



**MAJOR DANCE COMMISSION CO-DIRECTED BY REGGIE GRAY AND  
PETER SELLARS EXPLORES ISSUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY  
AT PARK AVENUE ARMORY**

**Series of Public Panel Discussions and Education Initiatives  
Encourage Dialogue on Social and Civic Issues**

**Photography and Video Installations by Richard Ross and Jason Akira Somma  
On View in Historic Armory Spaces**

**New York, NY** – March 17, 2015 – Park Avenue Armory has commissioned dance pioneer Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and visionary director Peter Sellars to create a performance piece that evolves the tradition of flex, the Brooklyn-born street dance. Characterized by sharp, rhythmic contortion, pausing, snapping, gliding, bone-breaking, and animated showmanship, the flex form evolved from the Jamaican bruk-up style popular in the dance halls and reggae clubs of Brooklyn in the 1990s. Opening March 25 and marking the first major presentation of the Armory’s 2015 artistic season, *FLEXN* transforms the dance from its individual, combative style to create a collaborative work of social commentary inspired by both personal experience and current events. A series of public discussions and education initiatives complement the presentation.

The Armory commission brings together 21 dancers from the Brooklyn neighborhoods where the flex movement began. Assembled specially for this engagement and performing together for the first time, the dancers have been developing *FLEXN* on site at the Armory since August 2014. The resulting work, co-directed by Gray and Sellars, confronts topical issues of social justice and racial equality within our nation’s law enforcement and judicial systems. *FLEXN* animates a 160-foot-long runway-style stage within the muscular Wade Thompson Drill Hall to choreography that draws from the flex movement vocabulary and the dancers’ individual inspiration. Designer Ben Zamora has created a massive light sculpture to serve as a backdrop for the work, and music will be spun by Epic B.

“It has been inspirational to have the *FLEXN* artistic team here at the Armory over many months, and to support their creative process,” said Rebecca Robertson, President and Executive Producer of Park Avenue Armory. “Reggie, Peter, and the dancers have created a deeply moving and personal work. We look forward to engaging our audiences and the thousands of public school students in our education programs with this important performance piece.”

Each *FLEXN* performance begins with a public conversation, open to all ticket-holders and free to the general public. Members of the creative team, public officials, educators, and community leaders will gather on the Armory stage to discuss and debate some of the most pressing social issues explored in *FLEXN*, including law enforcement policies and reforming the juvenile justice system. The conversation series is designed to amplify the experience of *FLEXN*’s narrative, creating a distinct experience for audience members at each performance.

Two installations in the Armory’s historic head house complement the presentation, by renowned photographer Richard Ross and multimedia artist Jason Akira Somma. Ross has created the single largest documentation of young people held in solitary confinement in the United States, photographing and interviewing youth over eight years in more than 300 cities nationwide for his “In Justice” series of publications. Selections of this photography will be displayed, in life-size projections. Additionally, Somma’s documentation of flex dancers and their culture over a five year period culminates in a video and photography installation featuring many of the dancers performing in the Armory commission. Both installations will be on view to ticket holders prior to and following each performance.

New York City public middle and high school students will be engaged in a series of education initiatives led by Park Avenue Armory education staff and members of the *FLEXN* artistic team—including a “student summit” in which hundreds of young people will gather at the Armory for discussions and art-making workshops designed by an advisory committee of students and focusing on utilizing the arts as a change agent for social justice. Two free performances will be given for students from under-served public schools participating in the Armory’s broader education programs, framed by in-school pre- and post-visit workshops; and additional master classes for students will be led by Gray and members of the company.

The Armory’s 2015 season encompasses site-specific installations, commissions, and cross-disciplinary collaborations across a range of art forms, including Philippe Parreno’s largest exhibition in the U.S. to date, a multi-sensory journey within the monumental interior of the Armory’s drill hall; *Tree of Codes*, a new contemporary ballet with direction and choreography by Wayne McGregor, visual concept by artist Olafur Eliasson, and music by Jamie xx; a commission of performance art by Laurie Anderson; and an immersive interpretation of J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* by pianist Igor Levit and performance artist Marina Abramović.

