

## “The Art and Artistry of Double Dutch” by Gia Kourlas

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Double Dutch has been a competitive sport since the 1970s, its popularity in cities intertwined with the birth of hip-hop. While just about anyone can do it, the best practitioners use athleticism, finesse and musicality to transform it from a game into a choreographic feat. Yes, double Dutch is very much an art form. And who knew? It even has roots at Lincoln Center.

Jill Sternheimer, the director of public programming at Lincoln Center, had no idea herself until **she stumbled upon a video circulating on Facebook. The footage, from Skip Blumberg’s 1981 documentary “Pick Up Your Feet: The Double Dutch Show,”** chronicled a competition held on the plaza. “It blew my mind,” she said. “I realized that I had to go back and find this history. It’s a story that I wanted to make sure was told from the viewpoint of an African-American woman.”

For [Celebrating Double Dutch in New York City](#), which is part of Lincoln Center Out of Doors on Saturday and Sunday, Ms. Sternheimer reached out to Kaisha S. Johnson, a founder of [Women of Color in the Arts](#), who has produced events at Lincoln Center for the past 11 years. What moved Ms. Johnson about the video went beyond jumping. “I saw all of the black and brown faces on the plaza of Lincoln Center,” she said. “In my lifetime, I haven’t seen that happen ever again. I thought, we have to revitalize this competition, but it has to be more than just a competition.”

Along with the return of the tournament, which was held on the plaza from 1974 to 1984, [Celebrating Double Dutch in New York City](#) will have jumping stations for all levels, demonstrations, panel discussions and a **screening of Mr. Blumberg’s film** to place the artistry and impact of double Dutch in a greater context.

“This is about preserving the legacy and the history of double Dutch,” Ms. Johnson said. “It kind of fell off the scene, people would say, but it’s really been a thriving form. It just found its feet outside of the urban communities in and outside of the United States.”

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Delores Finlayson, a member of the Fantastic Four — the **champion team featured in “Pick Up Your Feet”** — will be a judge. “We would actually dream of tricks,” Ms. Finlayson said. “If someone said something couldn’t be done in the ropes, it almost became our job to prove them wrong.”

Ms. Finlayson will participate in a **discussion, along with members of three teams, after a screening of “Pick Up Your Feet.”** While the Fantastic Four had to stop competing after being featured in a memorable McDonald’s [commercial](#) in the 1980s (it changed their amateur status), the group toured, performing with Fab Five Freddy, Afrika Bambaataa, the Rock Steady Crew and others.

“We were dedicated,” Ms. Finlayson said. “We were competitive. And I must say, we had a certain discipline that I have yet to see with a lot of our young people. I think the younger people today just have so many more distractions with technology.” Their desire, as kids, she said, was to go outside and play. “We wanted to jump, we wanted to be creative,” she said. The artistry behind double Dutch is not lost on Ms. Finlayson. “It requires balance, resilience, coordination, timing, and there’s a lot of gymnastics involved as well — especially nowadays. I see it as poetry *in motion*.”

Fittingly, this weekend such poetry — involving daredevil flips and breathtaking rhythmic coordinations — will return to Lincoln Center. “It will be right there at the fountain where it originally was,” Ms. Johnson said. “That was central to the idea of this program: To reclaim that cultural space.”

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