

Down to Earth Festival  
CUNY Graduate Center  
Martin E. Segal Theatre  
365 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10016-4309  
[esiyanko@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:esiyanko@gc.cuny.edu)  
[fhentschker@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:fhentschker@gc.cuny.edu)



## **DOWN TO EARTH, NYC's First International Festival of Multidisciplinary Creation in Public Spaces, to Take Place August 29 - September 7, 2025**

**Stay tuned for NYC's champions of public space and advocates of the  
powerful role of outdoor creation in transforming communities and spaces!**

**New York's Down to Earth Festival celebrates outdoor performance in city  
parks and public spaces!**

DOWN TO EARTH brings world-class international performance, theater, contemporary circus, an opera installation, and participatory events—absolutely free—directly to New York City's vibrant, diverse communities.

An initiative that embraces global exchange and democratizes cultural expression, the inaugural festival runs from August 29–September 7, 2025. Conceived by The Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at The CUNY Graduate Center, which serves as the festival's producer, organizational home, and fiscal agent.

Here in NYC, partnering with parks in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens and collaborating with more than 10 dynamic cultural and community organizations, we're staging performances and workshops across multiple urban spaces. Citizen expression beats at the heart of our artistic vision; Down to Earth affirms art's critical role in the economic, social, and mental well-being of all New Yorkers.

Outdoor creations, international contemporary circus, and in-situ participatory performances are ideal means of reaching new audiences: they are powerful expressions of communal space, championing public assembly, and democratizing access to the urban commons. DOWN TO EARTH is a crucible of ideas in action, forging connections between community organizations and CUNY Stages, affirming art's critical role in the economic, political, social, and mental well-being of all New Yorkers.

The festival also proposes a novel reading of the spaces, demonstrating how they can be used and understood. This mirrors the ways social and political action can produce unexpected effects, insights, and actions. We're focusing on how artistic presence transforms the experience of place, and the powerful role of outdoor creation in transforming communities and spaces.

DOWN TO EARTH seeks to expand access to cultural expression, privilege public assembly, and combat the injustices inherent in socio-economic exclusion. Central to the festival's mission is our commitment to dismantling cultural barriers by offering free programs for students, youth, immigrant communities, and families. By attracting a diverse public to free street arts and in-situ performances that are accessible and inviting, the festival will redress the shortcomings of an expensive system of cultural dissemination.

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**The 2025 inaugural Festival Program, August 29–September 7, 2025,** features seven international productions, workshops, interactive events, ten presentations of PRELUDE, a festival-within-a-festival, focusing on artists at the forefront of contemporary New York City theatre, dance, interdisciplinary and mediatized performance, and two symposia that explore themes of migration, diversity, social justice, theatre as a tool of resistance, intergenerational alliance, climate change, and our imperiled democracy. Performances will be held across various New York City parks and public spaces.

**Seven international productions: multidisciplinary performance, contemporary circus, and an opera installation**

**Soka Tira Osoa** by **Cie BASINGA**, with French-Congolese high wire artist Tatiana Mosio-Bongonga (France), a performance that turns tightrope walking into a collaboration between artist and audience

**Ancrage** and **SenCirk Duo**, from Senegal's only circus troupe, **SenCirk**, founded by former street child Modou Touré, explores themes including migration and living in harmony with nature

**Traces** (Lands) by Théâtre de l'Entrouvert's Elise Vigneron (France), a plastic and choreographic project representing a human community, through the image of a choir made of feet molded out of ice

**Arch**, a UK-based production **studio Kaleider's** operatic work of installation art, in which the performers struggle to build a freestanding arch out of blocks of concrete and ice

**HIT OUT** by **Parini Secondo** (Italy), a choreographic and musical composition wherein a jump rope is repurposed as a rhythmic and choreographic percussive instrument

**SANTE!** by **Le Cirque Kikasse** (Quebec), a dynamic circus show featuring extreme acrobatics and breathtaking balancing acts, whose stage is an extraordinary food truck

**"Poetic Consultations,"** a **Théâtre de la Ville**, Paris, and **DOWN TO EARTH** Festival initiative, in three boroughs, five languages

