

Top 10 dance events of 2013 — and more dancing memories to cherish



Trisha Brown Dance Company in 'Les yeux et l'âme' (Van Meer)



By [Robert Johnson/The Star-Ledger](#)

on December 17, 2013 at 11:31 AM, updated December 18, 2013 at 11:38 AM

The British are coming! The British are coming! Oops, they already left.

The past year in dance saw what may have been the biggest British invasion since 1812. We swooned, hypnotized by oily vampires in **Matthew Bourne's** remake of "The Sleeping Beauty." We recoiled as Royal Ballet star **Edward Watson** slithered through the ooze in "Metamorphosis," and we stirred uncomfortably when choreographer **Charlotte Vincents** tained the walls with menstrual blood in her plaintive "Motherland." **The Royal Ballet** broadcast its new production of "Don Quixote" in HD. And we gawked at the flashy, local premieres of **Wayne McGregor's** "Borderlands" and "Chroma." But don't think for a minute that we've seen

the last of that trendsetter.

In 2013, **American Ballet Theatre** launched a tasteful, new production of its buccaneer ballet, "Le Corsaire," and **New York City Ballet** restaged George Balanchine's provocative "Ivesiana." Yet some of this season's most refreshing reruns were modern dances. **The Martha Graham Dance Company** revived Graham's tormented "Phaedra" and **Richard Move's** glamorous, postmodern epic, "Achilles Heels." **Cedar Lake** imported **Jirí Kylián's** mercurial "Indigo Rose." And **Big Dance Theater** returned to the battered pumpkin patch of "Ich, Kürbisgeist."

Adding to the list of this year's memorable creations, **Mark Morris** gave us his dangerous and nearly fatal "Crosswalk," and the dueling "Jenn and Spencer." **Graham Lustig** animated the characters of Kipling's "Jungle Book," in "Jangala," while his "Jazzy Nutcracker" gave the old chestnut a sexy makeover. Crocodiles snapped their jaws maliciously, but then grew lovelorn in "A Bend in the River," an enchanted tale presented by the **Khmer Arts Ensemble**. And we shared unsettling, close-up views of **Susan Marshall's** dancers in her media critique, "Play/Pause."

So many dancers gave outstanding performances this year. A robust **Pastora Galván** kicked the stuffing out of "Metáfora" at the **New York Flamenco Festival**. **Parisa Khobdeh** fought desperately for her life in **Paul Taylor's** "To Make Crops Grow." **Carla Körbes**, of **Pacific Northwest Ballet**, made a delicate Terpsichore in Balanchine's "Apollo"; and the women of **Dance Theatre of Harlem** displayed a take-no-prisoners approach to "Agon." **Isabella Boylston** plunged into her spring debut as Kitri, in **American Ballet Theatre's** "Don Quixote"; while, in the fall, **Veronika Part** raised ABT's "Les Sylphides" to ethereal heights. **New York City Ballet's Jennie Somogyi** and **Tyler Angle** proved divinely matched in an excerpt from **Christopher Wheeldon's** "Mercurial Manoeuvres" at the **Nantucket Dance Festival**. Odissi



virtuosa **Sujata Mohapatra** sparkled at "**Dance Fest India**"; **Ramya Ramnarayan** was a supple devotee of Krishna in "Shyama," at the **New York International Fringe Festival**; and **Rajika Puri** proved an expressive storyteller in her "Sutradhari Natyam." A quick-footed **Gabriel Missé** led **Analía Centurión** through labyrinthine tangos at the Dardo Galletto Studios. Contemporary dancer **Akram Khan** seemed tireless in his imaginative solo, "Desh," at the **White Light Festival**. And who could forget **Laura Quattrocchi**, thrashing in a rising tide of plastic waste in **Joshua Bisset's** "Spring Rain," performed in a Jersey City store window?

Yet certain events deserve special mention:

"I'm Going to Toss My Arms — If You Catch Them, They're Yours": In Trisha Brown's piece, the dancers struggled against gusts of wind that seemed to be trying to wipe the stage clean. This dance marked the end of the ailing choreographer's career. Yet the **Trisha Brown Dance Company's** engagement, in

January and February at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, was not a farewell. Defiant performances of Brown masterpieces "Set and Reset," "Homemade," "Newark (Niweworce)" and "Les yeux et l'âme" made it clear that her works must survive.

"Interior Designs": Psychedelic patterns bathed the stage and images raced across giant video screens as the **Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company** celebrated its 30th anniversary with the premiere of "Interior Designs," at Kean University in April. Employing the latest Xbox technology, "Interior Designs" spilled across the line that separates audience members from performers drawing everyone into its complex, digital world.

