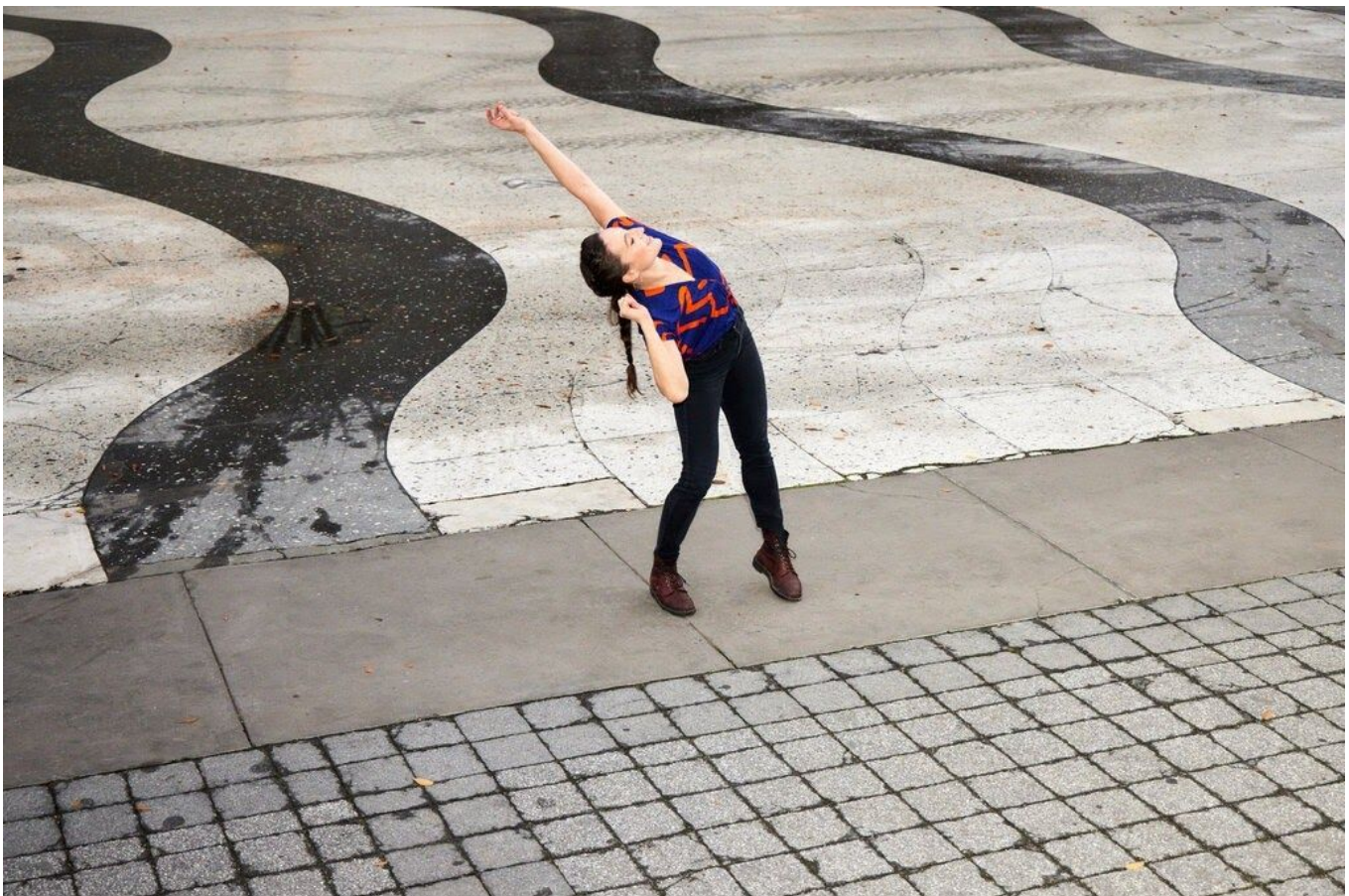


# The New York Times

## Catch the Vibe: Club Culture Comes to Life at Lincoln Center

The choreographer Ephrat Asherie unveils her short film “UnderScored,” which pays homage to the history of the underground scene and its veterans.



The choreographer and dancer Ephrat Asherie at Lincoln Center last week. Balarama Heller for The New York Times

By **Gia Kourlas** | Nov 15, 2020

It’s more than just another dance film born during the pandemic, because it is more than a dance. It’s a celebration of a culture: the underground scene of New York City.

“UnderScored,” by [Ephrat Asherie](#), is also a rush, gliding across the screen like a wave of motion. The progression of rhythm, of bodies, of momentum are thrilling. It doesn’t matter that the video, shot on the Lincoln Center campus, is short (it flies by at just under three minutes); it has layers of club culture and spirit embedded within it.

Ms. Asherie has never made something so authentically herself. And its sheer exuberance? Well, that is Ms. Asherie.

“When I think about this little video, it does feel like we’ve been confined for so long, but here we are,” she said in an interview. “Here’s the potential of growth and movement for us in our community.”

A choreographer with a passion for club life and social dance forms — house, breaking, vogue — Ms. Asherie, like many in the field, found herself with a dance and no place to show it. “UnderScored,” part of her multifaceted project exploring the lineage of street and club dance, was originally scheduled to premiere in October at Works & Process at the Guggenheim. Instead it became a video project, one of four in a series directed by Nic Petry in collaboration with the artists and presented by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and Works & Process. It will be available indefinitely starting at 7:30 p.m. Eastern time on Sunday. (When performances resume, it will eventually be shown in its complete form.)

