

**PARK AVENUE
ARMORY**



**Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and Peter Sellars Lead Third International Tour of *FLEXN*
with Launch at Park Avenue Armory May 18 through 21, 2017**

***FLEXN Evolution* Builds on Original Armory Commission to Explore Current Social Justice
Issues through Conversations and Dance**



TKTK. Photo by Clementine Crochet.

New York, NY – April 26, 2017 – Dance pioneer Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and visionary director Peter Sellars will lead *FLEXN Evolution* at Park Avenue Armory, May 18 – 21, 2017. The work epitomizes the Brooklyn-born street dance flex, transformed from its individual, combative style into a collaborative work of bone-breaking and boundary-breaking social activism, human exchange, and sheer artistic daring. Re-envisioned with newly created scenes since the Armory’s premiere of *FLEXN* in 2015, *FLEXN Evolution* is newly intimate, emotionally focused, personal, virtuosic, and transcendent, while embodying the next steps in a form that breaks news from the artistic and political front lines.

Going into the heart of issues that are only more urgent and more intense two years later, each performance will begin with an onstage conversation organized in collaboration with Common Justice, which develops and advances solutions to violence that meet the needs of crime survivors and fosters racial equity without relying on incarceration. Entitled “A New Vision for Justice in America,” the series represents new coalitions, insights, and ways of understanding questions of justice and injustice in communities that are demanding and actively shaping new futures. Artists Gray and Sellars moderate conversations that bring into dialogue collective problem-solving approaches with many of the leading intellectuals, community leaders, and dedicated innovators in the field of justice in America today. Participants include visionary public figures, social justice advocates, community leaders, and youth from across the country such as Danielle Sered (Director of Common Justice), Michelle Alexander (author, *The New Jim Crow*), Eric Gonzalez (Acting District Attorney, Brooklyn), Khalil Gibran Muhammad (Professor of History, Race and Public

Policy, Harvard Kennedy School), and student activists Iman Abdul and Frantzy Luzincourt (student activists, IntegrateNYC4Me).

Co-directed by Gray and Sellars, the performances that follow feature a series of self-choreographed and improvisational scenes by 16 dance-activists from the D.R.E.A.M. Ring, a creative engine of acclaimed artists that unite communities through movement for social change around the world. Using the flex dance vocabulary—characterized by sharp, rhythmic contortion, pausing, snapping, gliding, bone-breaking, and animated showmanship—the dance-activists confront issues of social justice and racial equality within our nation’s law enforcement and judicial systems.

On the final day of the performances (Sunday, May 21), there will be special celebration of *FLEXN*, Gray, and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring’s own evolution from one-on-one dance combatants to an international touring troupe of dance activists. Following the 3:00 p.m. matinee, special events will include a D.R.E.A.M. Ringmaster event where two-man and tag-team performances are showcased as well as demonstrations by the OGs (Original Generation) of flex, tracing the growth of the movement from its roots in the Jamaican bruk-up style popular in dance halls and reggae clubs of Brooklyn in the 1990s, to its performances now.

“*FLEXN* and its deeply personal yet universal themes have been embraced by audiences all over the world over the past two years,” said Pierre Audi, Artistic Director of Park Avenue Armory. “We are so proud to bring our audiences in New York the next step in the evolution of this Armory commission, as the dance form and the issues addressed continue to present themselves as more urgent than ever.”

“Reggie, Peter, and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring community have created an incredibly moving work full of tremendous energy and insight,” said Rebecca Robertson, Executive Producer and President of Park Avenue Armory. “We are so happy to have Reggie and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring dancers as artists in residence, supporting his and his colleagues’ work as they continue to push this form into new areas of both dance and activism.”

