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JANET ROSTON ON BRINGING JAY GATSBY TO BEVERLY
HILLS' GREYSTONE MANSION

By Ann Haskins | Jun 3, 2025



Built in 1928 by a scandal-plagued oil magnate, for the next two weekends Beverly Hills' elegant [Greystone Mansion](#) provides a luxe setting for *Gatsby Redux*, [Janet Roston's](#) site specific consideration of F. Scott Fitzgerald's [The Great Gatsby](#). Roston and her [Mixed eMotion Theatrix](#) guide audiences through the mansion and park-like grounds with music, text, and dancing that conjures up *Gatsby's* world of the 1920's jazz- age, contrasts of privilege and poverty, and tragic romantic entanglements. This return performance coincides with the centennial of the publication of *The Great Gatsby* in 1925.

Recently, the director/choreographer spoke with LA Dance Chronicle's Ann Haskins about developments since *Gatsby Redux*' 2018 debut at Disney Hall, the company's recurring relationship with Greystone Mansion, and why she has always cast an African American dancer as *Gatsby*. (The interview has been edited for length and clarity.)



Mixed eMotion Theatrix "Gatsby Redux" – Photo by Barry Weiss.

Haskins: I understand that *Gatsby Redux* started in 2018 with a Music Center commission for *Moves After Dark*.

Roston: Yes. I was one of the three groups selected for different locations of the Music Center campus. They walked me through Disney Hall, inside and outside, pointing out the available spaces where I could present. Since the show was going to be in the summer, I wanted the audience to feel like they were at a beautiful summer garden party, and from there came the idea of making it a summer party with the audience at Gatsby's estate. That is how it began.

We were allowed 17 minutes and we took the audience to different exterior parts of Disney Hall. First at the amphitheater, where the audience was at the bottom and the dancers used the steep tiered seating to move and tumble down. This is where Gatsby meets Nick and learns he is the cousin of Daisy, the woman Gatsby has always loved. From there, the second sequence was a series of duets that traveled through a narrow landscaped passageway. The third section was in the Blue Ribbon Garden with that enormous flower sculpted with Delft pottery shards, a tribute to Lillian Disney. There we had projections with vintage cartoons and art deco designs for the finale.

Haskins: How does that original 2018 Disney Hall event compare with the version you now stage at Greystone Mansion?

Roston: It has been expanded. Those original three sections are still in the piece, but in different ways. At Greystone, the opening that was at the Disney Hall amphitheater now makes use of this very grand staircase at Greystone. The gardens at Greystone have a Cedar Lane, a narrow area lined with trees, so the duets now are there. And the big finale is in the Greystone courtyard. Other new sections include a croquet match and dances capturing encounters among the different characters.



Mixed eMotion Theatrix "Gatsby Redux" – Photo by Barry Weiss.

Haskins: How did this relationship with Greystone develop?

Roston: After Disney Hall, we began discussions in 2019 with the Beverly Hills staff that operates Greystone as a city park. The discussions were moving forward to do something in 2020, and then everything stopped with the Covid pandemic. In 2021, when things started to open up, since our show was an outdoor production, the conversation resumed. We actually did it first in Orange County at the Muckenthaler House. We Covid-tested the dancers and the audience was masked. It was entirely outdoors and went well. After that, our conversations about Greystone resumed and we performed here in 2022, again last year in 2024, and now these two weekends.

Haskins: Has Gatsby Redux changed since the pandemic ended.

Roston: Opening the house itself was new as of last year. Last year, the pandemic was finally over and we were able to bring the audience inside Greystone. Now we start the performance with the entire audience in the grand staircase before dividing into groups with guides.

Haskins: Are any of the dancers this time, dancers who have been in prior productions?

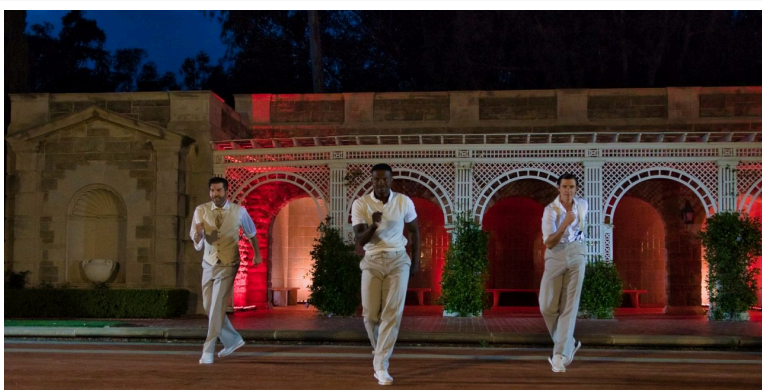
Roston: About half the cast, maybe a little more than half the cast is back again this year, and at this point, we have others who we can pull back in. I think it's impressive that we have a group that has just stayed with us. Our Daisy, Tiffany Wolff, the object of Gatsby's affection, has been with us the entire time, and also our Myrtle, Sarah Wines.



