



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

December 26, 2010

Teamwork and guts, stumbles and bums

By Paula Citron
Globe and Mail Update

Our dance critic looks back on the wildest twists, coolest triumphs and saddest missteps of 2010

In 2010, dance's dominant theme was relationships: From the stunning turmoil of Andrea Nann and Brendan Wyatt's *Beside Each Other* to the powerful couple-in-crisis piece *Hero/Heroines* by Amber Funk Barton and Josh Martin, the art form often shone.

It had a love affair with technology, too. One remarkable example was Roger Sinha's *Zeros & Ones*, in which he used a computer to generate images and sounds in an attempt to reflect the new, hi-tech-driven India.

As for dance's relationship with its audience, it had its share of ups and downs. With touring drying up on both the national and international levels, festivals were the best way to see visiting companies. In terms of series, Ottawa's National Arts Centre continued to be the richest source of dance from home and abroad.

Certainly, the dance community is taking the initiative in getting its work out there. One example: Prairie Dance Circuit featured one choreographer from each of Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary and Edmonton, with the four pieces presented together as a concert in each city. Another: Acclaimed Toronto-based indie veterans Sasha Ivanochko, Heidi Strauss, Susie Burpee and Susanna Hood banded together to form Connect T.O., a marketplace to show their work to international and national presenters.

As well, 2010 saw the end of a true partnership with the death of Arnold Spohr. The last great ballet pioneer, he shepherded the Royal Winnipeg Ballet onto the international stage.

In lean times, dance will always feel the pinch and looking ahead to 2011, the future is shaky in terms of grants, funding and support.

But dance is addictive to artists, and they will keep soldiering on. To acknowledge their work over the past year - good, bad and ugly - here are the very subjective 2010 Paula Citron Dance Awards.

Across The Pond Award Karen Kain, artistic director of the National Ballet of Canada; and Gradimir Pankov, artistic director of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. Both introduced works by red-hot European choreographers: Finland's Jorma Elo and Britain's Wayne McGregor (Kain); and Germany's Christian Spuck (Pankov). (McGregor

brings his company Random Dance to Kingston, Ont., Ottawa and Montreal in February.)

Best Invention Award Victoria's Sven Johansson, whose E.S. Dance Instrument creates the illusion of dancers performing in mid-air, as featured in Toronto-based choreographer Sharon B. Moore's *The Great Farini Project* about the rivalry between 19th-century tightrope walkers Farini and Blondin.

Chutzpah Award New artistic director Emily Molnar, whose astute choice of contemporary artists, particularly her appointment of Montreal's acclaimed José Navas as resident choreographer, seems to be waking Ballet BC up from the dead.

Dance On Film Revolution Award The 3-D process. The film *StreetDance 3D*, despite the nutty storyline of ballet meeting hip-hop, put the viewer right in the middle of the dance.

Disrespect To Artists And Audience Award The American touring show *Ballroom With A Twist*, which visited five Canadian cities without providing a program to the audience. It turned a show full of stars - including U.S. figure-skating champ Evan Lysacek - into a no-name production.

First Past The Post Award Calgary's Fluid Movement Arts Festival, under artistic director Nicole Mion, for presenting the Canadian debut of the exciting New York-based Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet. (The company performs at Ottawa's NAC March 3 and 4.)

Fresh Air Award Toronto's DIMBY project - Dance In My Backyard - the brainchild of Eroca Nicols, which actually holds a concert in an obliging host's backyard, with site-specific original works.

Longevity Award This award is shared by the poignant *Full Bloom*, choreographed and performed by fortysomething dance veterans Kevin O'Day, Robert Glumbek and Luches Huddleston Jr. from Mannheim, Germany; Peterborough, Ont.'s Old Men Dancing, a courageous group of late-blooming amateurs under the directorship of Bill James; and the National Ballet of Canada's Aleksandar Antonijevic, who at 40 is still performing principal roles.

Genre Fusion Award *60 X 60*, the brainchild of New York's Rob Voisey, was performed at Toronto's avant-garde Music Gallery. It featured 60 local choreographers, each of whom created works for one-minute pieces of music by 60 different composers.

Gymnos Award Vancouver's Kokoro Dance, for 15 years of *Wreck Beach Butoh*, which features nude dancers covered only in white makeup, performing rain or shine.

He's Everywhere Award Brendan Wyatt, the most in-demand male dancer in Toronto. Wyatt partnered with almost every noteworthy female choreographer in the city this year - including Nann in *Beside Each Other* and Strauss in the spectacular *This Time*.

She's Everywhere Award Prolific choreographer Crystal Pite, whose works were performed throughout Canada (the National Ballet's remount of *Emergence*) and the world (her piece *Lost Action* is currently touring).

I Can't Get The Piece Out of My Mind Award Montreal's Naomi Stikeman for *Çatum* at the Canada Dance Festival, a brilliant storytelling film filled with interesting characters, part doll, part human, and whose emotional roller-coaster rides are echoed in compelling dance duets performed by Stikeman and Peter Chu.

Immortal Award Toronto's Peggy Baker, who, with her fertile imagination and seemingly ageless body, continues to produce stunning choreography such as *earthling*, a meditation on insect imagery.

Most Bizarre North American Debut Damascus, Syria: Enana Dance Theatre's *Julia Domna* came to Toronto's Luminato Festival this year. It's Cecil B. DeMille meets Biblical epic meets ballet/modern dance.

Most Exciting Visitor Award Daksha Sheth Dance Company, based in the south Indian state of Kerala. A true original, Sheth, a former Kathak dancer, has developed a striking blend of martial arts, yoga and aerial dance, as

shown in *Sarpagati (The Way of the Serpent)*.

Most Hilarious Collision Of East And West Award Roger Sinha for his satiric *Zeros & Ones*, featuring a video that uses traditional facial expressions embedded in ancient *bharatanatyam* storytelling, to express the music of Rossini's overture to *The Barber of Seville*.

National Treasure Award Tristan Rehner's *Kitchen*, a richly layered 1998 homage to the humour and sadness in the lives of hard-working Newfoundland housewives, replete with Mason jars, vegetables and a washing tub. This award also goes to St. John's Festival of New Dance for the revival, and to Rehner, Caroline Niklas-Gordon and Anne Troake for their stirring performance.

What Were They Thinking? Award The Paris Opera Ballet's Laetitia Pujol and Alessio Carbone who, at Toronto's ballet gala, Stars of the 21st Century, performed a laboured and leaden Russian imperial-style *pas de deux*, when just two numbers later, the Kirov's Anastasia and Denis Matvienko showed how such a feat should be done.

Why Aren't They Touring The Country? Award Toronto's pre-eminent black companies, COBA and Ballet Creole, who produce solid shows of Afro-Caribbean/contemporary fusion. Audiences across Canada deserve to see them.

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