
Six Game-Changing Productions of 2015

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In a year filled with wonderful dance productions, here are six that graced local stages and proved game-changers for the artist, presenter or art form.

Malpaso Dance Company (Kelly-Strayhorn Theater, Feb. 27-28). Malpaso's Pittsburgh appearance was one of the company's first forays outside of New York in exposing U.S. audiences to Cuban contemporary dance. For the Kelly-Strayhorn, the company's appearance featured two U.S. premieres, and also showed that the theater could land a production usually reserved for much larger presenters, like the Pittsburgh Dance Council.

Usually the domain of the world's largest ballet companies, the exotic Middle Eastern-themed story ballet was the company's largest undertaking in its 43-year history. The milestone production was just one of many upgrades to PBT's repertoire made by artistic director Terrence Orr in 2015.

Scottish Ballet's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Byham Theater, May 19). This 2012 ballet, a British Critics' Circle award-winner, turned the international dance spotlight on Glasgow's Scottish Ballet with an ingenious combination of Tennessee Williams' storytelling, choreography by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and theatrical staging by U.K. theater/film director Nancy Meckler. The resulting production was nothing short of perfection.

CorningWorks' *Beckett & Beyond* (New Hazlett Theater, Sept. 9-13). In another stellar blending of dance and theater, dancer/choreographer Beth Corning brought together her decades of dance-making experience in the U.S. and Sweden to create a work that had the look and feel of one you might see on stage in Stockholm or Berlin. With an exceptional cast and concept, *Beckett & Beyond* proved a seminal work for Corning.

Aakash Odera Company' *Rising* (Byham Theater, Nov. 6). Like the recent tour of former New York City Ballet star Wendy Whelan, noted kathak dancer Aakash Odera veered outside his stylistic lane by enlisting several world-class contemporary-dance choreographers to create solos on him. But where Whelan and other ballet stars stretching their stylistic wings is somewhat commonplace, Odera's leap from traditional Indian dance to his brilliant

performances in *Rising* were art-form-transforming.

Cas Public's *Symphonie Dramatique* (Hillman Center, Nov. 14). Shady Side Academy's Hillman Center for Performing Arts hosted the U.S. premiere of this work by the Montreal-based contemporary-dance company. Like *Malpaso* at the Kelly-Strayhorn, it was a serendipitous game-changer for the center, whose programming had flown under the radar.
