

## Dance Celebration Dances on With Stellar Line-Up

**Low Whittington** Arts & culture journalist | Posted: 10/21/2014 8:51 pm EDT Updated: 10/21/2014 8:59 pm EDT

Those unabashedly buff *Ballet Boyz*, late of the Royal Ballet; kick off the 2014-15 Dance Celebration season this month as part of artistic director Randy Swartz's programming that includes performances by seven international companies. For three decades Swartz has nurtured the Annenberg Center as a vital venue for every genre of dance arts- from classical ballet to the iconic American companies of Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp, Merce Cunningham, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane and Martha Graham, just to mention a few.



BalletBoyz (photo: Panayiotis Sinnos)

In an interview this month, Swartz admitted that it has been more difficult in recent years as the arts have continued to be diminishing grants, corporate underwriting drying up and a drop in subscription sales. The series only receives a relatively meager grant from the city of Philadelphia, still, "We're among very few venues who present such a variety. Jacob's Pillow, The Joyce, American Dance Festival and only a few others," he said a week before the season opener.

Because dance companies routinely have to schedule performance tours two years in advance, the current season looked dicey, with full funding not cleared until late spring. It was so down to the wire this year and it hurt advance publicity and sales.

Even with these escalating challenges, Swartz says, "The artistic work continues to be more exciting, innovative and artistically sound." But, past those hassles and being "Constantly worried," Swartz's enthusiasm and commitment is unbending. Swartz cites the inherent risks in presenting such a wide range of artists, new and old. "In some respects because we don't present a single unified artistic focus," he said.

"We had to wait for to secure the funding to announce to the public the upcoming season. In spite of the fact that we make a high percentage of our budget through ticket sales, we still had to wait until May this year for other funding to be in place," Swartz explained.

Still, Swartz has been able to build 'key' audiences for diverse dance-theater styles and is particularly proud that "we've commissioned work, presented world premieres, brought back artists on a continuing basis that supports their creative efforts and development. We're a dance presenter which is not always a draw in itself," but "without this mechanism in place," Swartz said.

Swartz's theme this year is 'visionary voices' and international dance includes seven companies from other countries starting with *BalletBoyz* which began five years ago by Royal Ballet dancers William Trevitt and Michael Dunn, left the ballet and started to chronicle the lives of dancers on video, which became very popular in England.

Noting their innovative approach Swartz notes, "The BalletBoyz evolved into a serious dance company doing it in an unconventional way that completely connects to audiences. Now they are a troupe of ten men, all extraordinary dancers." For the Philly performances, they will perform works by Russell Maliphant and Liam



Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre (ph: Adam Reign)

Scarlett, who are choreographers in residence at the Royal ballet.

*Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre* makes its Philly debut with two "Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret and Dining Alone." Rosie Herrera is part of our initiative of new choreographic voices. She is Cuban-American and South Beach is her dance playground with an aesthetic that reflects a 21st century point of view. She's been called the Pina Bausch of South Beach. Gender bending, pop cultural, exploring themes that are serious, but she comes at it with humor. She deals with serious topics that can make the audience laugh until the punch line comes. And they say whoa!"

*RUBBERBANDance GROUP* from Montreal started by out a LA street choreographer Victor Quijada, a mix of hip-hop, break, ballet and capoeira that he took to another level as narrative dance theater, this time in a work titled 'Empirical Quotient.' Quijada successfully transplanted his company to Canada and they tour internationally.

New Zealand dance troupe *Black Grace* performs with strong narrative storytelling mixed with "an incredible mixed-cultural bag from Pacific Islanders, whether they are dancing to music by Philip Glass and Bach. Very powerful." Choreographer Jessica Lang, originally from Philadelphia, started her company (*Jessica Lang Dance*) in 2011 and will be making her Philly debut at Dance Celebration. Jessica Lang is 2014 Bessie Award winner, that is Swartz says " Structurally, rhythmically and visually, this is just exquisite choreography."



Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Co (ph: Uri Nevo)

*Pilobolus Dance Theater* has been a Philly favorite for decades and they this piece combines dance-magic ala Houdini with the troupe collaborating with comics Penn and Teller. "it's about escaping. Penn narrates the piece and it's definitely choreographed, but whether you want to call it dance or magic, who cares?" Swartz said. "Just to see them getting out of this bondage in front of your eyes, that's one aspect. It a three- ring dance circus."

Another company with an avid Philly fan built from their frequent appearances at the Annenberg is Parsons Dance. Choreographer David Parsons will present a premiere and a recent work that opened in New Orleans set to a jazz score. Of course, no Parsons performance is complete

without his punched- through another- dimension company classic 'Caught.'

Swartz said he debated about the Pilobolus work, but he said the point of Dance Celebration series is to explore every aspect of theatrical dance and movement. "It's a very specific physical feat to see this, it's like a human Rubik's cube. So I felt that it definitely belongs because part of our mission to explore every aspect of theatrical dance and movement."

Next month, the dynamic *Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company* from Israel will dance "If At All" which Swartz describes as having "Israeli sensibility and culture from everywhere." They are followed a week later by the fiery and soulful *Soledad Barrio & Noche Flamenca* performing 'Antigona' a full-length flamenco ballet.



(ph: Andres D'Elia)

**For a complete listing of the 2014-15 Dance Celebration season check**

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