



LEWIS SEGAL / THE BEST OF 2007

## Ballet takes a modern, worldly step

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In 2007, American ballet treaded water (as usual), but a few once-scruffy modern dance ensembles made it into some of our most prestigious venues with major success. What's more, world dance companies had a banner year: changing staging strategies, styles and philosophies as if the tension or disparity between folkloric authenticity and accessible entertainment had to be resolved once and for all. Below is a list of highlights from one aficionado's datebook, in chronological order.

**The Hamburg Ballet in John Neumeier's "Death in Venice,"** Orange County Performing Artscenter, February. Not merely a recap of the events in Thomas Mann's classic novella, this daring, masterly full-evening 2003 dance drama included Neumeier's powerful meditation on the artificiality of ballet versus the beauty of natural human movement.

**Ballet Flamenco Sara Baras,** UCLA Live series, Royce Hall, February. An irresistible sampling of Spain's new era of grand-scale, hyper-glamorous, super-technical flamenco delivered with unerring finesse.

**The Joffrey Ballet in Twyla Tharp's "Deuce Coupe,"** Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, March. The newly revised version of Tharp's heady 1973 pop suite crowned an exciting Joffrey visit that also included an exemplary revival of Léonide Massine's "Les Présages."

**Akram Khan and Sylvie Guillem in "Sacred Monsters,"** Royce Hall, May. Indian *kathak* and French ballet met in the UCLA Live series for a starry experiment in person-to-person -- and culture-to-culture -- interplay.

**Los Angeles Ballet in "Apollo," "Serenade" and "Rubies,"** various venues, May. This fledgling company has a lot of growing to do. But throwing itself into

three Balanchine masterworks, it emerged covered with honor. Credit Colleen Neary's meticulous stagings and the dancing of such worthies as Melissa Barak, Corina Gill and Oleg Gorboulev (in, unfortunately, his final performances with the company).

**Katsura Kanin "Global Butoh,"** Highways Performance Space, May. Facets of a contemporary, neo-Expressionist Japanese dance-theater idiom were explored in this ambitious multi-company, multimedia project, but nothing matched Kan (a Kyoto butoh master) in his haunting duet with Canadian dancer Gabriella Daris.



Angelin Preljocaj's choreography is featured in the 2006 film "Pavillon Noir," part of Dance Camera West's film festival lineup this year.

**Dance Camera West**, various venues, June. Always crammed with unusual goodies, the film festival this year showcased big guns in international choreography, including a preview of what to expect from Pina Bausch.

**Savion Glover**, Hollywood Bowl, July. Whether tapping to a jazz quartet or to Duke Ellington's symphonic ballet score "The River," Glover provided a

dazzling, tireless percussive complement to the music.

**Diavolo Dance Theater in "Foreign Bodies,"** Hollywood Bowl, September. Jacques Heim's pieces often achieve brilliance only after their premieres, but this one came out of the box (a 12-foot aluminum one) looking spectacular. Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic offered an imposing performance of their own playing the Salonen score that inspired the work. One of the year's breakthrough events.

**"Fall for Dance,"** Orange County Performing Artscenter, October. This long-overdue experiment in audience development, enabling dance-goers to sample a total of 11 companies in two programs for \$10 a program, was a sign of hope. But one weekend isn't enough. How about \$10 tickets for anyone with a student ID at every OCPAC dance event?

**Pina Bausch Tanztheater Wuppertal in "Ten Chi,"** UCLA Live, Royce Hall, November. Maddening, fascinating, overextended yet also deliberately incomplete, this full-evening work turned the company's trip to Japan into a quirky, rule-breaking collage of sensibilities.

### **The worst**

The new American Ballet Theatre staging of the complete **"Sleeping Beauty,"** Orange County Performing Artscenter, July. Deleting much-loved classic choreography to insert mediocre new dances was only the first bad idea of many in this expensive, full-length botch, the year's biggest disappointment.

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