

## The Year in the Arts

| DANCE |



Garth Fagan's "Mudan 175/39," left, at the Joyce Theater; Kelley Donovan's "Borrowed Bones," below, at Merce Cunningham Studio.

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### Leading Bodies, Stirring Imaginations

CREATING a dance involves much more than inventing steps for dancers. It needs a judicious eye for visual and spatial effect, a sense of timing and an instinct for building attention, for varying the mood and creating an overall theatrical arc that draws an audience into the world of the dance. Thinking about my favorite dance watching moments of the year, I realized that they all involved a sense of wonder at the skill with which the choreographers had woven these elements into a whole, making every aspect of a dance feel not just necessary, but inevitable.

1. William Forsythe's 1984 **ARTIFACT** is a four-act ballet that evokes both traditional 19th-century form (characters, narrative, a large corps de ballet, the equivalent of a "white" act) and Balanchinian abstraction. Brilliantly performed by the Royal Ballet of Flanders in Ludwigshafen, Germany, in November, it showed itself also as a viscerally thrilling celebration of classical dance and a demonstration of the way that Mr. Forsythe has extended that vocabulary and changed our expectations of what a ballet can be.

2. A dazzling lesson in theatrical craft was

offered by Big Dance Theater's **COMME TOUJOURS HERE I STAND**, an adaptation of the screenplay of Agnès Varda's 1962 film, "Cléo From 5 to 7," presented at the Kitchen in October. As they show us a self-absorbed actress making a film, the choreographer Annie-B Parson and the director Paul Lazar reflect on the nature of film and live theater by creating both of those forms before us. It's funny, thrilling and utterly deft.

3. In his new **MUDAN 175/39**, shown at the Joyce Theater in October, Garth Fagan responds to the complexity of musical pieces by Zhou Long, Tan Dun and Lei Liang with a subtle physical intelligence, layering and building his movement motifs over the work's episodic structure. The clear spatial architecture of "Mudan," its sculptural beauty and energetic articulation of speed and elevation show Mr. Fagan at the height of his powers.

4. Although "Polyphonia" is his best-known Ligeti work, Christopher Wheeldon's **CONTINUUM** is just as good. Created for the San Francisco Ballet in 2002 and shown by his own company, Morphoses, during its fall season at City Center, "Continuum" deploys eight emerald-green-clad

dancers in varying, beautifully constructed configurations. We hear unexpected rhythms in the spiky music; we are continually surprised by the boldness and strangeness of his images. Everything about Mr. Wheeldon's crisp geometries and nuanced human connections is both surprising and just right.

5. Tere O'Connor's new **WROUGHT IRON FOG**, which had its premiere at Dance Theater Workshop in November, is both abstract and strangely specific in its evocation of human behavior. Gestures and encounters offer fragmented and fragile meaning, while emotions seem to well through the bodies of the five dancers. Like a skillfully constructed poem, "Wrought Iron Fog" takes us invisibly through its subtle transitions, leading us into a world of its own.

6. On a freezing night in January, Kelley Donovan presented **BORROWED BONES** at the Merce Cunningham Studio. Fluid, sensuous movement was disciplined by Ms. Donovan's remarkable feel for creating variation, using counterpoint to keep our eyes and minds alert and seamlessly assembling and dispersing her dancers. Pure pleasure.