Previous dance presentations at Park Avenue Armory include the final performances of the Merce Dance Company, Trisha Brown Dance Company’s iconic *Astral Converted*, the world premiere of Shen Wei Dance Arts’ *Undivided Divided*, and Streb Extreme Action’s *Kiss the Air!*

## ***FLEXN***

Co-directed by Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and Peter Sellars

Performed by Ace (Franklin Dawes), Android (Martina Lauture), Banks (James Davis), Brixx (Sean Douglas), Deidra (Deidra Braz), Dre Don (Andre Redman), Droid (Rafael Burgos), Droopz (Jerrod Ulysse), Klassic (Joseph Carella), Maine (Quamaine Daniels), Nicc Fatal (Nicholas Barbot), Nyte (Ayinde Hart), Pumpkin (Sabrina Rivera), Sam I Am (Sam Estavien), Scorp (Dwight Waugh), Cal (Calvin Hunt), Shellz (Shelby Felton), Slicc (Derick Murreld), Tyme (Glendon Charles), Vypa (Khio Duncan), YG (Richard Hudson)

Music by Epic B

Lighting Design by Ben Zamora

Costume Design by Gabriel Berry

March 25 - April 4, 2015

Wed - Sat at 8:00 p.m. / Sun at 3 p.m.

Tickets for *FLEXN* begin at \$25 and are available at [armoryonpark.org](http://armoryonpark.org) or by calling (212) 933-5812.

## **Conversation Series: Race and the City**

Each performance begins with a panel discussion exploring some of the most pressing social issues addressed in *FLEXN*. These conversations are moderated by co-directors Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray and Peter Sellars, and are open to all ticket-holders. Non-ticket holders may attend for free; RSVP at [armoryonpark.org](http://armoryonpark.org)

### *Race Still Matters*

Wednesday, March 25 at 7 p.m.

Charles M. Blow, Op-Ed columnist, *The New York Times*

Tynesha McHarris, Director of Community Leadership, Brooklyn Community Foundation

Ritchie Torres, New York City Council Member, 15<sup>th</sup> District (Central Bronx)

### *Making Neighborhoods Safe for Play*

Thursday, March 26 at 7 p.m.

Majora Carter, urban revitalization strategy consultant and real estate developer

Susan Herman, Deputy Commissioner for Collaborative Policing, New York City Police Department

Tyree Hicks, graduate of The Arches Program, New York City Department of Probation

Reverend Dr. Alfonso Wyatt, Founder and CEO, Strategic Destiny: Designing Futures through Faith and Facts

*Reforming Rikers*

Friday, March 27 at 7 p.m.

Mary E. Buser, Former Assistant Chief of Mental Health, "The Bing," Rikers Island

Sister Marion Defeis, Former Chaplain, Rikers Island

Ismael Nazario, Case Worker, The Fortune Society

Jennifer J. Parish, Director of Criminal Justice Advocacy, Mental Health Project, Urban Justice Center

*Profiling Stop & Frisk*

Saturday, March 28 at 7 p.m.

Ashley Ellis, Intensive Youth Specialist/Agent of Transformation

Eli Silverman, Professor Emeritus, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center of City University of New York

Benjamin B. Tucker, First Deputy Commissioner, New York City Police Department

*Judging the Juvenile Justice System*

Sunday, March 29 at 2 p.m.

Hernan Carvente, Research Assistant, Vera Institute of Justice; senior, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York

Michael A. Corriero, Former New York State Judge; Executive Director and Founder, New York Center for Juvenile Justice

Soffiyah Elijah, Executive Director, Correctional Association of New York

*Informing and Reforming: Rikers*

Wednesday, April 1 at 7 p.m.