The *FLEXN* vocabulary moves across several intricately refined and perpetually redefined techniques. “Pausing” demonstrates stop-and-start freeze-frame analysis, before-and-after shots, the inner compulsion and the outside push-back that makes every move into a heroic moment. “Gliding” is based on the need to fly when you are trapped by an obstacle—time and space reorient and shift, and the body takes off and relocates with psychic and physical equilibrium and grace. “Get low” is about moving swiftly under the radar in an alternate culture and alternate economy, dancing on your knees with speed and style. “Bone-breaking” is about being broken, day after day, and reimagining and rebuilding your body and your identity in new forms with new possibilities that defy gravity, physique, and all the odds. “Grooving” takes the sweetness and juice of Jamaican dance-hall moves and translates them into a powerful display of emotion and inner life. “Connecting” is dance meta-language for communication in extraordinary circumstances, fast moves elaborating new geometries of the body and the world, rendering visible invisible matrices of connectedness, belonging, participation, and accomplishment.

Also on display during the Armory performances will be an installation of photographs by Carol Dragon in the Colonels Room. Dragon, who has been following the flex movement for many years, will display her portraits of the dancers participating in the show to allow another unique look at their movement and style as documented through portraiture.

FLEXN Evolution has been in development since its premiere with Gray and his D.R.E.A.M. Ring dancers in 2015, during their time as Artists-in-Residence at the Armory. The Armory has also organized two national and international tours of *FLEXN* to venues throughout the U.S., Australia, Italy, and France in 2015 and 2016. In its new iteration this year, *FLEXN* will travel to the Netherlands, Germany, and additional U.S. venues.

FLEXN Evolution is part of the Armory's 2017 season, which activates the institution's dynamic platforms—from the Wade Thompson Drill Hall to an array of exquisite historic period rooms—to enable the creation of new artworks and experiences that could not be realized in traditional concert halls, theaters, and museum galleries.

Additional upcoming programs include: *Hansel and Gretel*, a new commission by Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, and Ai Weiwei that explores the meaning of publicly shared space in the era of surveillance; the North American premiere of *Blank Out*, a chamber opera for soprano and 3D film based on the life and work of poet Ingrid Jonker by composer/director Michel van der Aa; Pierre Boulez's rarely performed spatial masterpiece *Répons* with Ensemble intercontemporain and led by Matthias Pintscher; *KANATA*, a commissioned, three-part theater work that confronts the treatment of indigenous peoples across Canada, directed and conceived by Robert Lepage and developed with Le Théâtre du Soleil and Ex Machina; and annual series of eclectic and intimate concerts and conversations held in the Armory's head house spaces. This season's artists in residence include two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage, Cuban installation and performance artist Tania Bruguera, composer and guitarist Marvin Sewell, and choreographer and flex dance pioneer Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray.

FLEXN Evolution

May 18 – 21, 2017

Thursday – Saturday at 8:00pm

Sunday at 3:00pm

A Collaboration of Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray, Peter Sellars, and Members of the D.R.E.A.M. Ring
Ben Zamora, Light Sculpture & Lighting Designer
Angela Wendt, Costume Designer
Epic B, Music Mix

Dancers:

Franklin (Ace) Dawes

Martina (Android) Heimann

James (Banks) Davis

Sean (Brixx) Douglas

Calvin (Cal) Hunt

Deidra (Dayntee) Braz

Aaron (Doc) Frazier

Andre (Dre Don) Redman

Rafael (Droid) Burgos

Jason (Erthquake) Cust

Quamaine (Karnage) Daniels

Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray

Dwight (Scorp) Waugh

Shelby (Shellz) Felton

Derick (Slicc) Murreld
Glendon (Tyme) Charles

Commissioned and produced by Park Avenue Armory

FLEXN CONVERSATIONS: “A New Vision for Justice in America”

“The ‘New Vision for Justice’ series offers not just an anchor to contextualize the extraordinary performances in *FLEXN Evolution*, but a pathway to act on changing the persistent inequities and sources of pain that the performers’ moving work calls on us to transform,” said Danielle Sered, Director of Common Justice.

Envisioning the Future from the Past

Thursday, May 18

Joo-Hyun Kang, Director, Communities United for Police Reform

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Professor of History, Race and Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School

Suzanne Young Murray, Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University

Donnell Penny, Case Coordinator, Common Justice

Imagining, Organizing & Reforming for a More Just Future

Friday May 19 (student matinee)

Iman Abdul, Student Activist & Educational Consultancy Intern, IntegrateNYC4Me

Frantzy Luzincourt, Student Activist & Political Strategist Intern, IntegrateNYC4Me

Richard Roderick, Program Coordinator, Justice-in-Education Initiative & Community Outreach Fellow, Columbia University

Additional participants to be announced.