Mixed eMotion Theatrx – “Gatsby Redux” for Los Angeles Music Center, Moves After Dark.
Performed in the Blue Ribbon Garden of Disney Hall – Photo Credit: Barry Weiss

Haskins: This year marks the centenary of *The Great Gatsby*’s publication which has prompted interviews and commentary by literary critics and historians. Some discussions I’ve heard include the perspective that Gatsby might not have been white, but his money and that mansion gave him entry into a world of privilege. You include that perspective in your casting.

Roston: When I was researching the book and exploring themes in the book like the class struggle in America, the unattainable American dream, and the unattainable sense of equality, casting an African American as Gatsby made sense. Our Gatsby is always cast as African-American because of the kind of class struggles that existed then and still exist. There’s the sense that however Gatsby tries, he is never going to be accepted by the elite class in East Egg and never going to attain Daisy.



Mixed eMotion Theatrx in “Gatsby Redux” – Photo by Barry Weiss.

Haskins: At the ending of *The Great Gatsby*, the book’s events go pretty dark. Seeing it in 2018 and last year, my impression was you allude to the darker elements, but not explicitly. How did you decide on your approach to the ending?

Roston: We’re not really telling the full story. We have some sequences in the show that the audience might recognize as scenes from the book. But then it also takes the audience, broadly into the 20s, and the feelings of the 20s. In the projections in that final section, you actually see the yellow car, and you see there is red that could be blood.



Mixed eMotion Theatrix in "Gatsby Redux" – Photo by Barry Weiss.

Haskins: How do you plan the logistics to move the audience around Greystone?

Roston: The logistics are really complicated. You have to walk down and around the main house to the terrace looking out to Beverly Hills and West Hollywood. After the beginning of the show in the house, you walk with a guide back up to see the different scenes, all the while working your way up along all the terraced gardens, and back down again for the big finale. We have tech people who are moving ahead of the action, so as the audience finishes seeing one scene and starts moving to the next one, music can be heard coming from the next location, drawing the audience toward where they're going. Throughout, the audience hears music playing from far away as they approach the next scene. That music draws the audience along, is very evocative of being in that time period, and I just love it.

What's especially beautiful about this production is that we light Greystone so you see the gardens in a way you usually can't, because the park closes at 6 pm. Even if you're at a wedding, they don't light all the areas. The lights and sound are complicated to make everything happen on cue. We've been at Greystone before, so we know it. But we've done Gatsby at a historic railway station in Tracy, California, at an oil baron's mansion in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and in September we're performing in Toronto, Canada by a lake where the dancers will arrive by boat. At each new venue, the tech team comes in, sets up lighting and figures out where everything is going to plug in, when we need generators, and all of that. For sound, there's maybe four different speaker systems. And we have guides too who know the cues to take the groups around.



Janet Roston – Photo courtesy of the artist.

Haskins: You have done a number of different works over the years, many with site specific elements, yet it seems Gatsby Redux is the one that is most recognized.

Roston: I think that it's a very fun entertainment and I think that audiences are looking for something different. We encourage the audience to come in white or 20's attire as if they were going to a party at Gatsby's. The immersive element helps the audience feel part of the story.

Haskins: Thank you for your time.

Roston: Thank you.

The dancers in Gatsby Redux: Tiffany Wolff (Daisy Buchanan), Timothy Lewis (Jay Gatsby), Andrii Strelkivskyi (Tom Buchanan), Sarah Wines (Myrtle Wilson), Donny Collinson (Nick Carraway), Alana Gregory (Jordan Baker), Natalie Oga (Catherine, Ensemble), Jaqueline Hinton (Goddess, Ensemble), Melissa Barrow (Ensemble), Nick Young (Ensemble), Deven Fuller (Nick/Tom Swing).

Mixed eMotion Theatrix – Great Gatsby at Greystone Mansion & Gardens, 905 Loma Vista Dr., Beverly Hills; Appropriate dress and footwear are recommended for the mostly outside performance that involves walking and stairs. Thurs.- Sun., June 5-8 & Wed.-Sat. June 12-14, 7 pm, \$30. Wed., June 11, is "Pride Night" performance.

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

Written by Ann Haskins for LA Dance Chronicle.

Featured image: Mixed eMotion Theatrix in Gatsby Redux – Photo by Barry Weiss.