



Dance highlights of 2011 in Cleveland

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By **Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer**

Dance makes its presence known in Cleveland only in spurts, but there was much to savor in 2011. Our local companies had a productive year -- several celebrated milestones -- and audiences were treated to everything from classical ballet to dance of the most contemporary kind.

Aszure Barton & Artists: The New York dance company, presented by DanceCleveland, made a disarming Cleveland debut in October with a program that revealed its artistic director's uncanny ability to devise works in which the dancers' personalities are key elements in the

narrative scheme of things. In two pieces, "Les Chambres de Jacques" and "Busk," the company engaged in whimsical and dark scenarios sparked by striking images, daring physical feats and intriguing thematic ideas.

Dancing Wheels: The Cleveland company for dancers with and without disabilities celebrated its 30th anniversary with an action-packed extravaganza in June at the Agora that included an appearance by Gloria Gaynor performing her signature song, "I Will Survive" -- twice. But the evening's highlight was the world premiere of Dianne McIntyre's "Dancing on a Dream," an affectionate and exhilarating work saluting the life and career of the company's indomitable artistic director, Mary Verdi-Fletcher.

Eifman Ballet: Classical ballet doesn't make many appearances in downtown Cleveland these days. So it was startling to encounter the charismatic artistry of the Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg, Russia, in May in artistic director Boris Eifman's grandiose full-length work, "Don Quixote, or Fantasies of a Madman." The production, set in an insane asylum, put a bizarre spin on Cervantes' beloved tale, but the dancing was so disciplined and animated that the company easily won over a ballet-deprived public.



Courtesy of Eifman Ballet

Eifman Ballet's production of "Don Quixote, or Fantasies of a Madman" was a dance highlight last year.

GroundWorks DanceTheater: David Shimotakahara's modern-dance company can be counted on to come up with new and intriguing ideas in motion. Two works stood out in 2011: Shimotakahara's sensitive adaptation of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" and Lynne Taylor-Corbett's "Hindsight," a tribute to Akron rocker Chrissie Hynde and her band, the Pretenders. The former condensed the beloved tale into a sweet and sweeping narrative. The latter used Hynde songs to evoke scenes of cheeky fun and poetic intensity.

Inlet Dance Theatre: The Cleveland dance company led by Bill Wade celebrated its 10th birthday in November with a program of revivals and a fine world premiere, "Let Go." To music by Ryan Lott, Wade's frequent collaborator, the piece explores issues of alienation and acceptance through a series of intimate and ensemble episodes. The work runs only 10 minutes, but its impact is powerful. The program included Wade's "Stone by Stone," a touching study of the need to connect and make a difference.

Joffrey Ballet: The noted Chicago dance company made its third summer appearance with the Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom Music Center in works by Julia Adam, Lar Lubovitch, Christopher Wheeldon and George Balanchine, whose "Stravinsky Violin Concerto" was particularly admired by freelance writer Mark Satola: "Balanchine's understanding of Stravinsky's playful and emotionally complex score resulted in a finale that was delightfully contrapuntal and, in the two pas de deux, profoundly moving."

Riolt: The New York dance company made a winning Cleveland debut in April in works set to music by Ravel and Bach. Artistic director Pascal Riolt's version of "Wien" (danced to Ravel's "La Valse") is a dark, expressionistic glimpse into a society on the verge of collapse, while his take on Ravel's "Bolero" treats the dancers as robots pining for liberation. States of nature are suggested in "Views of the Fleet World," a series of inventive pieces set to music from Bach's "The Art of the Fugue" that showed the Riolt dancers at their gleaming best.



Basil Childers

Members of the New York dance company Riolt performed artistic director Pascal Riolt's "Wien," set to Maurice Ravel's "La Valse," during their Cleveland debut in April.

Verb Ballets: The Cleveland modern-dance company had an exciting year in 2011, including the move to its first permanent home (Christ Episcopal Church in Shaker Heights). On the premiere front, Verb presented Antonio Brown's buoyant "Continuum" and Ginger Thatcher's feisty update of "Billy the Kid." The latter shared an American program with excellent revivals of Martha Graham's "Appalachian Spring" (set to music by Aaron Copland, also composer of "Billy the Kid") and Hernando Cortez's "Chichester Psalms" (with music by Leonard Bernstein).

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