**PRELUDE, a Festival-within-a-Festival, ten site-specific performances across all five boroughs with artists at the forefront of contemporary New York City theatre, dance, interdisciplinary, and mediatized performance:**

**Galileo, Galileo, Galileo**, by Cuban artist and activist Tania Bruguera, with excerpts of her workshop project based on Brecht's Life of Galileo

**Endsieg: The Second Coming**, an English language reading of a new play by Elfriede Jelinek, featuring Nicole Ansari-Cox and directed by Milo Rau

**In the Solitude of Cotton Fields**, by Bernard-Marie Koltès, co-directed by translator Amin Efrain (Iran/US) and Isaach de Bankolé (Ivory Coast/US), with Ismail ibn Conner and Tony Torn

**FLEXN, PAINTN, SPEAKN**, with Quamaine Daniels and Reggie Gray

**"Parliament"**: A work by choreographer and artist Michael Kliën / Laboratory for Social Choreography (Duke University)

**The Tales of Black Histories**, By Édouard Glissant (1972), Martinique, Caribbean, Directed by Keith Josef Adkins/The New BlackFest

**Live in NYC and Ukraine**: The Down to Earth and Ukrainian Contemporary Music Festival collaboration with Kyiv Contemporary Music Days

**The Nannies of New York City**, KATIANA GONÇALES RANGEL (Brazil) + KATIE BROOK (NY)

**Solidarność**, a town hall encounter in a city park

**A Lenape Creation Story of Turtle Island**, conceived by Eagle Project. Written & performed by Opalanietet, with music by Danielle Jagelski. Directed by Ash Marinaccio

**Two Symposia**: Day 1 at Graduate Center CUNY and Day 2 at LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC) at LaGuardia Community College:

Day 1: Milo Rau's **RESISTANCE NOW**, a one-day conference/Town Hall at The CUNY Graduate Center

Day 2: **In Via Publica: Performance and Public Assembly**, a conference on theatre and performing arts in public spaces, LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC) at LaGuardia Community College

**Detailed schedule of the festival's programs and dates**, on the festival's website:

<https://www.downtoearthfestival.org/calendar>

## **Festival Co-Directors:**

Frank Hentschker (MESTC), Founder and co-Director

Elena V. Siyanko, Founder and co-Director

Advisor to the festival and Conference Co-Director Ruth Wikler

## **Festival Partners:**

[The Coalition of Theaters of Color \(CTC\)](#)

[The Clemente Center, a Puerto Rican and Latinx Cultural Space, Lower East Side](#)

[The Alliance of Teatros Latinos NY](#)

[South Street Seaport Museum - Where New York Begins](#)

[Marc's Agger Fish Building, Brooklyn Navy Yard](#)

[Culture Lab, Long Island City](#)

[The Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn. New York City's Biggest Graveyard](#)

[The Bushwick Starr, Brooklyn: an award-winning non-profit theater that provides a home for artists, community and bold new work](#)

[MasterVoices \(formerly the Collegiate Chorale\) Symphonic Choir](#)

[New York City Parks: Hudson River Park; Marcus Garvey Park](#)

[CUNY Stages Theaters: LaGuardia Community College](#)

[Classical Theater of Harlem](#)

[French Cultural Services and Villa Albertine](#)

[Institut Français](#)

[Québec Government Office in New York](#)

[Instituto Italiana di Cultura](#)

[Milo Rau, The Vienna Festival \(Wiener Festwochen\)](#)

[Thomas Oberender, ex officio Director of Berlin Festspiele](#)

[Théâtre de la Ville, Paris, France](#)

## **About the Festival**

The MESTC **DOWN TO EARTH** Festival is committed to serving a diverse cross-section of New York City's population, with a focus on students, youth, immigrant communities, and families, especially those who are underserved by traditional cultural institutions. These are our primary organizational and project-specific audiences. By offering free programming, we aim to dismantle barriers to cultural access and bring world-class contemporary circus and outdoor arts directly to where communities live, learn, and gather.

Our programming is designed to be inclusive, accessible, and welcoming. By staging performances in public spaces—such as NYC parks and community-centered venues—we foster an environment that invites participation from audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.