A New Era of Prosecutors

Friday, May 19 (evening)

Kim Foxx, State’s Attorney for Cook County, Chicago

Rashad Robinson, Executive Director, Color Of Change

Additional participants to be announced.

Justice Beyond Prisons

Saturday, May 20

Michelle Alexander, Writer, Civil Rights Lawyer, Advocate, and Legal Scholar

Melody Lee, Co-founder & Director of Strategy and Campaigns, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice

Danielle Sered, Director, Common Justice

Envisioning Just Cities

Sunday, May 21

Eric Cumberbatch, Executive Director of the Mayor’s Office to Prevent Gun Violence

Kassandra Frederique, New York State Director, Drug Policy Alliance

George Galvis, Executive Director, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice, Oakland

Phillip Atiba Goff, Inaugural Franklin A. Thomas Professor in Policing Equity, John Jay College of Criminal Justice & Co-founder and President, Center for Policing Equity

“A New Vision for Justice in America” is part of the Armory’s ongoing *Interrogations of Form* conversation series—featuring artists and scholars exploring the realization of Armory productions and their resonances today, encouraging active discussion on a range of themes and complex issues.

Tickets

Tickets start at \$25 and may be purchased at armoryonpark.org or (212) 933-5812.

Thompson Arts Center at Park Avenue Armory
643 Park Avenue at 67th Street, New York, NY

Tour

Following its launch at Park Avenue Armory, *FLEXN* will tour to the Holland Festival (June 9 – 10, 2017) and Ruhrfestspiele (June 14-15, 2017). Excerpts of the work will also be performed at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of the JFK Centennial Celebration on May 27, 2017.

Sponsorship

Support for Park Avenue Armory’s artistic season has been generously provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Altman Foundation, The Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, the Achelis and Bodman Foundation, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, The Emma and Georgina Bloomberg Foundation, the Marc Haas Foundation, The Kaplen Brothers Fund, the Juliet Lea Hillman Simonds Foundation, the Leon Levy Foundation, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, and the Isak and Rose Weinman Foundation.

About Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring

Choreographer and dancer Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray has been a pioneer of flex dance for more than a decade, performing around the globe with his award-winning crew HyperActive. Born in East New York, Brooklyn, Gray began his journey in dance at the age of three, inspired by the legendary Michael Jackson. First introduced to the bruk-up style of dance, flex’s precursor, at a block party as a teenager, Gray later formed elite dance teams which competed on the television series “Flex in Brooklyn” and elsewhere in the borough. Gray and his teams would go on to evolve the flex form, win numerous competitions, and help spread the style’s popularity throughout New York and beyond.

In 2011, Gray founded the community-oriented performance and competition company The D.R.E.A.M. Ring (Dance Rules Everything Around Me), which has become an important launching pad for young flex dancers, or “flexors.” The D.R.E.A.M. Ring has broadened the genre while protecting the essence of flex culture, focusing on collaborative teamwork to build community amongst the dancers. It provides youth with a safe environment to express their artistry and a wealth of opportunities for sharing their creativity with the community—such as performing in schools and teaching in after-school programs—and professional development opportunities in an effort to show that flex dance will not only be known as a distinguished and genuine mode of expression, but a creative engine that will unite communities for social change around the world.

Gray has made several appearances on American television and in commercials, and has been featured in music videos with Wayne Wonder, Sean Paul, Nicki Minaj, and others.

Gray and the D.R.E.A.M. Ring dancers have been artists-in-residence at the Armory since May 2015, where they have continued to develop the flex movement and teach classes on the form.

About Peter Sellars

Opera, theater, and festival director Peter Sellars has gained international renown for his groundbreaking and transformative interpretations of artistic masterpieces and collaborative projects with an extraordinary range of creative artists. Sellars has staged operas at the Glyndebourne Festival, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Netherlands Opera, Opéra national de Paris, Salzburg Festival, and San Francisco Opera, among others, and has established a reputation for bringing 20th-century and contemporary operas to the stage. Sellars has been a driving force in the creation of many new works with longtime collaborator composer John Adams, including *Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *El Niño*, and *Doctor Atomic*.

