

TheaterJones

2017: Dance, Part 1

TITAS had a tremendous year, according to chief dance critic Margaret Putnam. Here are her favorite performances of 2017.

by Margaret Putnam

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Once again, the heavyweight for dance events for 2017 was TITAS. As it presented 11 programs, the advantage is clear. Texas Ballet Theater offered five, ditto Dallas Black Dance Theatre.

As for the smaller companies, once again Bruce Wood Dance and Dark Circles Contemporary Dance reign supreme, a position they have held since their inception. You can count on Danielle Georgiou Dance Group to go for oddball, and the newish Terrance M. Johnson Dance Project for emotional punch.

Dallas Black Dance Theatre swings from powerful to showmanship, so it will be interesting to see what new artistic director Bridge Moore can do with the company.

And since the number 10 is arbitrary and there are always more than 10 dance events that stand out, also worth mentioning: Rhythm in Fusion Festival: *Tapn2tap* which unleashed a stunning variety of styles; Danielle Georgiou and Dallas Neo-Classical Ballet's little gem of a multimedia work, *I Came to the Light and Stayed for the Shadows*, inspired the a very long Russian sci-fi film *Solaris*. TITAS so dominates the Top Ten list (five out of 10), that it would be hard to ignore yet another stellar program, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company's poetic *Horses in the Sky*.

1 Bridgman | Packer Dance

TITAS Presents

Jan. 27

AT&T Performing Arts Center, Winspear Opera House, Dallas

While *Under the Skin* casts projected images that magically morph with dancers onstage, it is *Voyeur* that takes film and video to a whole new level of wonder. Using the paintings of the American artist Edward Hopper as a point of departure, views of panels, doors and windows hung at different angles, sounds of seagulls and the rumble of trains, cascade in dream-like sequences as figures vanish like ghosts. Never has a different genre captured the essence of Hopper's isolation and loneliness so brilliantly.

2 Les Fairies and Big Bad Wolf

Dark Circles Contemporary Dance

Oct. 20

AT&T Performing Arts Center, Wyly Theatre Sixth Floor Studio Theatre, presented in the Elevator Project

Joshua L. Peugh turned Michel Fokine's airy *Les Sylphides* into a very contemporary, slightly ironic and yet poetic ballet, playing on the relationship of gays and lesbians: hence the "fairies." But it was his *Big Bad Wolf* that announces him as a choreographer to be reckoned with. For a harrowing tale based on the tales of the Brothers Grimm and Heinrich Hoffman, *Big Bad Wolf* depicts a truly ominous Big Bad Wolf who invades the world of playful children and erotic adults, mostly oblivious of their peril. Original music by Branson Carson contributes to the air of menace.

3 RISE

Nov. 18

Moody Performance Hall, Dallas

After the company's founder and chief choreographer dies, what's next? Taking over the realm of Bruce Wood, artistic director Kimi Nikaidoh makes sure that Wood's driving *The Only Way Through is Through* keeps its fierce intensity and his slow-as-melting-ice *Lay Your Burdens* retains its pristine purity. Honoring Wood's aesthetic, company répétiteur Joy Bollinger created a dreamy and other times nightmarish *Hillside*, an imaginative play on light, a set of rolling planes, and airy, lush dancing.

4 An American in Paris

Presented by Dallas Summer Musicals and Performing Arts Fort Worth

Performance viewed: Feb. 14

Bass Performance Hall, Fort Worth

If anyone worried that a stage version of the 1951 movie of the same title would lack its zing, then worry no more. As directed by Craig Lucas, the projection design by 59 Projections far outdid Hollywood in stunning stage effects, while choreographer Christopher Wheeldon tossed out one beguiling dance piece after another. Never mind the paper-thin story, this giddy, ebullient, dazzling marriage of dance and song had charm oozing out its core.

5 Rooster Smith Scher

Texas Ballet Theater

March 3

Bass Performance Hall, Fort Worth.

