

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Dancing at the Department Store

Ann Haskins · Wednesday, February 7th, 2018

A dancing tour of an architectural gem in Mid-City, African American migration and art in Northridge, an Odyssey festival ends in West L.A., immigrant stories in West Adams, Canadian visitors on resilience in Santa Monica, a Bessie-award winner returns to downtown and more this busy SoCal dance week.

5. Watching their stepping

In 60 colorful canvases, Harlem painter Jacob Lawrence audaciously tackled the original involuntary migration from Africa through the more volitional African-American migration from the rural south to the industrializing north starting with World War I. Drawing on African percussive dance traditions and incorporating the percussive African-American dance style known as stepping, **Step Afrika** draws inspiration from Lawrence's paintings in *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*. Replicas of some of Lawrence's paintings join the dancers onstage as part of this dance performance. The New York Times gave the company a strong review, praising the company's ability to present stepping as more than an entertaining routine, unlocking its ability to tell a story. Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge; Fri., Feb. 9, 8 p.m., \$33-\$78. ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org.



Step Afrika's "The Migration." Photo courtesy of the artists.

4. An Odyssey ends

L.A. boasts a number of dance festivals, most with lots of troupes offering brief samples from their repertoire. Several years ago, the Odyssey Theater launched a festival that is more of a planned meal than a smorgasbord, giving an entire weekend (sometimes two) to a few noteworthy local troupes. **Dance at the Odyssey 2018** closes this week with choreographer **Corina Kinnear**'s provocatively titled *Naked*. An art installation by Gina Teichert, a photo series by Babette Delafayette and live music by L.A. indie band Silent Scream provide context for Kinnear's dance exploration of what she describes as "non-sexualized human nudity". Long known as one of L.A.'s most respected theater companies, the Odyssey producers Barbara Mueller-Wittmann and Beth Hogan admirably have extended their reach to showcase L.A. dance. Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., West L.A.; Thurs.-Fri., Feb. 8-9, 8 p.m., \$15-\$25. <http://odysseytheatre.com>.



Okwui Okpokwasil. Photo courtesy of the artist.

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3. Another African consideration

Following her triumphant 2014 L.A. debut in *Bronx Gothic*, **Okwui Okpokwasili** returns with *Poor People's TV Room*. This L.A. premiere considers the Nigerian women's resistance movement and perceived collective amnesia on their struggle. A performer able to rivet an audience with her use of movement, song, video and text, Okpokwasili arrives aided by dancer/performers Thuli Dumakude, Katrina Reid and Nehemoya Young. REDCAT, 631 W. 2nd St., downtown; Thurs.-Sat., Feb. 8-10, 8:30 p.m., Sun., Feb. 11, 7 p.m., \$30-\$35, \$26-\$28 students. 213-237-2800, <http://redcat.org>.



Danza Floricanto/USA. Photo by Frank Sandoval.

2. Why they are here

Don't expect to see only the usual Mexican folkloric dancing (although there is some of that) as choreographer Gema Sandoval and her **Danza Floricant/USA** return with eight more episodes in their dance series *Immigrant Stories*. Inspired by first-hand accounts, the dances bring to the stage compelling stories of individuals who contribute the genuine things that still make this country a beacon to the rest of the world. Rosenthal Theatre, Inner City Arts, 720 Kohler St., West Adams District; Sat., Feb. 10, 8 p.m., \$20 in advance, \$25 at door. <http://www.danzafloricantusa.org/store.php>.



Diavolo's Veteran Project. Photo courtesy of Diavolo.

1. A night at a human zoo

Built in 1929 by the architect who also styled Yosemite's Ahwahnee Hotel, Desmond's Department Store was a glittering anchor for the the elegant department stores that once lined the Miracle Mile stretch of Wilshire Boulevard. Several innovative performance groups team up for *The Performance Zoo* with organizers Jacques Heim's **Diavolo** and Diavolo alums Jones and Anna Maria Talmadge who now head their own **Not Man Apart**. *The Performance Zoo* offers a site specific tour of this historic site with dance, music, theater, comedy, circus and other artistic endeavors. With a range of ticket prices, the event offers options that in addition to the performances include food, drinks, parking and even an pre-performance rooftop dinner in the top ticket price. All proceeds benefit Diavolo's Veterans Project which has been working with veterans from the current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and veterans from the Vietnam war. The first, deeply impressive result was seen last fall as part of Diavolo's day-long 25th anniversary celebration. The Veterans' Project next heads to Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center. A chance to have fun and do good at the same time. Desmond's Historic Department Store Building, 5514 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-City; Fri.-Sat., Feb. 9-10, 8 p.m., \$10-\$100. <https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3237590>.

