

Success stories of the year

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DANCE CRITIC

THE TORONTO STAR

Seven examples from the 2007 season that illustrate how to win over an audience for dance:

The dancers of the National Ballet of Canada doffed slippers and pointe shoes and put on sneakers to perform West Side Story Suite in an evening tribute to choreographer Jerome Robbins. They even sang. The audiences came in droves: 22,992 of them filled or nearly filled all the seats in the Four Seasons Centre. About 40 per cent of the ticket buyers were new to the National Ballet.

Denise Clarke, of Calgary's One Yellow Rabbit, mimed, danced and moved from the sublime to the ridiculous to the more ridiculous in Sign Language, turning stage tricks with the agility of a Chinese acrobat. The show came to Factory Studio Theatre in the spring and again to the Young Centre in the fall.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater sold out three nights at the 3,000-seat Sony Centre with an all-out, dance-your-pants-off evening that combined the best of contemporary ballet dancers, dazzling b-boys and modern moves and had the whole house rocking.

They lined up, they stayed up and they hung out in the cold to watch site-specific performance on Nuit Blanche. A 12-hour dance installation directed by Diana Groenendijk and Karen Kaeja at the Casa Loma stables featured 20 of the city's finest dancers. Kathleen Rea drew crowds with eight dancers and a giant piece of knitting in Parkdale. Yvonne Ng put on an Asian street festival on Cecil St. as dancers mingled with singers, actors, musicians and fortunetellers.

Cirque du Soleil's Kooza, choreographed by Clarence Ford, featured clowns, acrobats, "death-defying" acts, a big Vegas-style production number and skeletons with beat boxes in their costumes. The show earned two holdovers to run for more than 10 weeks in the big tent in the port lands.

If the public won't come to ballet, ballet can always go to them. Ballet Jörgen took Cinderella and The Emperor's New Clothes to Earle Bales and Etienne Brule parks. About 4,200 people attended and roughly 60 per cent were new viewers for the company. About 1,500 had never been to a dance performance.

Toronto had never seen anything quite like Traces, a show from Montreal's Sept doigts de la main, featuring five virtuosic and multi-talented young performers who could do unimaginable magic at the piano, on a skateboard, a trapeze, in a big steel hoop or bouncing a basketball.