"A Month in the Country": **American Ballet Theatre** has been working through the repertoire of the late British choreographer Frederick Ashton. This spring, "A Month in the Country" had its turn at the Metropolitan Opera House. Ashton's sendup of a Russian lady's flamboyant intrigues lent itself to



deliciously comic, yet sensitive portrayals by **Julie Kent**, as the mischief-making Natalia Petrovna, and by **Roberto Bolle**, as everybody's darling, the tutor Beliaev. **Danil Simkin, Arron Scott, Sarah Lane and Gemma Bond** added virtuoso turns and tantrums, with **Victor Barbee and Grant DeLongas** Natalia Petrovna's daffy husband and her long-suffering suitor, respectively. Sheer delight.

"Four Corners": Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continues to commission handsome, new works from choreographer **Ronald K. Brown**. His ambitious "Four Corners" received its premiere in June during the company's high-profile return to Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Blessing every corner of the stage, **Linda Celeste Sims** was a proud matriarch leading the female ensemble, with **Matthew Rushing** as her fluent, male counterpart. An intimate work, despite its scale, and filled with otherworldly rhythms and mystic architecture, "Four Corners" continues Brown's spiritual quest for enlightenment.

"STePz": A plain, wooden staircase was the centerpiece of "STePz," **Savion Glover's** brilliant showcase at the Joyce Theater in June. But, oh, the sounds that stairs can make when Glover comes knocking and climbs them in his special way. More than a nostalgic tribute to the late Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and his "Stair Dance," "STePz" underscored the virtuosity of today's performers, including



Marshall Davis Jr. and a trio of fly hoofers in heels: **Ayodele Casele, Robyn Watson and Sarah Savelli**. Dancing to Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke," Glover showed his mellow side, embracing tap's history as popular entertainment.

"The Rite of Spring": Those pounding rhythms can only mean one thing — Igor Stravinsky is at the piano again and a tribe of Russian primitives are preparing a maiden sacrifice. The 100th anniversary of "The Rite of

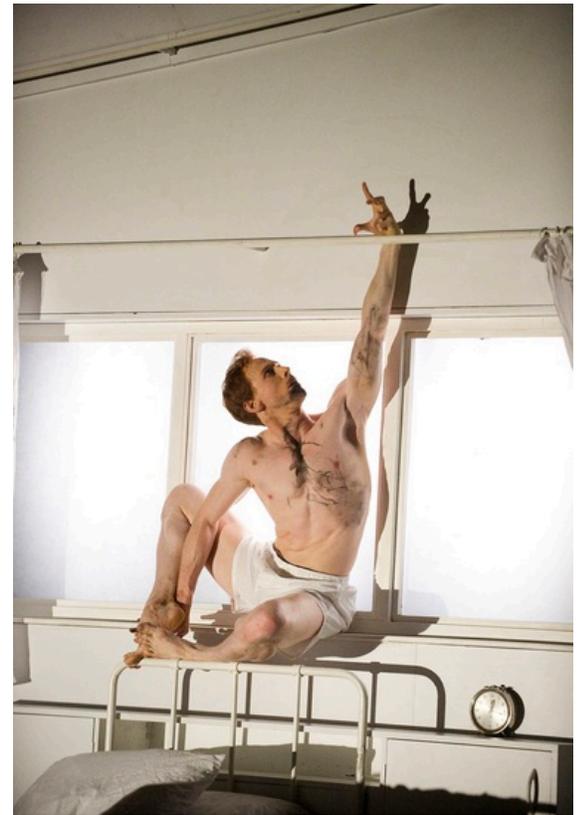
Spring" did not go unnoticed. **Douglas Martin's** new version for **American Repertory Ballet** set the "Rite" in a competitive, modern workplace. **Paul Taylor** slyly substituted music by Ferde Grofé. **Meryl Tankard** and **Tero Saarinen** both turned out demanding solos. Yet the most brilliant take came from choreographer **Bill T. Jones** and director **Anne Bogart**, whose touring production of "Rite" visited Bard College and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In this version, the victim is a traumatized soldier who gradually recalls he has committed a massacre. Fragmenting the score, with abrupt flashes of light and breaks for rambling dialogue, the collaborators pointed to humanity's yearning for ecstasy and underscored our tragic addiction to violence.

Drive East Festival: Amid the wealth of Indian dance performances that take place locally every year, the Drive East Festival, co-produced by **Navatman** and **Indian Raga**, offered something special: an attempt to re-create the intensity of the arts scene in Chennai. Making its debut at La MaMa, in August, Drive East presented no fewer than 26 dance and music concerts in a



week. The most outstanding performers included whirling Kathak virtuoso **Shambhavi Dandekar** and **Mandakini Trivedi**, a subtle mistress of the wave in Mohiniattam. Astonishingly painted, Kathakali soloist **Kalamandalam Shanmukhan** depicted the childhood and penances of the demon Ravana, his energy concentrated in fluttering cheek muscles, stamps and bellowing cries.

