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2013 year in review: dance

Allan Ulrich Updated 3:11 pm, Tuesday, December 31, 2013

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IMAGE 1 OF 2

Erick Montes Chavero and Jennifer Nugent perform in Bill T. Jones and Anne Bogart's "A Rite."

High: The number
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economy helped, so did K
Annex and SFJazz, replac



Low: The multimedia malady: They are called installations, environments and immersive experiences, and most of these efforts come up short in their attempt to create a Diaghilev-type of Gesamtkunstwerk, often because their creators value sensory effect over dance-making craft. That - not eccentric visuals, arresting sound scores, incessant chatter - is still what it's all about.

Most Improved: When Taras Domitro arrived at the **San Francisco Ballet** in 2008, one wondered what all the shouting was about. The Cuban-born dancer went through the motions without the spark that had won him more than one international ballet competition. But in the past couple of years (notably in "Don Quixote" and **Christopher Wheeldon's** "Cinderella"), Domitro's soaring style and flair have made him one of the company's powerhouse resources.

MVP: **Jessica Robinson** Love. You don't go to Counterpulse to see masterpieces. You go to see raw talent thrust into the crucible of public exposure. Executive and artistic director Love has wrought miracles in her Mission Street storefront. Expect her contribution to become even more influential when Counterpulse takes over the former **Exit Theatre** in the Tenderloin in 2015.

Top 10

Wayne McGregor's "Borderlands" (January): The British choreographer's first commission for the San Francisco Ballet had something to do with the paintings of **Josef Albers** and everything to do with deconstructing the ballet dancer's body, so that limbs and torsos are exploited in innovative ways, all at top speed.

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Anna Halprin's "Parades and Changes" (February): For the last time, Halprin, a prime mover in contemporary dance, revived her once-scandalous essay in stylized pedestrian movement and held the crowd at Berkeley's **University Art Museum** spellbound.

Mark Morris' "Beaux" (February): Although I did not see it in 2012, Morris' latest San Francisco Ballet commission was a wonderfully witty and wise opus. This all-male look at upended gender roles in ballet alienated a few souls at the encore, but the choreographer's smashing of assumptions about proper male behavior, delivered by the nine dancers at their most sophisticated, was an utter joy.

Alexei Ratmansky's "From Foreign Lands" (March): By cosmic standards, the great Russian's latest San Francisco Ballet commission is a minor diversion. Yet, Ratmansky's kaleidoscopic trip through sundry European dance styles was masterfully plotted and impeccably performed.

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Trisha Brown Dance Company (March): This was a sad occasion. Brown is no longer well enough to make new dances, But her two final works - the Rameau-inspired "Les yeux et l'âme" and the breezy "I'm Going to Swing My Arms - If You Catch Them, They're Yours" - represented this trailblazing postmodernist at her most endearing.

Mark Morris' "Spring, Spring, Spring" (June): In his capacity as music director of the Ojai North Festival, the choreographer found an unexpectedly delightful way of honoring Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" on its 100th birthday. Morris jettisoned the original scenario, took his inspiration from **Ethan Iverson's** jazz arrangement and generated one of his loosest and sunniest masterpieces, rendered with dedication by the **Mark Morris Dance Group**.

Dimensions Dance Theater: "The Last Dance: St. Ann and N. Rampart." (June): the Oakland company, which celebrated its 40th anniversary this fall, offered a juicy preview at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival with this visceral, rambunctious re-creation by Latanya d. Tigner of a New Orleans second line jazz funeral parade. It lifted you out of your seat.

Casebolt and Smith's "O(h)" (August): The usually parched summer dance diet was enlivened by a visit from this slick Los Angeles duo who prowl for the banalities of routine modern dance and skewer the pomposities with needles dipped in acid. Where have they been all our lives?

Bill T. Jones and Anne Bogart's "A Rite" (October): Jones celebrated the 30th anniversary of the **Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company** with this provocative collaboration with Anne Bogart's **Siti Company**. The work proposes that "The Rite of Spring" heralded more than the age of modernism; it ushered in an age of horrible violence. As movement theater, the beautifully elucidated piece asked as many questions as it answered.

Sheldon B. Smith and Scott Wells' "Father On." (December): It has been a terrific year for choreographed whimsy and nothing tickled the funny bone more than this collaborative inquiry into the problems and perplexities of fatherhood in an age of shifting parental roles. The project restored Wells to dancing after seven years, but this was a terrific team effort throughout. {sbox}

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