that combines sexy choreography with video and still photographic pics.

**The Other Dance Festival—Week Three** See Thu 20.

\* **third Swan from the end** Galaxie, 2603 W Barry St at Rockwell St (773-267-6010). Bus: 49 (24hrs), 76, 77. 8pm, \$12-\$18. Independent choreographer Darrell Jones and his cast of six dancers, some of whom are regulars on Chicago's underground ball scene, take dance into new territory. Using vocabulary drawn from the clubs and structures from postmodern dance, they pit virtuosity and voguing against narratives of escape, feminine versus masculine and fantasy versus real-life tragedy. See “In vogue,” this page.

### Saturday 22

**FREE Millennium Park Workouts** Millennium Park, Michigan Ave between Monroe and Randolph Sts. El: Red to Monroe; Blue to Washington; Pink, Orange, Green, Brown, Purple (rush hrs) to Randolph. Bus: 3, 4 (24hrs), 14, 124, 127, 145, 151 (24hrs), 157. 8-10am. What could be better than joining hundreds of your neighbors for a yoga practice, Pilates workout and hip-hop jam on a beautiful Saturday morning outdoors? Lani Granum