Sellars staged Johann Sebastian Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* with the Berliner Philharmoniker at Park Avenue Armory in October 2014. Other projects have included a double bill of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Stravinsky's *Persephone* for Teatro Real in Madrid; critically acclaimed concert stagings of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* and *St John Passion* with the Berlin Philharmoniker; and *The Indian Queen*, combining Purcell music, text, and dance at the Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre. Theater projects have included a production of Euripides' *The Children of Herakles*, focusing on contemporary immigration and refugee issues and experience; *Desdemona*, a collaboration with the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison and Malian composer and singer Rokia Traoré, which was performed in major cities in Europe and the U.S. and presented in London as part of the Cultural Olympiad; and a radical four-person distillation and exploration of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Canada's Stratford Festival.

Sellars has led several major arts festivals, including the 1990 and 1993 Los Angeles Festivals and the 2002 Adelaide Arts Festival in Australia. In 2006 he was Artistic Director of New Crowned Hope, a month-long festival in Vienna for which he invited international artists from diverse cultural backgrounds to create new work in the fields of music, theater, dance, film, the visual arts, and architecture for the city's celebration of Mozart's 250th birth anniversary. He also served as the Music Director of the 2016 Ojai Music Festival. Sellars is a professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA and Resident Curator of the Telluride Film Festival. He is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, the Erasmus Prize, the Gish Prize, and the Polar Music Prize, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

About Common Justice

Common Justice develops and advances solutions to violence that transform the lives of those harmed and foster racial equity, without relying on incarceration. In New York, Common Justice operates the first alternative-to-incarceration and victim-service program in the United States that focuses on violent felonies in the adult courts. Nationally, the organization leverages the lessons from its direct service to transform the justice system through partnerships, advocacy, and elevating the experience and power of those most impacted. Rigorous and hopeful, Common Justice builds practical strategies to hold people accountable for harm, break cycles of violence, and secure safety, healing, and justice for survivors and their communities. vera.org/project/common-justice.

About Park Avenue Armory

Part palace, part industrial shed, Park Avenue Armory fills a critical void in the cultural ecology of New York by enabling artists to create, students to explore, and audiences to experience, unconventional work that cannot be mounted in traditional performance halls and museums. With its

soaring 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall—reminiscent of 19th-century European train stations—and an array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory offers a platform for creativity across all art forms. Together, these and other spaces within the historic building utilized for arts programming comprise the Thompson Arts Center, named in recognition of the Thompson family’s ongoing support of the institution.

Since its first production in September 2007, the Armory has organized and commissioned immersive performances, installations, and cross-disciplinary collaborations that defy traditional categorization and challenge artists to push the boundaries of their practice. In its historic period rooms, the Armory presents small-scale performances and programs, including its acclaimed Recital Series, which showcases musical talent from across the globe within the intimate salon setting of the Board of Officers Room; and the new Artists Studio series in the newly restored Veterans Room, which features innovative artists and artistic pairings that harken back to the imaginative collaboration and improvisation of the original group of designers who conceived the space. The Armory also offers robust arts education programs at no cost to underserved New York City public school students, engaging them with the institution’s artistic programming and the building’s history and architecture.

Programmatic highlights from the Armory’s first 10 years include Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s harrowing *Die Soldaten*, in which the audience moved “through the music”; *the event of a thread*, a site-specific installation by Ann Hamilton; the final performances of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company across three separate stages; *WS* by Paul McCarthy, a monumental installation of fantasy, excess, and dystopia; an immersive *Macbeth* set in a Scottish heath and henge by Rob Ashford and Kenneth Branagh; a profound and radically inclusive staging of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* staged by Peter Sellars and performed by Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker; and Louis Andriessen’s *De Materie* in a highly imaginative staging by director Heiner Goebbels that included floating zeppelins and a flock of 100 sheep.

Concurrent with its artistic program, the Armory has undertaken an ongoing \$210-million revitalization of its historic building, designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron.

www.armoryonpark.org.

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