"Metamorphosis:" It seems fair to say that no one who saw "Metamorphosis" at the Joyce Theater in September will ever forget to take out the garbage again. The prospect of a giant insect moving in and squirting brown goo everywhere until the floor grows slippery, the walls are streaked and the bedclothes become a sticky mass is simply too horrible. Yet Kafka's tale of physical decay, and a family unable to cope, was poignantly danced by the limber **Edward Watson** and a cast that also featured **Nina Goldman, Bettina Carpi and Corey Annand**. An unforgettable encounter — and better at the Joyce than in the laundry room.



"Romeo and Juliet": Douglas Martin, the director of **American Repertory Ballet**, has a special affinity for "Romeo and Juliet." His production of the ballet, which appeared fully staged in October at the State Theatre in New Brunswick, moved seamlessly from one episode to the next, hitting all the passionate high-notes in Prokofiev's score. Though simply decorated, the production never failed to create a sense of place; and Martin's handling of the boisterous crowd scenes — making the company appear larger than its actual size — revealed his canny professionalism. This "Romeo" marked a watershed in the company's history.

"Borderlands," "Classical Symphony" and "Ghosts":When **San Francisco Ballet** visited Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in October, the rich menu included **Wayne McGregor's** dazzling, visual spectacle, "Borderlands"; **Yuri Possokhov's** lightning-fast "Classical Symphony"; and **Christopher Wheeldon's** contemporary "ballet blanc" called "Ghosts." Director **Helgi Tomasson** piled on the



premieres and the dancers were astonishing, especially supple **Maria Kochetkova**; ferocious **Sofiane Sylve**; and high-flying **Gennadi Nedvigin**; with **Yuan Yuan Tan** memorably displaying the purity of her line

in the adagio of "Suite en Blanc." Led by **Pascal Molat**, the men of the company received a wonderful showcase: playful, but susceptible to heartbreak in **Mark Morris'** oh-so-innocent "Beaux." If only San Francisco Ballet could return each year.

Loved and loathed

Loved: Amid a season of vibrant novelties, **Garth Fagan Dance** revived a gem from 1983. **Vitolio Jeune** was the sensitive hero catapulted into the past in "Easter Freeway Processional," at the Joyce Theater in November. Entranced by the music of **Philip Glass**, or joined in tableaux like human collages, the cast transported us back to a time of religious verities and social niceties. Here, couples



dreamed together, forming seemingly uncomplicated attachments, and no one looked behind the façade of a handshake and a smile. Fagan placed us in the middle of this Never-never land, yet we remained outside, too — watching everything as disillusioned strangers from a future yet-to-be. It paid to keep a tissue handy for the moment when, in a lunge, the women rested their heads so easily and trustingly on their partners' shoulders.

Loathed: Slickly choreographed, yet tawdry in concept, **Angelin Preljocaj's** "Spectral Evidence" for **New York City Ballet**, in September, turned the company's ballerinas into "witches," with red-hot bottoms peeping out from beneath their nightdresses. The icky costumes were by **Olivier Theyskens**, but we can thank Preljocaj for this sick fantasy in which the women were stereotyped as temptresses, scarred and punished with hellfire for seducing their saintly menfolk. Supposedly, this ballet was about the Salem witch trials, but don't blame the Puritans. Most of this choreographer's works catch him drooling.

Best surprise: Who would look at the tango dancers swinging from bungee cords in **Brenda Angiel's** whimsical, aerialist works and imagine this Argentinian choreographer paired with **Doug Varone**? As it turns out, Varone himself could see the possibilities and the match would be inspired. His collaboration with

Angiel and her company on "Bilingua," at BAM's Fishman Space in October, created a double dance floor with intersecting planes in space, and added a new dimension to Varone's already lush, organic patterns. The same performance saw a haunting rendition of his "Boats Leaving," capping a successful year for Varone that included the premiere of another multileveled piece, "Mouth Above Water," at the **92nd Street Y**, and the choreographer's intimate contribution to the **Martha Graham Dance Company's** series of "Lamentation Variations."

Most overrated: Just because a person can put classical steps together doesn't make him a choreographer. Great artists have visions that extend beyond the mechanics of glissade-jeté. **Alexei Ratmansky**, however, has trouble making ballets that are cogent wholes. This year, his "Shostakovich Trilogy" for **American Ballet Theatre** was marred by cliché, vulgarity and a bizarre taste for Soviet kitsch. His "Tempest," for the same company, proved garish and dramatically lame. Don't ask about the awkward costume change near the end of "From Foreign Lands," or about Ratmansky's hostility toward his ballerinas. Sadly, after so much mediocrity, it seems beyond hope that he may redeem himself.

Looking forward to:

Fukiko Takase in Wayne McGregor's 'Atomos'

Wearing 3-D glasses during the local premiere of **Wayne McGregor's "Atomos"** in March at Montclair State University. A work in McGregor's flashy, trademark style — with hyperextended limbs and wavelike movements of the torso — "Atomos" draws upon classic, science-fiction horror movies and explores the legacy of the atomic age. McGregor's frequent collaborator, Ravi Deepres, supplies the eye-popping videos, while the electronic music is titled "Winged Victory for the Sullen."



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