Taking a break from the company's usual full-length ballets, this triple bill was a triple whammy. In Garrett Smith's *Imbue* plastic tutus and plastic fringe curtains bathed the stage in moonlight while the hyper-energetic movement created thrills and non-stop tension. Decorum,

tentativeness and stillness in the opening moments of Avi Scher's *A Full Life* soon turns to passion and dreamy separation, a lovely metaphor for the edge and flow of life. Set to Rolling Stones' tunes like "Ruby Tuesday" and "Play with Fire," the strut and swagger of Christopher Bruce's *Rooster* belies an uncertain future of picket lines and cramped lives.

6 Doug Varone and Dancers

TITAS Presents

Feb. 18

AT&T Performing Arts Center, Winspear Opera House, Dallas

Varone's free form, scattershot style makes use of runs, slides and collapses, performed at breakneck speed and serving perfectly for *Possession* and set to the pulsating urgency of Philip Glass. In contrast, Julia Wolfe's *Believing, folded* displayed the complex relationship between two men, who thrust and parry, grapple and toss. Also on the program were Michael Gordon's dissonant and fierce *Dystopia* and Varone's *ReComposed* where dances leap and run in wild trajectories but miraculously never collide.

7 Ballet BC

TITAS Presents

June 10

AT&T Performing Arts Center, Winspear Opera House, Dallas

The Vancouver-based Ballet BC's triple-bill was in turns gritty, haunting and strange, with the haunting piece qualifying a minor masterpiece. Difficult, off-kilter pairings in Emile Molar's *16 + a room* gave the dance the fell of ice hockey without a goalie. Inspired by Mark Strand's poem about death, Crystal Pite's *Solo Echo* has a quiet, pensive quality as dancers move in serpentine smoothness. A strange mix of robot-puppet-alien gave Sharon Eyal and Gai Behar's *Bill* a carnal atmosphere, with a Barbie's Ken at the forefront. Dancers move like zombies or rush at warp speed, making *Bill* both disconcerting and eerily riveting.

8 Paul Taylor Dance Company

Eisemann Presents

Feb. 17

Eisemann Center, Richardson

The Eisemann Center presents the company every two years, with a new commission this year by Lily York. While the ensemble dancing is lovely, if not much in unison, the pas de deux performed by Michael Trusnovec and Madelyn Ho was much more intriguing. A display of gentle lifts and rotations contrasted tellingly to Mr. Trusnovec's manic action. Taylor's sardonic side came into view in *Book of Beasts*, a modern tale of mythical creatures and human foibles. The closing work, *Cascade*, showed Taylor's love of symmetry and structure, arching leaps, diagonal patterns and circles within circles.

9 Malpas Dance Company

TITAS Presents

Nov. 10

Moody Performance Hall, Dallas

The Cuban-based company opened the program with Canadian Azure Barron's *Indomitable Waltz*, a work full of off-kilter, even awkward movements, with ape-like hunches and ankles ready to buckle. Set to a variety of haunting waltzes, the work had a tense, urgent strain, full of purpose and drive. Even more edgy was American Trey McIntyre's *Bad Winter*, two short vignettes depicting a woman in distress to the music "Pennies from Heaven," and a duet about two people desperate for each other and just as desperate to separate. For pure energy, Ronald K. Brown's *Why You Follow* mixed African, Latin and contemporary dance styles. Earth and tribal in atmosphere, the stylized movement placed the dance in the present.

10 Diavolo: Architecture in Motion

TITAS Presents

March 10

Moody Performance Hall, Dallas

It is no surprise that most of the dancers in this company have a background in tumbling, competitive cheerleading, track and field, baseball, acrobatics and gymnastics—at least when you bet a full dose of the derring-do. In a program called L.O.S.T., the simplicity of *Cubical* contrasted to the fantastic, space-age set of *Passengers*. In the first piece, dancers are crammed into cubicles like worker bees trapped in the monotony of daily life. In the second, the set is such a work of art that the dancers could get by with little action: the massive set slowly pivots, breaks apart like icebergs, and morphs into new shapes that resemble at one point a train, then a subway car, a submarine and a staircase. But the dancers do have a lot to do, not the least sliding sideways down a slanted platform with no foothold, or dive, roll and leap. Danger seems a foreign concept.

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