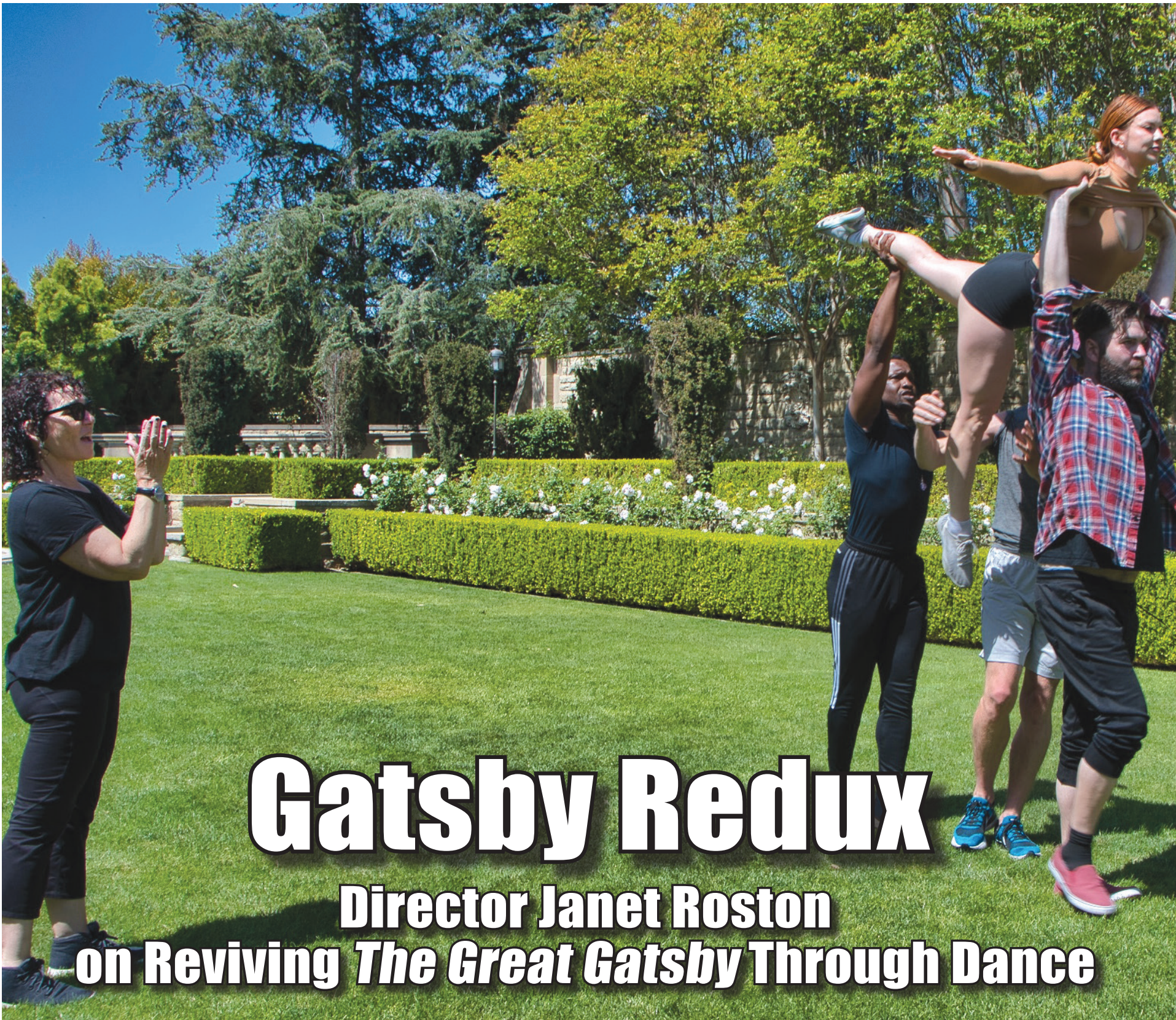


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on Reviving *The Great Gatsby* Through Dance



# coverstory

## GATSBY REDUX

### Director Janet Roston on Reviving *The Great Gatsby* Through Dance

By Danielle Berjikian

**This will be Mixed eMotion Theatrix's third run of *Gatsby Redux* at the Greystone Mansion. Tell us about that.**

This piece is a site-specific work that guides the [audience] through the house and the tiered gardens of Greystone, [enhanced] by moody lighting and sound that create a magical experience.

It doesn't tell the whole story of *The Great Gatsby*—there are some sequences that are scenes from the book, but it's also just giving you the mood. It's about stepping into Gatsby's world. So there's a very 1920s feel to it. The characters are there—Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Tom Buchanan, Myrtle Wilson, and Nick Carraway. So you see the lead characters.

Also, only 150 people can attend each night, so you're in a very small, intimate group moving through the experience.

**The production first performed in Disney Hall's Blue Ribbon Garden. Tell us how it has since been developed into a full-length work.**

We were commissioned by the Los Angeles Music Center for an event that they did at a building that was part of their complex. For the year we were invited, they were doing it at Disney Hall. I loved the gardens at Disney Hall and thought, "Wouldn't it be nice to do a Summer Gatsby soirée?" For that event, you were only allowed to do a work for 15 minutes, but we traveled the audience from the amphitheater outside into a more intimate garden area, and then out to this big plaza.

For that performance, we did it in three sections, in three different locations. We projected vintage cartoons and Deco vi-

suals onto the walls of Disney Hall. That was the first time they'd ever projected onto Disney Hall, and people loved it. I started thinking about how we could continue to develop the piece.

Then, of course, the pandemic happened.



