



Can't Help Falling for Dance

BY JOSEPH CARMAN

Only \$10 for a ticket to a full program of top-flight international dance companies?

Yes, you read that sentence correctly. From October 11–14, the Orange County Performing Artscenter is putting its own spin on one of the most successful New York dance theater projects: the City Center Fall for Dance Festival that has packed houses for the last three seasons. Hosting exciting ballet, contemporary, hip-hop and ethnic dance groups, the Artscenter plans to provide the most democratic way to see dance. Through low prices and a diversity of programming, patrons can sample just about anything on a juicy menu of dance entrees.

Judy Morr, Artscenter vice president of programming, spotted an opportunity to offer patrons something beyond the traditional fare the Artscenter has proudly sponsored in the past. “The Orange County Performing Artscenter’s Fall for Dance program will showcase a number of companies, both known and unknown, that are creating a stir in the dance world,” says Morr. “As an art form, dance has a depth and breadth to which curious audiences sometimes just don’t get access. We are looking to broaden the dance audience that comes to the Performing Artscenter. We recently opened our new facilities, including the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, Samueli Theater and education theater,

From top: Alonzo King’s LINES Ballet, Charles Moulton/The Ball Passing Project, Susan Marshall & Company.



which allow us to present a broader range of this art form.”

Arlene Shuler, who fashioned the blueprint for the New York City Center Fall for Dance Festival, says the original idea was to give high-quality dance a chance to be experienced by as many people, both dance veterans and newcomers, as possible. “I wanted a program that allowed people to see a lot of different companies at once, because I thought it was a wonderful way to kick off the new dance season and get people excited about dance,” says Shuler, president and CEO of City Center, a concert hall comparable in size to Segerstrom Hall.

The results have exceeded all expectations. “You can use the phrase ‘a line around the block’ as an exaggeration, but when it comes to the turnout for tickets to City Center’s Fall for Dance Festival, it’s a statement of fact,” says Pia Catton, dance critic of the *New York Sun*.

So what did Morr search for in dance companies that would stimulate new interest for Orange County audiences? “We were looking for quality, diversity—things that are different from what our audiences are used to,” says Morr, adding that she also relied heavily on her “gut feelings.” Working with Ellen Dennis from City Center, Morr pored over videos and sought out companies that had a particularly distinctive pizzazz. The Performing Artscenter’s Fall for Dance will feature two different programs (two performances each) at Segerstrom Hall with troupes that cover a wide spectrum of artistry.

Program A (October 11–12) begins with the group Srishti, headed by the British choreographer Nina Rajarani, who won the Place prize, Europe’s most coveted choreography award. Her piece *Quick* blends the integrity of the classical South Indian dance form Bharatanatyam with the fast pace of modern corporate life. Renowned contemporary choreographer Susan Marshall will be represented with *The Kiss*, a hypnotically lyrical duet for two dancers suspended together in midair, set to the haunting

music of Arvo Pärt. And the Boston Ballet will present Val Caniparoli’s dramatic *Lady of the Camellias*, depicting the famous consumptive Parisian courtesan who lives and dies with equal doses of passion.

Seattle’s Pacific Northwest Ballet will dance a ballet by the popular Spanish choreographer Nacho Duato, titled *Jardi Tanca* (a phrase that means “closed garden.”) Based on Catalonian folk songs sung by Maria del Mar Bonet, the work details the hardships of peasants praying for rain and working the land during an exhausting drought. Rounding out Program A is the rousing South African troupe Via Katlehong Dance, originally founded by youths to stave off criminality. Their style uses a local hip-hop dance called *pantsula* and combines it with stomping and tap dancing.

Leading off Program B (October 13–14) is Charles Moulton’s tour de force work, *48 Person Precision Ball Passing*, which needs little explanation other than the fact that it works as a riveting opener. The Dutch National Ballet will perform a moving neo-classical duet *Before After*, choreographed by Annabelle Lopez. The late, great choreographer Martha Graham, who shaped modern dance into a mature art form, will show off her impeccable form with the all-female cast performing excerpts from the ballet *Sketches From Chronicle*, an intense work that demonstrates Graham’s political response to early 20th century wars. Because the Martha Graham Dance Company performs so rarely now, Morr considers the ballet “an important showcase right now—a kind of moral consideration.”

Alonzo King’s *LINES* Ballet, a hotbed of sleek dancers who are trained equally in classical and contemporary genres, will perform a signature work. And the inimitable Rennie Harris, who has brought hip-hop to a superior level of artistry, finishes off Program B with a slam-bang finale. In *Student of the Asphalt Jungle*, Harris’s company Puremovement pulls out all the stops to the backbeat of samba drums and house

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From top: SRISHTI – Nina Rajarani Dance Creations, Boston Ballet, Martha Graham Dance Company.



■ SPECIAL EVENT

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music. Expect breathtaking gymnastics, head spinning, and plenty of urban adrenaline that pumps up the volume and raises the temperature of the theater.

So with this generous input of new dancing (at generous prices), does Morr hope to bring in the under-30 crowd? "Our target audience is those who have not been to the Performing Artscenter yet," she says. "This is not off-putting programming, and it will be an open, friendly atmosphere. Orange County's 3 million people represent a very diverse population. This may be the chance we have to bring in the young people. They want to have more participation."

Following that line of thought, Morr plans to expand the festivities to the outside plaza with free outdoor theater and music events linked to the festival. In that way, artists and patrons can get to know each other. In the future, the dance events will most likely take place in all the theaters at the Performing Artscenter.

For dance to excite 21st century audiences, changes need to reflect the desires and interests of both young and older audience members. "It is consistent with other art forms that are looking at opening up their facilities from what might be described as 'the hallowed halls,'" says Morr. "We want to do everything we can to foster a new audience. It's the responsibility of the administrators to keep working on that philosophy."

Joseph Carman is a Contributing Editor to Dance Magazine and the author of Round About the Ballet.

SEGERSTROM HALL

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Tickets: \$10

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From top, left to right: Project Bandaloop, Rennie Harris Puremovement, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Dutch National Ballet, Via Katilehong Dance.