

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

#LADance on the Rise

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, June 6th, 2018

Right now, and *finally*, there is a seismic cultural shift happening for Los Angeles dance. It is long overdue and long awaited, and happening in part because many of the old paradigms attached to dance no longer serve. It used to be that as a dancer you graduated from college or the equivalent in comprehensive studio studies and flew to NY to get a job dancing with a company, or perhaps on Broadway. Now ... not so much. There are many more companies than available funds and performance opportunities, and many are struggling to stay afloat. Established New York companies that used to only perform solo are partnering up to make performances affordable, and young dancers there are finding it more difficult to make ends meet with just company work.

Thus the once maligned alternative that LA presented of dancers and choreographers jumping between company and commercial work—and let's face it, dance for film and television or as entertainment is not going anywhere anytime soon—is being seen as a really viable alternative. Many of my own dancers go from dancing with me or other contemporary LA choreographers to touring with Lorde or Dua Lipa or whoever is the latest musical flavor of the month, stretching their pennies simply in order to do both. And the sprawling physical and cultural diaspora that is Los Angeles has made for new approaches to presenting dance, with dance makers looking to site-specific and alternative sites for performance. Even mainstream presenters like CAP UCLA and The Music Center are following suit, partially in an attempt to reach new audiences and communities outside of their traditional site lines, but with (to my eyes) great results. And both are booking more LA dance as well. And let's not forget the presence of the relatively new USC Gloria Kaufman School of Dance. With its visionary faculty under the direction of Jodie Gates, including the likes of William Forsythe, and a curriculum that mixes classical, contemporary, commercial, street and beyond to produce absolutely stellar dancers, it is emerging to be a kind of Julliard West. Because of all this and more, plenty of emerging and established choreographers and dancers are moving here in droves.



Lula Washington Dance Theater

And if that's not proof enough, the arrival in Los Angeles this week of the national conference Dance/USA and BODYTRAFFIC's 10 year anniversary marked last week by their stellar performance at The Wallis—another venue that is starting to regularly feature dance by LA choreographers—are notable.

BODYTRAFFIC was amongst the first of LA companies to have gained international notoriety both for their performances and teaching as cultural ambassadors, traveling to countries such as Israel, Jordan, and Algeria. The clear vision of directors Lillian Barbeito and Tina Finkelman Berkett is matched only by their stellar dancers—especially Berkett and the unbelievable Guzman Rosado who seems only to get more amazing and otherworldly with each passing year. Yet another feather in LA’s cap.



BODYTRAFFIC at The Wallis

Happening the same weeks as Dance/USA, LA’s own Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) has insightfully created a Dance Platform that introduces invited individuals to selected LA dance to “showcase its breadth, excellence, diversity, and aesthetic.” This initiative, designed by DCA’s own Director of Performing Arts Ben Johnson, is a brilliant way to celebrate the rise of LA dance, and—full disclosure—I am privileged to be a part of it. Amongst others including LA icon Debbie Allen, Dance/USA is also honoring LA’s very own Lula & Erwin Washington, whose “Afro-centric” company Lula Washington Dance Theater and school located in LA’s inner city have been a staple, successfully both serving young aspiring dancers and touring for years.

Many other markers include internationally recognized companies like Ate9, LA Dance Project and Diavolo—and these are just a few of the more known companies—alternative site-specific performance events like last week’s Donna Sternberg and Dancers Metro Dances II, this week’s Santa Monica Cultural Affairs [Beach Dances](#), a myriad of really viable summer intensives including AXIS CONNECT (in both NY and LA) and much, much, more prove to be grounds for further commemoration. And young emerging companies too numerous to name are brilliantly staking their own claim in this vast LA landscape of city, mountains, sea, and sky.



Jay Carlon performs Four Triangles as part of Beach Dances

After years of being marginalized internationally, dance in Los Angeles is finally having its moment on the world stage. There is so much going on in dance every weekend that it’s difficult to see it all. Dancers, dance makers, and dance enthusiasts have much to celebrate. As someone who has been on the frontlines both pushing and waiting many years for this shift, I am beyond thrilled, and I look forward to seeing this new moment, and this new paradigm, last a long, long time.

Hello #ladance!

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