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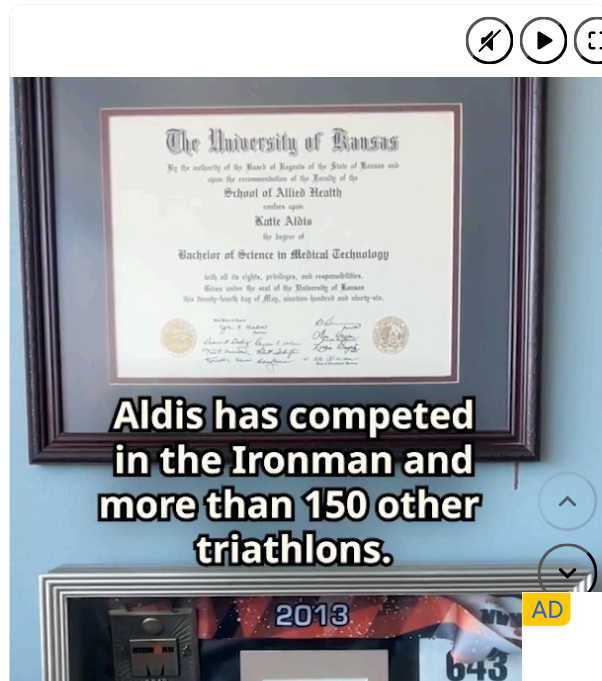
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KANSAS CITY ENTERTAINMENT

Tap-dancing legend will perform with ballet during Kansas City's throwback May

By **Dan Kelly**

May 6, 2026 7:24 AM  Gift Article



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Two of Kansas City’s premier performing arts companies are traveling back to the early 20th century this May, and Lonnie McFadden is happy he will be going along for the ride.

The legendary Kansas City entertainer will appear in [the Kansas City Ballet’s](#) production of “The Great Gatsby,” which will open May 8 at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

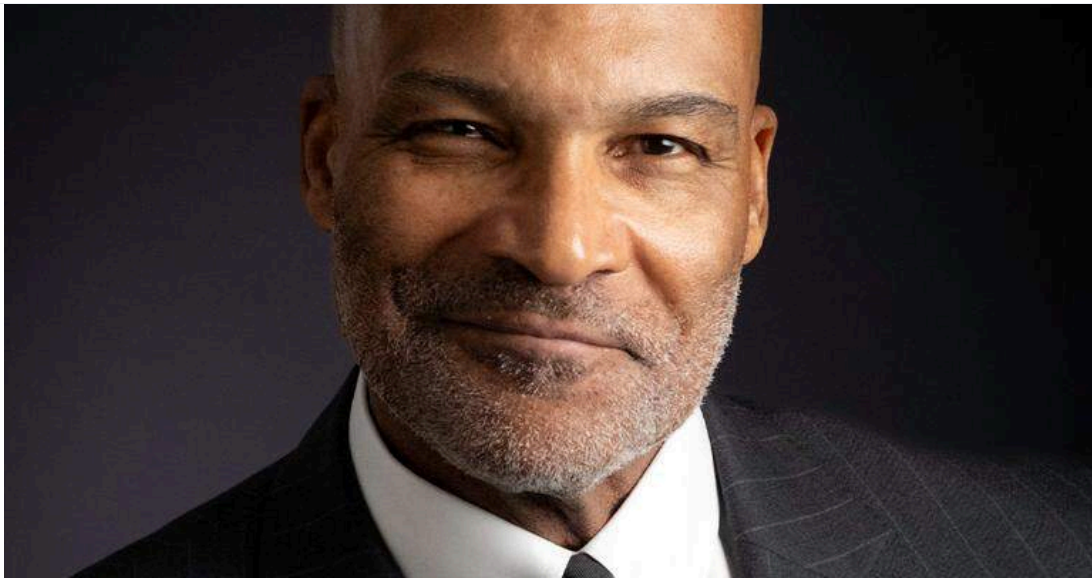
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No, the 70-year-old trumpet player/tap dancer/singer won't be donning a form-fitting unitard and launching into a sauté. McFadden will perform what he calls "a tap-dance a cappella solo" built into this ballet version of "The Great Gatsby" by choreographer Septime Webre.

"At this point in my life and my career, knowing I had never performed with a ballet, I'm so excited for this," McFadden said.