**"Movement can convey emotions and moods that text often can't. And because we're not trying to tell the entire story, it allows the audience to use their imagination about what's happening"**

I realized that what made this piece particularly great was that it was outdoors and site-specific. So in 2021, we began developing it and started rehearsals. During the pandemic, we rehearsed in a park in North Hollywood with masks on for a month. We completed the full-length piece at the Muckenthaler Cultural Center in Fullerton in 2021.

In 2022, we brought it to Greystone. We've also performed it in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Tracy, California, and we're about to perform it in Toronto at the Harbourfront Centre, which is a large theater complex. The

dancers will even arrive by boat on the lake, which is very exciting.

But of all the places we've done it, we love Greystone the best because it really feels like you're in the 1920s. With the lighting and the different gardens, it's just so beautiful.

I'd also like to acknowledge Sarah Scrimshaw. She's been incredible. She's in charge of Greystone, and she's just fantastic. She's always so supportive of the project and always willing to help us. It's one of the reasons we keep coming back.

**You were the Beverly High dance teacher for many years, retiring in 2006. Tell us about some students you have kept in touch with from the Beverly High Dance Company.**



I still go back and choreograph for the company and do one dance for them each year. I'm extremely close with many of the dancers who were part of the Beverly High Dance Company. It's kind of a running joke that everyone has danced with me at some point. I keep really close track of the students who were with me over the years in the dance company because we were a really close group.

I think it's great that the Dance Company has continued to thrive. They've been performing at the Wallis, and next year they're supposed to perform in the new auditorium at Beverly High, which is exciting.

One former student is our videographer and editor, Ariel Benarroch, who also served as our tech director when we took *Anais Nin, Unbound* to the Avignon Festival in France. Laura Karlin, who has her own company, Invertigo, [was one of my students]. Jackie Lloyd, who danced with me as well, has gone on to perform in many productions. Now a [professional dancer], she's performed at the Oscars, the Super Bowl, and toured with Lana Del Rey. Joanna Elliott is now a strategic planner and consultant for nonprofits.

Other former students have gone on to do great things as well. Ash Sroka is a voice-over artist, Jennifer Jessum is a filmmaker and producer, and Howard (Howie) Nourmand is a creative director and graphic designer.

Additionally, I'm collaborating with Lital Mizrahi, who is also a filmmaker and is assisting me on a music video I'm working on. She's also been involved in helping us develop projects.

It's really exciting to see how far they've all come.

**There are many adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* out there. What did you feel was missing that this version incorporates?**

Ours is a dance piece, so we're telling the story through movement, without any speaking. Movement can convey emotions and moods that text often can't. And because we're not trying to tell the entire story, it allows the audience to use their imagination about what's happening. I actually think it's great that there are other

adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* because it's a fantastic story. Our piece is also deeply connected to the themes of the book. We're especially interested in Fitzgerald's examination of class in America and the longing for the unreachable American Dream.

When you attend the show, you're given a program, and in the program, it describes each location. For example, it might say

something like "a hot hotel room in New York City," which is a scene where Gatsby, Olive, Daisy, and Tom are all drinking in the hot hotel room. Or it might describe the cabaret in the mansion, which has a more fun atmosphere with burlesque dancing. So if you read the program, you can follow along with what we're aiming for. We also have a scene at Nick's house, early in the book, where Daisy, Nick's cousin, and Gatsby meet. We have this scene on the grand horseshoe staircase at Greystone, which is really beautiful.

**What do you hope the audience will take away from the performance?**

One thing I know for sure is that after people experience the show, I often hear them say, "I've never been here before." What's exciting for me is that the performance is bringing new people to Greystone. For those who have been there before, they'll see it in a new way. The chance to experience a performance like this, where the audience moves throughout the entire grounds of Greystone, is so rare. So, even if they've been to Greystone, they'll see it in a completely new way. I think they'll be delighted to be immersed in Gatsby's world.

This year, 2025, marks the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, and we're really excited about that. We're also thrilled that Greystone invited us back this year for a two-week run. Because the show is intimate and exclusive with a small audience, it's a unique experience.

**Is there anything else you would like readers to know?**

I suggest guests wear walking shoes, as there are a lot of stairs at Greystone. We also encourage people to dress in costume. It's been really fun to see so many attendees come in costume—it adds to the experience. You can even arrive early and enjoy the patio that overlooks the city, where you can take some great photos. We're also making some adjustments this year to accommodate guests with accessibility concerns.

To purchase tickets, visit:

<https://beverlyhills.org/1327/Gatsby-Redux>

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in Saturday's Kentucky Derby at the Louisville, Kentucky track, Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners, reported on social media.

Journalism is "under consideration" for the Preakness Stakes with "his energy, action & appetite being monitored in coming days," according to Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners.

Eclipse Thoroughbred Partners reported

on social media on Sunday that Journalism "emerged from his gallant 2nd in the @KentuckyDerby in good order. He ate up last night & was sound and bright this morning."

Michael McCarthy, Journalism's trainer, said on the social platform X, "We'll monitor him in the coming week before making a decision on the @PreaknessStakes w his best interest our primary focus."

The Preakness Stakes, the second jewel of thoroughbred racing's Triple Crown, will be run May 17 at Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore.

Kentucky Derby winner Sovereignty will not run in the Preakness Stakes, Mike Rogers, the executive vice president of 1/ST Racing, which operates Pimlico, said Sovereignty's trainer, Bill Mott, called race organizers Tuesday to inform them of the

decision.

Steven Herbert has covered Beverly Hills High School sports for Beverly Hills Weekly since 1999. He has also covered college and professional sports for the Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post. He can be reached at (786) 201-2460 or by email at [Stvherbert@aol.com](mailto:Stvherbert@aol.com).