

## THE BEST OF 2001

# Backstage ferment, glorious movement

By Christine Temin

GLOBE STAFF

This year saw the end of one dance era in Boston and the aborting of another before it began. Dance Umbrella, for two decades the region's leading presenter of nearly every sort of dance except classical ballet, folded at the close of its 2001 spring season. Its dissolution was due to irreconcilable differences between founding director Jeremy Alliger and his board.

Meanwhile, Boston Ballet had hired Maina Gielgud as artistic director designate, scheduled to take over this past July. But Gielgud bolted months before. As with Alliger, she and the board didn't see eye to eye. Eventually, the board hired Mikko Nissinen, a Finnish-born dancer turned director whose formative years were spent working with a fellow Scandinavian, Helgi Tomasson, at San Francisco Ballet. Nissinen seems ideally qualified for the Boston job. The real issue is whether the Boston Ballet trustees are qualified for *theirs*.

While making grand pronouncements about becoming one of the 10 best companies in the world by 2010 — which sounds oddly reminiscent of Soviet Five Year Plans — the Ballet board hasn't come up with the money to do that. The company desperately needs to tour, which it hasn't in a decade. It needs a new opera house facility of 2,500 seats and the good sightlines its current home, the Wang Theatre, lacks. It needs more rehearsal time and more performances.

All this requires a huge financial commitment from the board, backed up by the community. Perhaps his San Francisco experience will arm Nissinen for the struggle. San Francisco now regularly performs in the world's top venues: Covent Garden in London; the Paris Opera's Palais Garnier. But it took money from the San Francisco board to get the ball — and the Ballet — rolling.

The institutions that are trying to fill the gap left by Dance Umbrella's demise are the FleetBoston Celebrity Series and World

Music and its contemporary division, CRASHarts. World Music brought Noche Flamenca to Boston for a program of purity and passion, flamenco at its classical best — and a good warm-up to the flamenco festival the presenter will offer next month.

In these lean times, organizations are collaborating on pricey presentations. The Celebrity Series and the Wang Center joined forces to bring England's Royal Ballet to Boston to perform a standard-setting "Swan Lake." In skill and style, the Royal offered world-class dancing. Visits to Boston by big classical companies have been rare in the last decade; the Royal's was the first event in the Celebrity Series/Wang plan to import one big ballet troupe a year for five years.

The Celebrity Series teamed with another local organization, the New England Foundation for the Arts, to present Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project in "PASTforward," old works and new by the radical choreographers of the Judson Dance Theater, which redefined modern dance in the 1960s. Baryshnikov is generally regarded as the epitome of glamor; Judson was allergic to it. How ironic that Baryshnikov, with his name recognition and box-office clout, is the only dancer who could sell a program in which he did a turn playing onstage propmeister and cleanup crew.

NEFA got together with the Asia Society and Lisa Booth Management, both in New York, to produce the ambitious "Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia," which was both gorgeous spectacle and poignant saga. The Khmer Rouge almost wiped out the country's court dance tradition — almost. For the past few years, after decades of economic and political turmoil, the dancers who remember the tradition have been teaching and reviving it, chiefly at the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. The result is that Cambodia's dance heritage is, bit by bit, being saved.

There was good news and bad from Cambridge. Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre moved from Boston to

## DANCE | Christine Temin

The 10 best events of 2001, in no particular order.

- **Dance: The Spirit of Cambodia**, at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival
- **England's Royal Ballet** in "Swan Lake" at the Wang Theatre
- **Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre** in "Resurgence" at the Sanctuary Theatre, Cambridge
- **Anna Myer and Dancers** at the Orpheum in Foxborough
- **Noche Flamenca** at the Emerson Majestic Theatre
- **White Oak Dance Project** in "PASTforward" at the Shubert Theatre
- **Boston Ballet** in "From Distant Shores" at the Wang Theatre
- **The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company** at the Emerson Majestic Theatre
- **Goldhuber & Latsky** at the Emerson Majestic Theatre
- **"Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime of Dance,"** a PBS television documentary



Tamara Rojo as Odette in the Royal Ballet's "Swan Lake," which brought world-class dance to Boston.

new quarters in the Old Cambridge Baptist Church, where it has handsome studios, an intimate performance space — and a 20-year lease that assures stability. The inaugural program, "Resurgence," showed off Mateo's lucid, lyrical choreography and his dancers' commitment to it. On a sadder note, this month the 10-year lease the founders of Green Street Studios had on their Central Square facility ran out and the landlord wanted to raise the rent to unaffordable heights. Green Street, which had become a prime venue for excellent classes and performances, has a six-month extension on its current quarters, which will take it through June. The organization's principals are trying to relocate to a building they can *buy*, so they'll never be in the same situation again.

Many of Boston's best modern-dance choreographers have to produce their own concerts, sav-

ing up all year to pay for a weekend onstage. Not surprisingly, burnout leads some to move to more hospitable climes — or to quit. This is why the appearance of Anna Myer and Dancers at the Orpheum in Foxborough, a 427-seat converted movie theater, is so important. The Orpheum acted as presenter so Myer was free to do what she does best — make dances. Her choreography blends ballet's clarity with her own idiosyncratic vocabulary and emotions that tend toward the tender.

Boston Ballet presents so many full-length story ballets drowning in decor and starving for steps that its "From Distant Shores" triple bill came as a wonderful relief. Works by Nacho Duato, Rudi Van Dantzig, and Lila York showed off the company's chief strength — the high level of performance the dancers can produce when the material warrants it.

One of the most comforting moments of the dance year came with the PBS documentary "Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime of Dance," which showed the octogenarian choreographer diving into the computer world and 21st-century technology to aid in creating his art. As for the much-missed Dance Umbrella, it went out on a high. The Umbrella had produced work by Bill T. Jones for a decade. For its final season, it offered not only Jones in his 80-minute solo tour de force, "You Walk?" but also, through the "Bill T. Jones Legacy Project," presented two troupes led by former Jones dancers: the Sean Curran Company and Goldhuber & Latsky. An important move in tracing the history of an ephemeral art, it also ended the history of Dance Umbrella.