

Arts & Entertainment

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An energized Boston Ballet brought new life to an old standby

By Christine Temin
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A year when a production of "The Nutcracker" makes a dance critic's Top 10 list is one of two things: either such a disaster that the Christmas chestnut offers a lonely glimmer of good cheer or a year with a superlative version of the ballet.

In the case of Boston Ballet's "Nutcracker," which closes tomorrow, it's the latter. And there is one prime reason for the jump in quality from previous years: Mikko Nissinen, the company's new director. In a few short months, he has energized a once-torpid troupe. The three programs the ballet has presented under his leadership — a fine repertory bill and a superb "Onegin," as well as this "Nutcracker" — have been extremely encouraging to balletomanes. The company still has major problems (lack of money, poor ticket sales, no decent opera house in which to perform, no imminent touring prospects), but Nissinen seems poised to tackle them. And he's already given us some great dance to watch.

"Raw Dance" was a Boston Ballet offshoot: Seven company members turned choreographers for a program in the Cyclorama. It's the kind of experimental work that should be ongoing — dance makers need to make *lots* of pieces to develop, and the Cyclorama is an appropriately low-key space for trying things out. ("Raw Dance" has another outing in March.) The ballet's own Grand Studio atop its South End headquarters is also a good setting for smaller works: "Dance on the Top Floor" is a



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JIM DAVIS

Larissa Ponomarenko dazzled in Boston Ballet's revival of John Cranko's "Onegin."

Boston area's main chamber-sized classical company, José Mateo's Ballet Theatre, signed a 40-year lease on the Sanctuary Theatre near Harvard Square in Cambridge this year. Mateo and his dancers have settled in nicely, and there is ongoing renovation that makes the space more pleasant with each new program. The intimacy and informality of having 100 or so audience members sitting at little tables and sipping drinks while watching the show is a nicely novel way to present an art form some people find remote and intimidating in a 4,000-seat house.

Also on the local front: Boston

four performances (one a month, starting in September), with each new show cracking apart and recomposing material from its predecessors. Prometheus Dance and the Caitlin Corbett Dance Company were among the other Boston-based troupes to give notably successful shows in venues including the Boston Conservatory Theatre, Green Street Studios, and the Dance Complex.

World Music/CRASHarts and the FleetBoston Celebrity Series stepped up their commitment to presenting dance both local and imported this year. World Music's Flamenco Festival 2002 brought top Spanish dancers, including

choreographers — Marcus Schulkind, Carol Somers, Brenda DiVelbliss, and Sara Sweet Rabidoux — to make new works for its new series, "Dance Straight Up!" It's the kind of institutional support local dance makers need.

The Celebrity Series gave us the Mark Morris Dance Group performing, among other things, "V," a large and luminous group piece set to Schumann's sublime Quintet in E-flat. That series also brought Garth Fagan Dance to town. Fagan is best known as the Tony Award-winning choreographer of "The Lion King," but in this program he took quite a different tack, with "In Memoriam: the Innocent, the Brave, the

DANCE | Christine Temin

- Boston Ballet's "The Nutcracker," at the Wang Theatre through tomorrow.
 - "Trisha Brown: Art and Dance in Dialogue 1961-2001," at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, through Jan. 5.
 - World Music's "Flamenco Festival 2002," at the Emerson Majestic Theatre in January.
 - José Mateo's Ballet Theatre in "Then, Here & Now," at the Sanctuary Theatre, Cambridge, in October.
 - Lorraine Chapman's performance in Marcus Schulkind's "Let By-gones Be," at Blackman Theatre, Northeastern University, earlier this month.
 - Mark Morris Dance Group in "V," at the Shubert Theatre in March.
 - "Raw Dance," at the Cyclorama of the Boston Center for the Arts in November.
 - Garth Fagan Dance, at the Emerson Majestic Theatre in February.
 - Marjorie Morgan and Tom Plsek in "Gu — Decay and Restoration," at Mobius, this fall.
 - Irina Dvorozenko and Maxim Belotserkovsky in American Ballet Theatre's "Giselle," at the Wang Theatre in November.
- Thea Singer and Karen Campbell contributed to this list.

extravaganza devoted to Trisha Brown, the great modern-dance choreographer. Brown's drawings are included: They're exquisite and have an improvisational, free-form grace. Decor created for Brown's choreography by Robert Rauschenberg, Nancy Graves, Donald Judd, and others is the meat of the exhibition, which is animated by a hefty selection of videos of Brown and her company. And lucky were those in attendance for the troupe's one performance at the school. Brown, who has been a force on the dance scene for 40 years, danced her solo "if you couldn't see me," in which she faces upstage the whole time, riveting the audience without making eye contact.

Sometimes, one individual or couple can make an evening. That

shaping space.

It was also true of Larissa Ponomarenko in Boston Ballet's revival of John Cranko's "Onegin." She's actually better in the leading role than the ballerina for whom Cranko created the part, the great Marcia Haydee.

And it was true of Irina Dvorozenko and Maxim Belotserkovsky in the "Giselle" that American Ballet Theatre brought to Boston in last month's engagement (presented by the Celebrity Series and the Wang Center). The opening night principals, the much-hyped Paloma Herrera and Marcelo Gomes, looked stale, and the rest of the cast needed a shot of vitamin B-12. The lesser-known Dvorozenko and Belotserkovsky were given just one performance during the run, and they made the