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[Culture Seen's Top Dance Picks of 2010](#)

By [Kevin Griffin](#) 29 Dec 2010 [Culture Seen](#)



Before I started looking back at 2010, I knew it was a memorable year for dance but I'd forgotten how truly amazing it was until I went through and reviewed all the performances I'd seen. The year started off strong with the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival in January and then revved into high gear with the Cultural Olympiad during the 2010 Winter Olympics.

There was an understandable lull after the Olympics but the dance scene picked up speed again in the fall with several significant performances including the triumphant return of Ballet BC.

What follows are my choices for the top 10 performances in Metro Vancouver in 2010.

* *The bliss that from their limbs all movement takes*: After financial and administrative troubles put Ballet BC into hibernation for a season, the company returned to the stage in November with a newly commissioned work by its choreographer-in-residence Jose Navas. It was an electrifying performance by the company's 15 dancers. They aced a dynamic new work that was the first en pointe ballet created by Navas for an entire company. It was such a hit that normally reticent Vancouver audience members didn't hesitate when the dancers left the stage: they immediately leapt to their feet in a standing ovation. A memorable night of dance.

* *Dark Matters*: One of several outstanding performances during the Cultural Olympiad, *Dark Matters* by Crystal Pite was funny, surprising, dramatic and moving. *Dark Matters* used puppeteers, text and spoken word to weave a story that connected dark matter or energy that constitutes something like 96 per cent of the observable universe and the unknown place where creativity originates – including Pite's own.

* *The Show Must Go On*: Jerome Bel's minimal creation was about doing more with less – well, actually,

almost nothing. It was the bare-bones skeleton of a performance that used ballet, modern dance, movement, and stillness orchestrated by a DJ playing pop music. As a member of the audience, I felt as if I'd been recognized as being part of a collective which turned the whole experience into something utterly unique. Plus, it was very, very funny.

**Grupo Corpo:* The Brazilian dancers from the country's top contemporary dance company moved in a way that defined sensuality in dance. In *Parabelo* and *Breu* the dancing was as loose as contact improvisation and as tight as a classical ballet. As a group, they all moved like a hot Amazonian breeze.

**Tobari: As If in an Inexhaustible Flux:* The second offering from DanceHouse, *Tobari* was as different from Grupo Corpo as could be imagined. This was the slow, deliberate world of *butoh* as performed by Japan's Sankai Juku. A dance that explored how the bodies of the performers could synchronize with gravity rather than fight against it, *Tobari* created an otherworldly performance space that magically telescoped time so that a 90-minute performance went by in a flash.



**The Golden Mean (Live):* Exploring the idea that humanity is on the verge of a new mutation, Marie Chouinard's *The Golden Mean* was self-indulgent, transgressive and mesmerizing. Dancers were born from cocoons, performed on a stage with a walkway that projected into the audience, stripped naked, and wore baby masks as they became reborn in the new world. I didn't get *The Golden Mean* reference but this Cultural Olympiad performance sure was great to look at.

**Box4:* Performed by four powerful male dancers on a box-like set, *Box4* crackled with hard-edge aggression and competition that gave way to flashes of tenderness and cooperation. Paraskevas Terezakis' dance work was all about men moving and dancing with a common purpose that wasn't about being gay or

straight. It was both more than that and also that: a new kind of generous and inclusive masculinity.

**Shadow Machine*: A recreation of a work by Alvin Erasga Tolentino from 2001, *Shadow Machine* deftly combined dance and visual projections that didn't make me choose between watching one or the other. It included an amazingly evocative and sad ending that in its form both forgot and remembered the people of different cultures who built Vancouver.

**Black Grace*: Another offering from The Cultural Olympiad, *Black Grace* was founded by Neil Jeremia, as an all-male dance group to explore what it means to be a Pacific Islander in multicultural New Zealand. Jeremia's choreography mixed traditional Samoan movement taken from rituals that included tatau and iconic Western elements such as the baroque music of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

**Ziyian Kwan*: For several weeks towards the end of summer, dancer Ziyian Kwan performed an improvised solo every Sunday afternoon on the triangle of a sidewalk where Kingsway meets Main. As a dancer in Metro Vancouver for 22 years, Kwan's performance was her way to protest against the provincial government's cuts to the BC Arts Council. Her performance brought out scores of dancers, choreographers, musicians and others to lend their support.

Honorable mentions go to the quirky Nature Theatre of Okahoma for its *Poetics: a ballet brut* for not being about television at all, Ballet BC's cabaret-style show at the Royal Canadian Legion on Commercial Drive for *Dances for a Small Stage 22* and *The Dali Universe* for trying but failing to do something new.

The performance I missed that I wished I'd seen was Savion Glover's tap-dancing show at Centennial Theatre.



**Top: Crystal Pite's Dark Matters was performed during the 2010 Cultural Olympiad.*

**Middle: Marie Chouinard's The Golden Mean (Live) broke through the fourth wall into the audience during its performance at the Cultural Olympiad.*

**Bottom: Ziyian Kwan took her protest to the street at Kingsway and Main.*

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