Mary E. Buser, Former Assistant Chief of Mental Health, "The Bing," Rikers Island

Jennifer Gonnerman, Staff Writer, *The New Yorker*

Robert Sanchez, Facilitator & Case Worker, Working It Out Program, Strive

Michael Schwartz, Reporter, *The New York Times*

*College or Prison?*

Thursday, April 2 at 7 p.m.

Shawn Dove, CEO, The Campaign for Black Male Achievement

Rachel Gilmer, Associate Director, African American Policy Forum

Ron Tabano, Principal, John V. Lindsay Wildcat Academy Charter School

*Policing the Neighborhood*

Friday, April 3 at 7 p.m.

Rukia Lumumba, Director of Youth Programs, CASES

James O'Neill, Chief of Department, New York City Police Department

Marlon Peterson, Founder and Chief Re-Imaginator, The Precedential Group

Jumaane Williams, New York City Council Member, 45th District (Brooklyn)

*Restorative Justice*

Saturday, April 4 at 7 p.m.

Victoria Sammartino, Founder, Voices UnBroken

Danielle Sered, Director, Common Justice, Vera Institute of Justice

*Panel participants subject to change.*

**About Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray**

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 N 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 dance competition D.R.E.A.M. (Dance Rules Everything Around Me), which has become an important launching pad for young flex dancers, or "flexors." D.R.E.A.M. has broadened the genre while protecting the essence of flex culture, focusing on collaborative teamwork to build community amongst the dancers. 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.

### **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 20<sup>th</sup>-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 Berlin Philharmonic at Park Avenue Armory in October 2014. Other recent projects have included a double bill of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Stravinsky's *Persephone* for Teatro Real in Madrid and critically acclaimed concert stagings of Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* and *Saint John Passion* with the Berlin Philharmonic. *The Indian Queen*, combining Purcell music, text, and dance, had its premiere at the Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre in 2013 and will be seen in London early in 2015. 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 Traore, which was performed in major cities in Europe and the U.S. and presented in London as part of the Cultural Olympiad; and, most recently, 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 250<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. Sellars is a professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA and Resident Curator of the Telluride Film Festival. He is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, the Erasmus Prize, and the Gish Prize, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. This year he was awarded the prestigious Polar Music Prize.

*Citi; Pershing Square Capital Management, LP; and Bloomberg Philanthropies are the Armory's 2015 season sponsors.*

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### **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—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 19<sup>th</sup>-century European train stations—and array of exuberant period rooms, the Armory offers a new platform for creativity across all art forms.

Since its first production in September 2007—Aaron Young’s *Greeting Card*, a 9,216-square-foot “action” painting created by the burned-out tire marks of ten choreographed motorcycles—the Armory has organized a series of immersive performances, installations, and works of art that have drawn critical and popular attention. Among the highlights of its first seven years are: Bernd Alois Zimmermann’s harrowing *Die Soldaten*, in which the audience moved “through the music”; the unprecedented six-week residency of the Royal Shakespeare Company in their own theater rebuilt in the drill hall; a massive digital sound and video environment by Ryoji Ikeda; a sprawling gauzy, multi-sensory labyrinth created by Ernesto Neto; *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; the New York Philharmonic performing Karlheinz Stockhausen’s sonic masterpiece *Gruppen* with three orchestras surrounding the audience; *WS* by Paul McCarthy, a monumental installation of fantasy, excess, and dystopia; a sonic environment that blurred the boundaries between artist and audience created by the xx; an immersive *Macbeth* set in a Scottish heath and henge by Rob Ashford and Kenneth Branagh; and *tears become...streams become...*, a major genre-defying collaboration between artist Douglas Gordon and pianist Hélène Grimaud, which flooded the Armory’s drill hall with an installation of water, light, and music.

Concurrent with the development of its artistic program, the Armory has undertaken an ongoing \$200-million revitalization of its historic building, designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron.

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