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Dance in 2014: Same-sex duets, solid performances and an unsure future

By **LEWIS SEGAL**

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Reflecting fast-evolving social and marital realities, the same-sex duet became a staple of new choreography on nearly every local dance stage in 2014, ranging from the dazzling partnering innovations of Liam Scarlett's "Serpent" for England's all-male BalletBoyz ensemble to Graeme Murphy's woozy attempt to link a classical masterwork to the story of Princess Diana in a largely unrecognizable "Swan Lake" for the Australian Ballet.

However, a strongly danced showcase of commercial choreography titled "Shaping Sound" at the Montalban not only remained strictly hetero in its incessant aggressive couplings but also wedded to backdated jazz-dance clichés that often turned its women into puppets. At the final performance, the audience included a gay icon from the cast of TV's "Modern Family" viewing a presentation with no relevance to the kind of life he so engagingly portrays.

Right now, American television glories in popular LGBT characters — some long-established (the singing lovers of "Glee"), others recently introduced (the irresistibly wicked law student of "How to Get Away With Murder"). But

without a Ryan Murphy or a Shonda Rhimes to kick butt, media-dancing remains inflexibly closeted — except, reportedly, at the cast parties.

The Boyz and the Aussies exemplified the extremes of a Music Center/Gloria Kaufman dance season trying with some success to balance solid-gold titles ("Giselle," "Romeo and Juliet") with more daring imports such as Angelin Preljocaj's "Les Nuits." Does the series match the luster of its Orange County counterpart? Not really a relevant question, because every survey on the subject says that only die-hards and dancers will travel more than 30 minutes to a performance.

That's why Los Angeles Ballet tours its programs to various Southland communities. This year, the company danced one full-evening classic after another, none more treasurable than Bournonville's "La Sylphide," weakened somewhat by peculiar borrowed sets but lovingly realized. Indeed, it might have qualified as 2014's best ballet revival if not for L.A. Dance Project's powerhouse staging of William Forsythe's still-awesome (and knotty) 1993 "Quintett."

Besides performances at the Ace, the Project made a concerted attempt to genuinely connect with the local landscape (if not the local dance community) through video projects celebrating the city plus various outreach activities. And the level of dancing made you a believer, no matter where the artistic director hung his chapeau.

Three Israeli companies appeared in the area in the same month, all offering in-your-face modernism. But it was American master Garth Fagan who best fused technical virtuosity with conceptual depth. The soul-deep conviction and spectacular flair of his 1983 "Discipline Is Freedom" at the Holden may have been the indispensable dance experience of the year.

Runner-up: the glorious spirituality of Indonesian classicism brought to the Aratani by former UCLA world-dance doyenne Judy Mitoma. Her "Cup of

Java" program proved a mite long on gamelan interludes — and talk — but positively redemptive in motion.

Among locally based artists, Jacob "Kujo" Lyons returned home long enough to show that his familiar street-dance brilliance and new prowess in gymnastics could yield a unique meditative intensity. His "Eponym" for his Lux Aeterna troupe played but a single night at the Theatre Raymond Kabbaz, but anyone who saw it glimpsed new horizons for dance forms born and bred far from any academy.

Angeleno choreographers Melissa Barak, Josie Walsh (both at the Broad) and Jacob Jonas (at Highways) launched impressive, short-term attempts to break into wider renown. But what's next for them? Another night or two a year from now? And will they have to mortgage all their worldly possessions and maybe even their first born to afford even *that*?

As they know too well, there's no dedicated dance space in this city, no sure passage for choreographers and companies to grow from studio to stage, no accessible/affordable venue where the members of the dance community can measure their work against the achievements of others and where audiences can find and follow the artists they've heard or read about.

In 2014, Los Angeles gained a reconceived pre-professional dance academy at the Colburn School — and 2015 promises a vastly upgraded presence for dance at USC. But where are the future graduates of such institutions going to dance? That's the unanswered question casting a shadow over our dance community and explaining why so many artists feel stifled here.

Does anyone out there want to open or endow a 24/7 dance theater? Speak now or watch our finest and fleetest head for Manhattan, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, Miami....

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