The festival emphasizes engagement over exclusivity, offering dynamic, unconventional presentations that resonate with today's culturally curious audiences.

In opposition to NYC's current performing arts landscape, where high costs have reduced many venues to rental facilities or limited seasons, Down to Earth articulates a different approach. With the majority of work presented in public spaces, our strategy focuses on sharing resources and building coalitions with CUNY Stages, NYC parks, and The Coalition of Theaters of Color, Bushwick Starr, among other organizations. We plan to unite these spaces through joint presentations in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens, fostering visibility and cooperation, while focusing on access for students, families, and a variety of theater audiences. By leveraging the networks of institutions like LaGuardia Community College, Green-Wood Cemetery, and the South Street Seaport Museum, we connect with built-in audiences and educational outreach programs that extend our reach organically.

For this festival, we focus on communities in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens through strategic partnerships with CUNY Stages, NYC parks in underfunded areas, and community organizations with established audiences.

**Festival Co-Directors:** Frank Hentscheker and Elena Siyanko

Detailed schedule of the festival's programs and dates, on the festival's website:

<https://www.downtoearthfestival.org/calenda>

### **About Martin E. Segal Theater (METC), CUNY Graduate Center**

The Martin E. Segal Theatre Center of the Graduate Center Foundation is home to theatre artists, scholars, students, managers, and local & international performance communities, providing a supportive environment for conversation, open exchange, and the development of educational, community-driven, and professional projects in the performing arts. The Center presents a wide variety of free public programs year-round, which feature leading national and international artists, scholars, and arts professionals and serve to enrich the lives of CUNY's constituent communities across New York City.

Presented at the Graduate Center, CUNY, for 20 years, the annual PRELUDE festival has been dedicated to artists at the forefront of contemporary New York City theatre, dance, interdisciplinary, and mediatized performance. PRELUDE offers an array of short performances, readings, and screenings—a completely free survey of the current New York moment and the work being prepared for the next season and beyond—as well as new commissions and panel discussions with artists, scholars, and performers. PRELUDE is a place to discover the voices shaping the future of theatre and performance in NYC, to observe, engage, commune, and critique.

Segal Center programs like PRELUDE (New York City playwrights, directors and ensemble showing work in progress), Global World Voices Festival (international playwrights festival), the

Segal Film Festival on Theatre and Performance) have been ambitious in scale, epic in scope, challenging in form, controversial in subject matter, experimental in concept, and/or unabashed in their theatricality. The Center serves as a resource center for CUNY, for New York City, and for the nation; and disseminates the results of its activities to the scholarly community and to the world at large through publications, conferences, and exhibitions. The Martin E. Segal Theatre Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY, occupies a place unlike any other organization in New York City: in the space between public arts presenter, academic publisher, and research nexus. For more than 20 years, the Segal Center has served as a bridge between the academic and professional performing arts communities by fostering dialogue between playwrights, directors, designers, choreographers, filmmakers, critics, and academics from New York and around the world.

Having founded The World Voices Festival in 2004 and presented over 100 works for the screen by theatre artists from over 50 countries in 2022 as part of the 7th Segal Center Film Festival, the MESTC and its leadership are no strangers to festival creation. In 2025, MESTC will present the inaugural program of the city-wide international performing arts Down to Earth Festival, dedicated to multidisciplinary performance, contemporary theater, outdoor arts, and "new" circus, integrated into city streets, parks and urban spaces.

### **Acknowledgement and Support**

DOWN TO EARTH Festival would not be possible without the civic commitment and leadership gift of Marvin A. Carlson, the distinguished theatre historian and CUNY Graduate Center Professor Emeritus of Theatre and Performance. Additional funding is provided by the NYC Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, the Zankel Music Fund, Villa Albertine and Albertine Foundation's Theater and New Forms; Québec Government Office in New York, Institut Français, Italian Cultural Institute, Venturous Theater Fund of the Tides Foundation, Lucille Lortel Foundation, and several generous individuals. The NYC Down to Earth Festival draws its inspiration and name from the groundbreaking 2020 Berlin Festspiele project, conceived and curated by Thomas Oberender.