Legendary Kansas City entertainer Lonnie McFadden will appear in a ballet for the first time in his career when he tap dances with the Kansas City Ballet in "The Great Gatsby." *Kansas City Ballet*

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The Ballet’s season-ending production is based on the 1925 novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Opening the preceding week was “[The Wizard of Oz](#)” (drawn from L. Frank Baum’s 1900 children’s novel) by Kansas City Repertory Theatre.

Both are new productions or new to Kansas City.

Webre’s “The Great Gatsby” will feature live jazz accompaniment by Billy Novick’s Blues Syncopators and vocalist Eboni Fondren in addition to McFadden’s tap dancing.

“You’re dealing with the 1920s, of course,” McFadden said. “But it’s still great to see classical ballet and American tap and American jazz put together in this way. Because it’s like the blending of two completely different worlds.”

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The “Gatsby” world is somewhat reflected at his [Lonnie’s Reno Club](#), which evokes Kansas City’s jazz past. McFadden sings and plays the trumpet there in addition to tap dancing, which he said he first was paid to do when he joined his father onstage at the age of 7.

He learned the art of tap from his father, the equally legendary Jimmy “Pops” McFadden, who performed with many jazz greats.

“I grew up idolizing my dad and Sammy Davis Jr. and Count Basie,” he said. “I mean, I met these guys because of my father, and I always wanted to be one of them. Now, I feel like I’m living the dream.”

His dream come true also includes working with Kansas City Ballet dancers less than half his age. He said he has been “blown away” by their commitment and athleticism. AD

As for his own dancing, McFadden said he’s made concessic

“I don’t do the high jumps, the jumping in the air, doing the jumping off of 6-foot stages, I don’t do any of that anymore, rhythm, it’s interesting, I think maybe what I’ve lost in spee in nuance.”

Here is what you need to know about the early May performing arts openers in Kansas City.

'The Wizard of Oz'



Local actress Amari Lewis will portray Dorothy in Kansas City Repertory Theatre's production of "The Wizard of Oz." *Kansas City Repertory Theatre*

Who: Kansas City Repertory Theatre

When: 7 p.m. May 6-7, 8 p.m. May 8, 2 and 8 p.m. May 9, 2 p.m. May 10, 7 p.m. May 12-14, 8 p.m. May 15, 2 and 8 p.m. May 16, 2 p.m. May 17, 7 p.m. May 20-21, 8 p.m. May 22, 2 and 8 p.m. May 23, 2 p.m. May 24.

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Where: Spencer Theatre, 4949 Cherry St., on UMKC campus

Noteworthy: Puppeteer Zack Garner will bring Toto to life. Harold Arlen and E.Y. "Yip" Harburg are taken from the 1938 Academy Award for best song for "Over the Rainbow."



Ruby red slippers sit on a shelf in preparation for Kansas City Repertory Theater's rendition of 'The Wizard of Oz,' on Tuesday, April 28, 2026. The reimagining of the classic tale will feature costume designs from Sully Ratke. Dominick Williams dowilliams@kcstar.com

Tickets: \$44-\$84

Information: kcrep.org

'The Great Gatsby'

Who: Kansas City Ballet

When: 7:30 p.m. May 8-9, 1:30 p.m. May 10, 7:30 p.m. May 16-17, 1:30 p.m. May 17.

Where: Muriel Kauffman Theatre, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, 1601 Broadway Blvd.

Noteworthy: This will be the largest-ever production at the Kauffman Center. ... The Cincinnati Ballet performed this ballet by choreographer Septime Webre in November.

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Tickets: \$43.50-\$158.50

Information: kcballet.org

Other shows

'Don't Touch My Hair': May 6-24, Unicorn Theatre, 3828 Main St. unicorntheatre.org

'Brigadoon': May 7-10, Music Theatre Heritage, Crown Center, 2450 Grand Blvd., Suite 301. musictheaterheritage.com

‘Cactus Flower’: Starring Marilu Henner. Opened April 23 and runs through June 28, New Theatre and Restaurant, 9229 Foster St., Overland Park. newtheatre.com

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Dan Kelly *The Kansas City Star* 

Dan Kelly has been covering entertainment and arts news at The Star since 2009. He previously worked at the Columbia Daily Tribune, The Miami Herald and The Louisville Courier-Journal. He also was on the University of Missouri School of Journalism faculty for six years, and he has written two books, most recently “The Girl with the Agate Eyes: The Untold Story of Mattie Howard, Kansas City’s Queen of the Underworld.”

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