Of course, for a dancer like Ms. Asherie, the pandemic has affected more than her work in the concert dance world. “The nightlife scene in New York City has been hit so hard,” she said. “It’s really been incredible to see how D.J.s and promoters are doing their thing on Twitch or on Instagram.”

The underground scene, Ms. Asherie says, allows you to access a different part of yourself. “It’s like a spiritual thing,” she said. “It’s feeling, it’s a body thing. It’s a soul thing, right? These are all lyrics that you hear over and over again in house songs, too, because it’s trying to get at the thing that’s intangible — that’s the reason we are all there congregating.”

“UnderScored” is a homage both to that world and to its veterans, and it features appearances by two of them: Michele Saunders, 77, and Archie Burnett, 61. Ms. Asherie said that the recent deaths of two important street dance innovators, [Don Campbell](#) and [Tyrone Proctor](#), were on her mind. “I just felt like, let’s collaborate with the elders when they’re here,” she said. “Why are we waiting to celebrate them?”

She and the dancers worked on the choreography in a bubble residency at Kaatsbaan Cultural Park in Tivoli, N.Y., but being on site at Lincoln Center made her understand exactly how she wanted it to look: shot, basically, in one take. “It was exciting to have this feeling of wanting to be in conversation



“We’ve been confined for so long, but here we are,” Ms. Asherie says. Balarama Heller for The New York Times

with the space,” she said. “It was so clear to me when I got there: Oh, I want this to feel like one sweeping movement, because so much of what we’ve done has been interrupted by the pandemic.”



In “UnderScored,” from left, Val Ho, Ron Chunn, Teena Marie Custer, Ephrat Asherie, Dorren Moglii Smith, Matthew West and Manon Bal. via Dancing Camera

Mr. Petry, a dancer who heads the media company Dancing Camera, understands the relationship between choreography and the camera. “Often the hardest part for me is that the dance is the dance and you want it to remain true to what it is,” he said. “What was so fun and so great about Ephrat is how collaboratively she was interested in working. She was like, ‘Let me do something that would really work for this part.’ So it was actually making something new, which is very exciting.”

“UnderScored,” set to Sam One’s pulsating track “Kitalé,” feels urgent and alive: a visceral response to the moment. “The reason I’ve been riding my bike like a maniac in the pandemic is because I need to move through space,” Ms. Asherie said. “As dancers, I feel like our whole sense of time and space has shifted so dramatically. When this opportunity came up, I was like, how do we take up space? How do we show that we’re here?”

Ms. Asherie, known in the dance world as Bounce, spoke about her film, which transports the cast from confined spaces to the open air, about what it’s like to dance with trees (and other household objects) and about the importance of her club elders.

What follows are edited excerpts from that conversation.

**What was the biggest challenge in shooting “UnderScored”?**

It's a huge space to cover. You can plan in your head, but ultimately it's also this dialogue with the videographer. It was so much about the moment and the joy of creating something so unexpected in a short amount of time after you've been alone and overthinking everything so much. The thing about the one-take feel is that it's the closest to a performance.

### **How did you choose the sites for your dance?**

I knew right away that I wanted to be in the slats on the side of the [Metropolitan Opera] house, because that is also very much how confined we've been and separated from one another — and then slowly we break out of that.

### **What is the root of the choreography in that opening moment?**

We called it the “rona phrase,” because I made it in my living room. I was like, we just need to be dancing. This is at the top of the pandemic; I'm like, we're just going to make a really long phrase, and every time we have rehearsal, I'm going to add four, five, six, seven, eight counts. And we're going to do it every time we rehearse to keep our stamina up. The slats are really reflective of our Zoom squares and our confinement in those squares. So that phrase represents the beginning of our experience in this time.

### **The film unfolds like chapters to me. How did the section in the trees happen?**

We need to frolic. There are trees! You can't not use them.

I also have a weird amount of standing lamps in my apartment. At one point, I put all three of them on the floor, and I was like, these are my dance partners right now. I was moving through these lamps. And this was before the Lincoln Center thing was in my mind, but then I saw the trees and I was like, oh my God — people don't even know, but we were dancing by ourselves with our lamps. Or whatever — with our brooms! I'm sure everybody did some kind of crazy stuff like that. We *all* did it.



They paved the way: Archie Burnett and Michele Saunders in "UnderScored." via Dancing Camera

## **What do Michele Saunders and Archie Burnett represent here?**

They're the ones that have paved the way. If you ever see footage of the Paradise Garage, Michele was in it. She was there all the time in full-out costume — die-hard, like going to the club with a suitcase and multiple outfits to change her costume. At Kaatsbaan, we would rehearse all day and then we'd go back and have big family dinners, and then Archie and Michele would dance for hours in the living room. That kind of energy — *that* is the reason there is a club scene.

## **What does that mean to you?**

It's like celebrating the reason that we're doing what we're doing. The energy that they share with us is so generous and magnanimous. I'm *never* going to leave a party early again ever. Once we're back at the club, I'm staying until closing every single night. So that's why. Because we are because of them.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/15/arts/dance/ephraat-asherie-underscore-works-and-process.html>