

# How to get

## Dance

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Hristoula Harakas reunites with Hassabi.

## GLORIA days

**Hristoula Harakas finds her spotlight.**

**By Gia Kourlas**

In Donna Uchizono's recent *Thin Air*, there were a few moments in which the sight of Hristoula Harakas—angelically still on top of a ladder, or knitting a pattern of complicated footwork with plush efficiency—simply astounded. Strange as it seems, the longer she dances, the stronger and silkier Harakas becomes. Born in Connecticut, the dancer, now 33, grew up in Athens, where her then-newly retired father transplanted Harakas and her two older brothers. After extensive training, she moved to New York in 1996 and began studying at the Merce Cunningham School, where she has also served as a faculty member since 2002. At P.S. 122 this week, Harakas resumes her ongoing relationship with choreographer Maria Hassabi in *GLORIA*, their fourth show together. The hypnotic evening-length work employs Hassabi's usual method of collage; the result, oddly peaceful, proposes the body as sculpture as the dancers move from one pose to the next. In an e-mail, the choreographer writes, "When we first started working together, we used to walk next to each other through the city without talking to each other. But it felt really good. A togetherness beyond words. Like dance." Harakas, who won a Bessie

in 2006 for her work with Hassabi, spoke about her career over lunch in the East Village.

**Does anyone in your family dance? Have your brothers ever studied dance?**

Oh my God, no. I'm the artistic blood of the family. Though my father used to be really famous as a dancer and a singer and musician—but in the folklore tradition. During the summers, we would travel around the village where my father is from, and older people would say, "Oh, I've seen your father dance! He's amazing!" The most incredible story was when we went to a village and this guy had a coffee place that turned into a taverna at night. He took my brothers and me to the attic and he showed us this table that was covered with dust. At the edge of it were teeth marks—from where my father would lift the table as he was dancing. Crazy.

**When did you begin your training?**

I think I was eight, and I started with ballet. I didn't have any modern dance until I was 13, and that was once a week—ballet was at least three times a week. It was kind of ridiculous because I was dripping with sweat. I was traumatized that I was the only child who had a towel on the side of the barre. I was trying so hard. But I think about having the concentration and the dedication of enjoying something and really trying to master it—I wasn't thinking that way back then, but now [I can see] that's what I

was doing. After I was 13, I danced with the company of the school [Niki Kontaxaki's Modern and Classical Dance Ensemble] in small roles like Little Swans from *Swan Lake*. It was the one company in Greece, other than the national opera, that actually gave performances in ballet.

**Tell me about *GLORIA*.**

It's for two people. David [Adamo] was part of the process from the beginning though, so it still feels like a trio. It seems like we could have different versions of it. The idea is two separate solos—but it doesn't feel like a solo to me. There are moments when I'm on my own, but the sense of a duet remains.

**"*GLORIA* is like a ballet in a way—in a downtown sense."**

***GLORIA* features you and Hassabi moving through a series of timed extensions and positions. How exact is it?**

It is so specific. But you get lost in the images of the piece, even as you're in it. It works with the idea of space and the body, and as an audience member, I think you might doze off in parts—but I really think that's good and part of the piece, actually. You stay with the image and, visually, you almost get sucked in. I also feel the

choreography is so restrictive that I can't let my personality out; but this is not about interpreting anything in a specific way—it's about feeling free to go further or not. The personality or the feeling is going to come out from that specificity, and that's really challenging for me. *GLORIA* is like a ballet in a way—in a downtown sense. [Laughs]

**Is it a return to *A Forest Near Chelsea*, which was the first work Hassabi made with you?**

It started from a different place, but now it's going there. It's emotional for us a little bit, too. By the time you get to the performance, everyone gets stressed out, so you kind of stay tied together. And both of us are a little bit injured. We have to take care of ourselves, but at the same time push further in. It's kind of tricky.

**What is it like dancing with Hassabi? You both hold your own onstage in very different ways.**

It doesn't feel challenging or like I'm competing with her. The solos we do are set, but we are connected. You just cannot ignore the person who is dancing next to you. We are related in a way, like two different souls being in the same place. It feels very comfortable. Walking together and not talking, as she told you. Maybe that's it. Maybe that's the piece.

**Maria Hassabi's *GLORIA* is at P.S. 122 through Sat 10. For the complete interview, visit [timeoutnewyork.com](http://timeoutnewyork.com).**

Dance