

2003 DANCE

A revitalized Boston Ballet among local legacies to celebrate

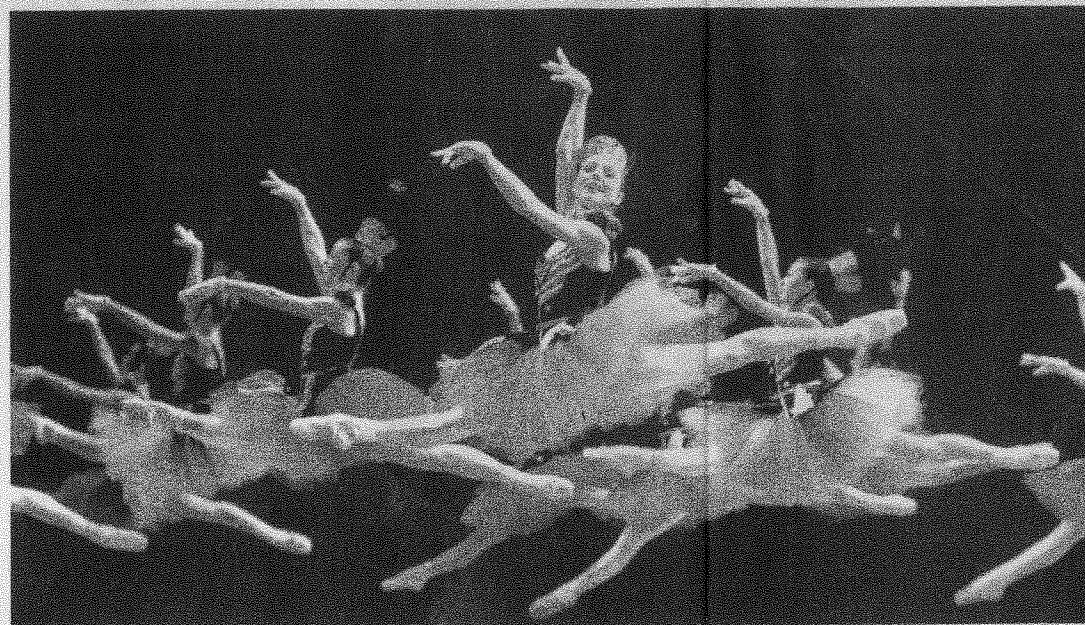
Performances by Dance Collective, Jose Mateo troupe were also standouts

By Christine Temin
GLOBE STAFF

The dance year in Boston ended on a sad note. The Wang Center plans to evict Boston Ballet's "The Nutcracker" next year to bring in the "Radio City Christmas Spectacular" — the touring, canned-music version, not the one based in New York. Boston Ballet is scrambling to find another space for the holiday favorite, which will be tough. This elaborate "Nutcracker" production was constructed specifically for the Wang Theatre. The Radio City show, on the other hand, was built to travel.

On the plus side, the Wang and the FleetBoston Celebrity Series joined forces to bring Russia's Kirov Ballet and Orchestra to Boston for four performances of an all-Fokine program. It was brave not to do one of the reliably popular evening-length classics, and the decision paid off: The show sold out three of its four performances. The choreography was vintage, the dancing revitalized. The success also demonstrated that there is a public for ballet in Boston.

Still, presenters and dance companies are finding it increasingly difficult to book — and then to fill — suitable spaces around town. In the case of the Kirov, its exoticism and the fact that so few big classical companies come to Boston helped with the box office. Boston Ballet has a different set of problems: People assume it will always be there, so they don't feel any urgency about attending. Many former fans still cringe when remembering "Dracula," a low point in the company's history, without realizing that it predated the arrival of artistic director Mikko Nissinen. In his year and a half at the helm, Nissinen has transformed the troupe, adding stars including Lorna Feijoo, a Cuban-born principal who joined



GLOBE STAFF FILE PHOTO/DOMINIC CHAVEZ

Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes" was a high point in the year for Boston Ballet, a company that has been transformed by new artistic director Mikko Nissinen.

program demonstrated an ability to tackle not just any works by the master, but some of the most devilishly difficult ones, including "Ballo della Regina." The company danced Balanchine works in its fall repertory program, too, along with a brooding piece by the contemporary English choreographer David Dawson. Both Dawson and his work are new to Boston; Nissinen is determined not to rely on revivals. His problem now is getting the word out about the company. There's nothing like a tour with good reviews to make the folks back home appreciate what they've got.

One of Boston Ballet's assets is the Grand Studio on the top floor of its Clarendon Street headquarters. It doubles as a small, informal theater that the company should take advantage of more frequently, to give patrons a much closer relationship with dance than they get at the Wang. The Grand Studio used to be home to a series called "Dance on the Top Floor," which this year relocated to the Robsham Theater at Boston College, where there are better sightlines, more seating, and parking that is but a dream in the South End. If the venue has



PHOTO/VALENTIN BARANOVSKY

Russia's Kirov Ballet and Orchestra brought an acclaimed program of vintage dances by Michel Fokine, including "Chopiniana" (above), to Boston.

always a mixed bag, which can be an advantage: The variety in quality helps sharpen viewers' eyes.

More real estate news this year: Green Street Studios in Cam-

bridge, where Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre holds a 41-year lease, represents a real estate victory. Over the past couple of years, the company has gradually transformed

and his dancers have grown into the space.

"Sanctuary" is a serendipitous name for a church that's been turned into a haven for dance. At

CHRISTINE TEMIN'S PICKS

- **Kirov Ballet and Orchestra** in an all-Fokine program at the Wang Theatre
 - **Noche Flamenca** at the Cutler Majestic Theatre at Emerson College
 - **"Undercurrents,"** performed by Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre in the Sanctuary Theatre, Cambridge
 - **"All Balanchine,"** performed by Boston Ballet at the Wang Theatre
 - **Balanchine's "Stars and Stripes,"** performed by Boston Ballet at the Wang Theatre
 - **"Recent + Revisited Dances by Daniel McCusker"** at the Dance Complex, Cambridge
 - **Mark Morris Dance Group** at the Shubert Theatre
 - **"Dangling by a Thread: Dance Collective 30th Anniversary Gala Concert"** at the Tsai Performance Center
 - **Merce Cunningham Dance Company** at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Becket
 - **"Dance on the Top Floor"** at the Robsham Theater, Boston College, Chestnut Hill
- Globe correspondent Thea Singer contributed to this report.*

anniversary celebration. On the program was one of Cunningham's "Events," which he describes as "like something that could be going on always, and you chance to see this part of it."

A local success story in longevity is the Boston-based Dance Collective, which turned 30 this year. Its aptly titled "Dangling by a Thread" program was a celebration not only of that anniversary, but of the career of Dawn Kramer, who became the last of the founding directors to retire. Her "Walk in Progress," a clever mix of live dance and music with video, showed that Kramer departed at the top of her form, something many dancers aren't willing to do.

One of the saddest events in Boston dance this year was the death of Julie Ince Thompson, at 51. Thompson was one of the finest choreographers ever to grace a Boston stage. Her evening-length tour de force "Tamsen Donner: A Woman's Journey" was a stunning solo in which she sang, spoke, and danced the saga of the heroic pioneer woman. Tragically, "Tamsen Donner" was never properly preserved on film or video.

Thompson was a much-loved figure as teacher, mentor, guiding