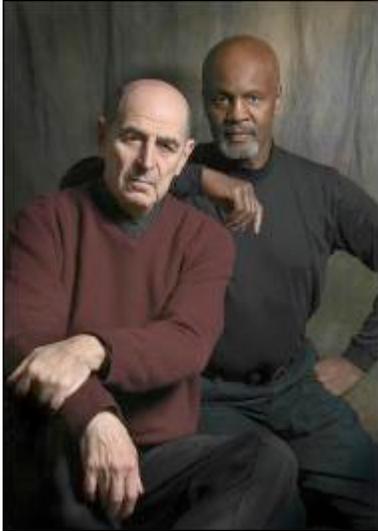


Can't stop moving

Paul Sanasardo and Joel Hall resurrect Nina Simone.



TWO'S COMPANY Sanasardo, left, and Hall collaborate on choreography.
PHOTO CREDIT: JENNIFER GIRARD

Thinking to retire, choreographer Paul Sanasardo returned to his hometown of Chicago several years ago, having founded a groundbreaking dance company in NYC and worked with the likes of revered German dance artist Pina Bausch. "I was going to be the nice old man in the park," he says. But work is not a habit the modern-dance legend will easily kick. "All I need is a few young dancers in front of me and I'm seduced all over again," he says.

At 79, Sanasardo's face is lined with decades that took him from performing with the New York City Opera Ballet to Broadway musicals to directing Batsheva Dance Company in Israel. But these days, his large brown eyes are focused on new ideas, and when he's not painting, holding workshops or advising former colleagues, he mentors dancers at the [Joel Hall Dance Studio](#) in Andersonville. "It's not often that we have people of his background and experience available to young people," says artistic director Joel Hall.

Hall and Sanasardo both contributed choreography for the program *In the Shadow of Nina Simone*, a tribute to the great singer, in performance Friday 23 at Athenaeum Theatre. Sanasardo's numbers evoke the grit of Simone's soul music, and the movements have a jazzy feel despite the strong modern-dance influence of his early days at the Martha Graham studio. The second part of the evening, by Hall, recalls Simone's days as a civil-rights activist.

Dancer Masha Balovlenkov was initially hooked by Sanasardo's passion for everything from politics to art. "He has a very individual philosophy that it's our responsibility to bring something to the group," she says. "We need to be connected to the world." Sanasardo shows no signs of slowing down: His future plans include a ballet inspired by the work of Edward Hopper.

In the Shadow of Nina Simone will be performed Saturday 23 at the [Athenaeum Theatre](#).

— Clare Curley