### **Program of DOWN TO EARTH International Festival of Multidisciplinary Performance**

**Compagnie BASINGA (France)**  
**Soka Tira Osoa**

September 4, @ South Street Seaport

September 6, @ Marc's Agger Fish Building, Brooklyn Navy Yard

Length: 45 minutes

Age: all

Tatiana-Mosio Bongonga is one of the world's few female artists walking the high-wire. Basinga's SOKA TIRA OSOA (literally "pulling the rope") takes its name from the traditional "tug of war," a sport in which two teams pull on the opposite ends of a rope, each trying to drag the other team across a line drawn in the middle. But Basinga turns the experience into a collaboration between the artists and audience-participants. At the outset, the tightrope walker's wire lies on the ground, inert, and it is the audience members who bring it to life, stretching and stabilizing the wire into a tightrope. Then Tatiana-Mosio Bongonga performs her poetic, breathless, spectacular balancing act, accompanied by a pop-up band of local musicians, professional and amateur. "It takes many to be many." Tatiana-Mosio Bongonga will carry out her breathtaking crossing in the South Street Seaport's historic waterfront district, a feat of balance and imbalance, aided by her audience and the pop-up band's auditory "ground track."

Basinga's artistic practices are inseparable from the artist's social mandate: One of the world's rare women highwire performers, Bongonga has been organizing collective adventure skywalk aerial performances without a harness for over a decade. Wherever Basinga performs, she enlists the help of up to sixty local volunteers to stabilize the complex structure supporting the tightrope and help create a ceremony grounded in circus arts that combines music, acrobatics, and mutual trust. Beyond the company's performances, Basinga conducts cultural and artistic projects in various settings, from hospitals to prisons, offering workshops in tightrope walking, costume design, and photography to promote personal development.

**Compagnie SenCirk (Senegal)**  
**DUO SENCIRK and ANCRAGE ("anchoring"),**

circus-dance-acrobatic-balance-inspired performances about identity and returning to one's roots

September 3, 2025. SenCirk Duo, by SenCirk, an outdoor version, @ LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC) at LaGuardia Community College

Length: 30 minutes

September 3, 2025. ANCRAGE, by SenCirk, indoor, evening, @ LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC) at LaGuardia Community College

Length: 50 minutes

September 5, 2025, SenCirk Duo by Cirque SenCirk @ Marcus Garvey Park Amphitheater. 2 shows, with a kids workshop in tightrope walking, costume design, and photography between afternoon and evening performances.

Age: all

In ANCRAGE (anchoring), the indoor version, and DUO SENCIRK (an outdoor version), a man awakens and encounters an alien being. Performed by two acrobats, Modou Fata Touré and Ibrahima Camara, they measure, observe and confront each other, then mutually tame each other. When they find their anchorage, a world arises where nature and man merge, take root in each other, and harmony is created. Modou Fata Touré questions Europe and Africa: What if

contemporary circus was not only European, and what if African circus was not exclusively traditional? Through ANCORAGE, Modou and Ibrahima reclaim the circus's African identity. The local materials of Senegal—bags of rice, traditional brooms, wooden ladders—join raw materials like earth, sand, aluminium, and straw. SenCirk's unique approach shares personal stories that West Africans—and others—can relate to, from clandestine migration to Europe to the experience of living as a talibé runaway.

Founded in 2009 by Modou Fata Touré, SenCirk is Senegal's first circus organization, encompassing a company, school, and performance tent. Touré, who as a teenager discovered circus arts at Sweden's Cirkus Cirkör, transformed himself from a child beggar to a leading figure in contemporary African circus. Rather than pursuing a career in Europe, he returned home to establish SenCirk, which uniquely blends traditional Senegalese culture with contemporary circus arts. The company employs a dozen professional artists from diverse backgrounds and provides free workshops at shelters for street children and women. SenCirk maintains its African identity by crafting equipment from local materials and training future circus professionals while supporting children in need throughout Dakar.

