

December 31, 2009-January 13, 2010

Dance

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The best (and worst) of 2009

By **Gia Kourlas**

THE BEST

► **Julian Barnett**

At Danspace Project, *Sound Memory* was a happy surprise: a rigorous work for three dancers that started with the notion of a mixtape—as in, the now-ancient audiocassette. It created an evocative world of dance theater full of memory and imagination.

► **Ronald K. Brown**

For *Dancing Spirit*, his fourth work for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Brown started off methodically and powerfully—gradually easing the audience into his world—and concluded with a resplendent dance that conjured the spirits of the past by bringing them into the present.

► **Merce Cunningham Dance Company**

The choreographer's final year was momentous in terms of creativity, from the breathtaking *Nearly Ninety* (at BAM in April) and *Evening Stars* at Rockefeller Park (in August) to a series of *Events* at Dia: Beacon (one of the greatest places on earth). In October, Cunningham's memorial, held at the Park Avenue Armory, let the work shine; it felt sad, as it should, but it also felt right.

► **Trajal Harrell**

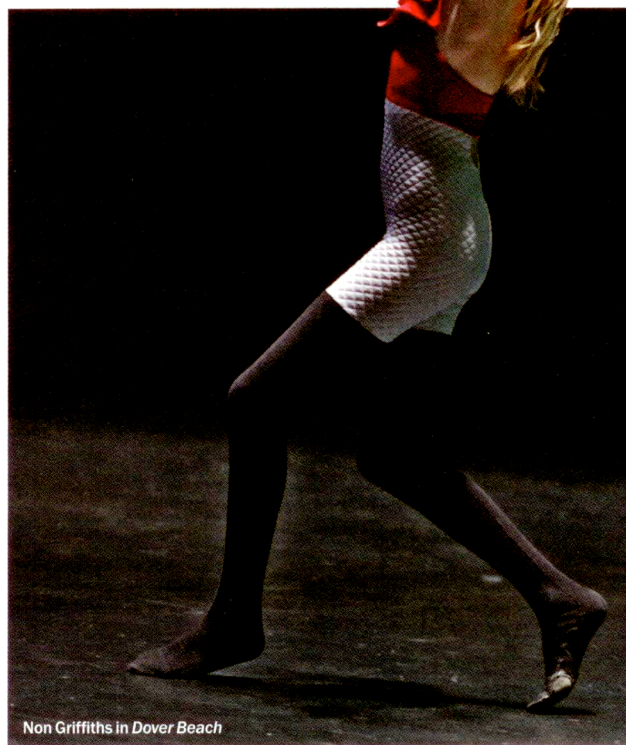
In the first version of his dance collection, *Twenty Looks or Paris Is Burning at the Judson Church (S)*, the choreographer created a brilliant look-book for the ages (it will be shown again on Thursday 7 and Friday 8).

► **Raimund Hoghe**

The German choreographer made an auspicious New York debut with a dazzling doubleheader: *Boléro Variations* (Dance Theater Workshop) and *L'Après-Midi* (Danspace Project).

► **Jodi Melnick**

One of New York's most beloved dancers, Melnick employed her articulation and fine delicacy as a



Non Griffiths in *Dover Beach*

choreographer in two works: *Fanfare*, a collaboration with visual artist Burt Barr, and the harrowing *Suedehead*.

► **Sarah Michelson**

Marking her return to the Kitchen, Michelson delivered *Dover Beach*, the most enchanting dance of the year: With a cast of 12 and a sweeping score by Pete Drungle, the evening-length production was all about movement—giving it shading, nuance and rhythmic punctuation, and rendering it pure.

► **Dean Moss and Yoon Jin Kim**

With carefully cultivated audience participation and a marvelous all-female Korean cast, two choreographers—one American, the

other Korean—explored ideas of sincerity and isolation in the chilling *Kisaeng becomes you*.

► **Ohad Naharin**

The Israeli choreographer made us go gaga with a pair of related dances: *Max*, for the Batsheva Dance Company at BAM, and *From Max and Three*, a masterful mash-up of two works for the students of the Juilliard School.

► **Alexei Ratmansky**

As American Ballet Theatre's artist in residence, Ratmansky has already taken substantial steps in rejuvenating the company with two major works under his belt—*On the Dnieper* and *Seven Sonatas*; he's the

best thing to happen to ballet (and ABT) since Twyla Tharp.

► **Paul Taylor**

In honor of his company's City Center season, Taylor brought back his 1963 work *Scudorama*—it remained a searing demonstration of darkness and desolation.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Pam Tanowitz's *Be in the Gray with Me*; Douglas Lee's *Lifecasting* for New York City Ballet; Mark Morris's *Romeo & Juliet*, *On Motifs of Shakespeare*; Miami City Ballet's season at New York City Center; Rennie Harris's *Philadelphia Experiment* for Philadanco; Melissa Barak's *A Simple Symphony* for New York City Ballet; and *Replica* (Jonah Bokaer, Judith Sanchez Ruiz and Daniel Arsham).

THE WORST

► **Complexions Contemporary Ballet:**

Beyond the dreadful choreography, here's a burning question: In a group called Complexions, where are the black ballerinas?

► **Individual dances from hell:**

Lightfoot León's *Softly as I Leave You*, for Morphoses/The Wheelon Company, and David Parsons's *Remember Me*.

► **Lincoln Center Festival:** The dance category just gets more and more horrid. Thanks, Nigel Redden, for making dance irrelevant on a festival scale.

► **New York City Ballet:** If a company is going to, say, lay off a bunch of dancers—not so unjustifiable given the economic times—it probably shouldn't also hold on to the director's son.

Report card: The plus is largely due to Sarah Michelson and Alexei Ratmansky. Bravery needs to make a comeback.

FINAL GRADE: B+