

## FALL PREVIEW

# Together and in Person: Everybody Dance Now

Professionals and amateurs can leave their living rooms behind as dance studios make a cautious comeback.



By Siobhan Burke

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The pandemic brought dance to a halt on multiple fronts, shutting down not only theaters but also the spaces where dancers train. Alongside the gradual return of live performance in New York, dance studios have been making a cautious comeback, as they reopen for in-person classes with safety protocols in place.

That's good news for anyone, professional or amateur, who has grown weary of dancing at home, alone, in front of a screen. Across the city this fall, opportunities to dance offline abound: One way to shake off the pandemic blues, even as the pandemic presses on.

"As much as we're thankful for being able to work virtually, it's a completely different energy to be with each other in person," said Jimena Martinez, the executive director and co-founder of Cumbe: Center for African and Diaspora Dance in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Like many dance studios, Cumbe switched to a fully online schedule early in the pandemic. Its indoor, in-person classes — in forms like Afro-Haitian dance, Samba and Chicago-Style Steppin' — resumed this month. (The studio continues to offer virtual and outdoor classes.)

Martinez said online classes have had their benefits, attracting new students from beyond Brooklyn who couldn't normally get to the studio. But the joyful, even therapeutic power of dancing together in a shared space — with live drumming, a staple of many Cumbe classes — has been hard to replicate on Zoom.

Some New York studios have been offering in-person classes since the spring, or even earlier. What's new this fall, in keeping with city guidelines, is the requirement that students show proof of vaccination.

Amid so much change and uncertainty, clear communication about Covid-19 protocols can be reassuring. For the dancer and choreographer Garnet Henderson, that's been a draw of Steps on Broadway, on the Upper West Side, where she has been taking ballet classes since May.

"It seems like they care about keeping everybody safe, which is good," said Henderson, who isn't deterred by the requirement that students wear masks while dancing. The studio is an upgrade over her living room.

"I really missed having a proper floor and space to do jumps and waltzes and the bigger traveling exercises of ballet class," she said, "because that's the fun part."

As indoor classes have resumed at other long-established studios — like Peridance, Gibney and Mark Morris Dance Center, to name just a few — newer outdoor offerings have also emerged. Early in the pandemic, a savvy group of dancers swiftly organized freeskewl, an online class platform that has since expanded to include outdoor classes. (The latest schedule is at [freeskewl.com](https://www.freeskewl.com).) In Prospect Park, the year-old Improv Club hosts movement improvisation sessions for people with any level of dance experience. (For updates, follow [@improvclub\\_](https://www.instagram.com/improvclub_) on Instagram.) And at parks and plazas around the city, Dances for a Variable Population hosts creative movement classes for older adults of all abilities. (See [dvnpnyc.org](https://www.dvnpnyc.org) for details.)

For many organizations, virtual classes aren't going anywhere. The Merce Cunningham Trust, for instance, has been offering free daily classes via Instagram since March 2020; these will continue three times a week as daily Cunningham technique classes return to City Center (the Trust's home base).

Brandon Collwes, a Cunningham instructor, said the Instagram classes have increased access to work that can often feel intimidating. Already, he has noticed a more diverse group of students at his in-person classes, which he attributes in part to this greater accessibility. The change excites him. "It feels like something has shifted," he said.

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