**Studio Kaleider (UK)**  
**ARCH,**  
an installation opera

Sunday, September 7, with MasterVoices chorus @ Green-Wood Cemetery

Length: 2 hours

Age: all

Kaleider's ARCH is an attempt to build a freestanding arch, made two-thirds of concrete and one-third of ice, witnessed by a vigilant choir of human voices. Touching audiences with themes of death, renewal, and hope, ARCH points towards the extraordinary, yet flawed, systems humans create: language, economies, architectures, democracies—and, inevitably, to the impact of these systems on our ecosystem and ourselves. Kaleider's ARCH event unfolds under the open skies, a thought-provoking performance enchantingly accompanied by the watchful singers.

A languageless score by Verity Standen accompanies a relentlessly physical performance, at times meditative, at others arresting and highly charged. During the performance, singers unobtrusively seated among the audience join the core singers' voices, enlarging the impassioned focus on the task, and blurring the boundaries between performers and witnesses. Each singer leads a group in a different harmony, which interweaves with the others.

<https://kaleider.com/portfolio/arch/>

**Elise Vigneron, Théâtre de L'Entrouvert (France)**  
**TRACES, Inhabiting the World**



Sunday, August 31, @ Bushwick Starr (with a 3-day workshop preceding the performance)  
Sunday, September 7, @ Hudson River Park, Pier 84 (with a 3-day workshop preceding the performance)

A participatory project/performance by Elise Vigneron with a group of up to 40 people -- and feet cast in ice. "Traces" represents a human community, featuring thirty participants of all ages, through the image of a choir made of ice feet. A plastic and choreographic project that connects us and makes us sensitive to the world we live in. Through an ephemeral and collective performance conceived for a public space, Élise Vigneron, in collaboration with circus artist Eleonora Gimenez, questions the ecological stakes and the traces left by human beings as they pass through the world. The participants, their feet cast in ice by the artistic team, are the actors of this choreographed installation. The singularity of each member, their bodies and the individual stories form a chorus and discover their collective identity. The ice mirrors the fragility of the world and its transformation into water, the ephemeral nature of human experience and narrative.

Trained in visual arts, theatre and circus, Elise Vigneron attended the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette de Charleville-Mézières and graduated with honors in 2005. From 2005 to 2011, she worked as a puppeteer and set designer for the company Le Théâtre de Nuit, directed by Aurélie Morin. She then joined the Vélo Théâtre, where she created the solo work Traversées, before founding Théâtre de L'Entrouvert in 2010. Since then, she has created many works, at her own theatre and in association with Espace Jéliote, TJP, CDN Strasbourg Grand-Est, Marseille's Théâtre du Gymnase, for the 2019 Avignon Festival, Théâtre du Bois de l'Aune in Aix-en-Provence, the Théâtre Joliette in Marseille, among others.  
<https://lentrouvert.com/en/lands/>

**Le Cirque Kikasse, Quebec (Canada)**  
**Acrobatics + Mobile Circus**

September 3, Abolitionist Place, Downtown Brooklyn  
September 4, @ Culture LAB, Long Island City  
September 5, @ LaGuardia Community Greenway, Queens  
Length: 45 minutes

SANTÉ! by Cirque Kikasse is a dynamic circus show with high-level acrobatics, contagious energy, and breathtaking balancing acts...all on their extraordinary food truck! The troupe transforms tables and chairs into a balancing tower 30 feet in the air, creating comic chaos as they clean their truck and trampoline, and flooding the area with popcorn. A light-hearted tour de force sure to tickle your inner child and thrill your kids. Contemporary circus is an infectious

performance art hybrid, employing elements of acrobatics, theatre, music, comedy, and improvisation to fashion narrative and engage audiences of all ages and backgrounds. It expands access to cultural expression, encourages public assembly, and unifies communities.

### **PARINI SECONDO (Italy)**

#### **HIT OUT**

a choreographic and musical composition built around the jump rope repurposed as a rhythmic and choreographic percussive instrument

August 30, 31, @ Culture LAB, Long Island City

September 6, @ Washington Square Park

Length: 25 minutes

In the dual athletic and rhythmic nature of the jump rope, with HIT OUT Parini Secondo elevates the intimate practice of training into a performative action: the hammering succession of rope strokes morphs into the drumbeat of rebellion against those forces that would have us lie motionless on the ground with our eyes closed. Parini Secondo focus on the sound produced by rope skipping, dissecting its timbral possibilities. The jumpers on stage perform a rhythmic and at the same time choreographic score in which single-unders, side-swings, and double-unders are both athletic and musical elements: combined with voice and synthetic sounds, they harmonize into a true hit. To jump, at once limping and flying, is a rebellion against gravity and all those forces that would have us lying motionless on the ground with our eyes closed. The pounding succession of rope strokes is the echo of this rebellion; with time, its meaning fades away. The error suddenly happens and reminds us of the origin of our dissent: from the awareness of our weight, the reason for the uprising can be powerfully renewed.