Other dance of note:

Scheduled to open the Festival International de Arts Escenicas in the Panama Canal Zone, **Rosanna Gamson/World Wide** offers a preview with *LOVE IS IN THE AIR: ¡Party for Panamá!* This party with dance, music, food, drinks, magical guest performers, poetry, prizes, and surprises will help fund the company's travel and performance. Downtown Dance & Movement, 1144 South Hope St., downtown; Sun., Feb. 11, 4 p.m., \$30, \$50 for two, \$20 students. RSVP to Tsarina.rgww@gmail.com.



Rosanna Gamson/World Wide. Photo courtesy of the artists.

The sophisticated grace of Fred Astaire inspired *Astaire Dances* as **American Contemporary Ballet** recreates several memorable moments from Astaire's films. Several dances were presented in ACB's third season and are reprised here with some new additions. *Astaire Dances*: ACB Studios, 700 S. Flower St., Suite 3200, downtown; Thurs.-Sat., Feb. 8-10, 8 p.m., Sun., Feb. 11, 4 p.m., Tues.-Wed., Feb. 13-14, 8 p.m., \$40-\$105. <http://acbdances.com>.



American Contemporary Ballet. Photo courtesy of ACB.

A granddaughter's dreams is the starting point for *A Jewish Child's Story*, presented by **Louise Reichlin & Dancers** in this free performance that includes dancing and discussion. Culver City Senior Center, 4095 Overland Ave., Culver City; Sun., Feb. 11, free. 310-253-6700. <http://www.culvercity.org/live/community-neighborhood/adult-senior-services/senior-center>.



Louise Reichlin & Dancers. Photo courtesy of the artists.

One of the few dance events in this year's *Fireside at the Miles* series features choreographer **Angela Todaro** and her dancers. The charming series offers performances in the historic playhouse with an open fire and organic snacks/beverages for purchase. Miles Memorial Playhouse, 1130 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica; Sat., Feb. 10, 8 p.m., \$10, \$5 seniors, youth & students.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/dance-by-the-fire-angela-todaro-dance-fireside-at-the-miles-tickets-41194173883?aff=MilesBlastDecember>.

Two Canadian companies, **Kidd Pivot** and **Electric Company Theatre**, join forces in choreographer Crystal Pite's *Betroffenheit*. Directed by Pite and written by Jonathon Young, the starting point was the death of Young's daughter, but the overarching theme is how humans move through and emerge from trauma. The Broad Stage, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica; Wed.-Fri., Feb. 14-16, 7:30 p.m., \$45-\$95. <http://thebroadstage.org>.

The dancers and other performers who comprise Chicago's **Lucky Plush Productions** arrive with *Trip the Light Fantastic: The Making of SuperStrip* considering has-been superheroes who start a non-profit think tank. The troupe promises dance theater swirled with comic-book graphics, emersive video, and improvisation as the superheroes' quest to build a better world encounter real world problems that are not just a singular force of evil. USC Bovard Auditorium, 3551 Trousdale Parkway, West Adams; Mon., Feb. 12, 7:30 p.m., free with reservation. http://crue.usc.edu/visionevents/rsvp/makeReservation_2.php?event_id=966288&RSVPEventCode=74.

In conjunction with a Degas exhibit, a Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly dance film is offered with museum admission each Friday in February. This week it's Astaire with Ginger Rogers in *Swing Time* (1936). Next up, Gene Kelly in *American in Paris* (1951) and the series closes with Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952). Norton Simon Museum, 411 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena; Fri. thru Feb. 23, 5:30 p.m., free with museum admission \$15, \$12 seniors, free 18 & under. 626-449-6840, <http://nortonsimon.org>.

From their 1976 debut on the Muppet Show, the human puppets that cavort about the stage as **Mummenschanz** continue to amuse and charm with their distinctive blend of masks, choreography, props, and lighting. Valley Performing Arts Center, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge; Sun., Feb. 11, 3 p.m., \$23-\$63. <http://www.valleyperformingartscenter.org>.

A merry go round is the unusual setting for *An Illegal Start*, a theatrical pas de deux about two men who seek refuge in an abandoned merry go round after a serious accident. The restored Santa Monica pier merry go round portrays the refuge as director Paul Sand and playwright James Harris take the audience on a circular story of the two men's relationship. Santa Monica Pier Merry Go Round, 200 Santa Monica Pier (Colorado and Ocean Aves.), Santa Monica; Sat., Feb. 10, then Fri.-Sat., Feb. 16-17, 23-24, Fri., March 2, Fri.-Sat., March 9-10, 8 p.m., \$24-\$30. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/an-illegal-start-theatre-in-the-merry-go-round-tickets-42150009814>.

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