### **“Poetic Consultations”**

#### **a Down to Earth Festival-Théâtre de la Ville Collaboration**

NYC-based immigrant artists, dancers, and musicians. Presented in English, Spanish, French, Wolof, and Chinese

@ Various dates and locations.

September 4, at the plaza in front of McNally Jackson, South Street Seaport

September 5, Marcus Garvey Park, Harlem

additional locations TBD.

**“Poetic Consultations”** are individual conversations between artists and members of the public. Each consultation takes place around a table: it begins with a free conversation and ends with the artist reading or singing a poem or song specifically chosen for the participant. At the end of the consultation, the participant receives a personalized poem or song in the form of a “poetic

prescription.” Consultations are free 20-minute experiences, individual meetings based on listening, on time given to the other, on a moment to share life, poetry, music and dance. Poetic Consultations is a new practice that rethinks the relationship between the public and the performer, imagined by Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota, Director of the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, and playwright, poet, and novelist Fabrice Melquiot.

NYC-based actors, musicians and dancers. A simple idea unfurls into a soothing ritual: listeners book appointments and actors call to talk for 20 minutes before reciting a poem inspired by the conversation and, finally, suggesting a poetic remedy prescribed specially for each participant. An unexpected meeting, face to face, in the flesh, between an actor, a musician, or a dancer and a person around poetry. Like the Telephone Consultation, the Face-to-Face Consultation begins with an exchange to get to know each other, but this time, the scene is set. A table and two chairs create intimacy. Equipped with a collection of over 100 poems, invented on the model of a medical dictionary, the actor chooses a poem from what has been said, the dancer a choreography, the musician a melody.

### **Symposium:**

#### **In Via Publica: Performance and Public Assembly**

a one-day conference on theatre and performing arts in public spaces

September 3, @ LaGuardia Performing Arts Center (LPAC) at LaGuardia Community College

Length: all day

For urban planning professionals, open space enthusiasts and practitioners, artists, funders, and scholars

**In Via Publica** will convene civic actors from the arts and culture, public administration, private development, and the academy for an in-depth reflection on the many vital roles that poetics must play in public spaces today, from enriching civic life with consumption-free beauty and wonder to fostering social cohesion across differences to bolstering democratic participation and engagement. International guests representing networks such as IN SITU (the European commissioning network for artistic creation in public space) and Circostrada (the European network for contemporary circus and outdoor arts) will offer models and best practices. Arts champions from within government and the private sector, including NYCDOT, NYC Parks, Brookfield Properties, and various business improvement districts, will share success stories. Artists creating and performing outdoors, representing a range of artistic generations and visual and performing art forms, will exchange visions and experiences with their DTE Festival counterparts. Arts philanthropists, programmers, producers, agents, and other cultural actors will hatch plans to nurture new expressive works in this arena. Scholars and researchers will offer critical and global perspectives. Consistently with its holistic vision, the conference will take place on the campus of LaGuardia Community College; include an afternoon open-air performance by DTE Festival Artists **SenCirk Duo**; an evening performance of **Ancrage** by **Cirque**

**SenCirk** (Senegal); and conclude with the official launch of CUNY Stages, a consortium of venues at CUNY campuses across all boroughs. **In Via Publica** is developed in collaboration with Wikler Arts.

Official Site: [downtoearthfestival.org](http://downtoearthfestival.org)

**DOWN TO EARTH Festival | CUNY Graduate Center Martin E. Segal Theatre**  
**Marketing Director: Anastasia Dzutsatsi**  
**[anastasia.dzutsati@gmail.com](mailto:anastasia.dzutsati@gmail.com)**  
**+1-631-742-3982**