

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Racial Strides in Ballet Steps

Ann Haskins · Wednesday, February 19th, 2020

Bollywood in Beverly Hills, a Balanchine ballet triptych in Santa Monica, Japanese visitors downtown, a BMX cirque in Elysian Park, Black History Month marked in Northridge, and more SoCal dance this week.

5. From tradition to beatbox

Marking Black History Month, the Washington D.C.-based **Step Afrika!** arrives with its newest *Drumfolk*. The dancers and musicians specialize in percussive dance forms, traced from traditional rhythms adapted to the human body when drums were denied. The troupe doesn't miss a beat as the dancers move from the traditional to exuberant contemporary beatboxing. The Soroya, Cal State University Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge; Sun., Feb. 23, 3 p.m., \$36-\$65. <https://www.thesoroya.org/>.



Step Afrika! Photo by Jim Saah.

4. Fall, flow and melt redux

Only a few more chances to see Benjamin Millepied's revisited *I fall, I flow, I melt* for **L.A. Dance Project**. Originally premiered in January 2019, these performances offer a second look at Millepied's choreography and an always welcome chance to appreciate LADP's excellent dancers. Details at <http://ladanceproject.org/>. L.A. Dance Project Studios, 2245 E. Washington Blvd., downtown; Wed.-Sat., Feb. 19-23 & 26-29, 8 p.m., \$45. Family friendly show Sat., Feb. 23, noon, \$20, free children under two years. <https://www.artful.ly/store/events/1939>.



LA Dance Project. Photo by Daniel Beres.

3. Why rust never sleeps

Two artists from Japan—choreographer **Maki Morishita** and visual artist **Tabaimo**—team up in *Fruits borne out of rust*, employing drawings, video installations, live music and movement to create an imagined world that traps a dancer inside a bird cage. The title refers to a Japanese description for a sword gone to rust from neglect and lack of care. REDCAT at Disney Hall, 631 W. 2nd St., downtown; Thurs.-Sat., Feb. 20-22, 8:30 p.m., Sun., Feb. 23, 3 p.m., \$22, \$18 students. <https://www.redcat.org/>.



Maki Morishita & Tabaimo. Photo by bozzo.

2. Are they blue?

This venue continues its exciting 2019-2020 dance series devoted exclusively to bringing L.A.-based companies front and center stage with **Blue 13** with its irresistible blending of hip-hop with traditional, contemporary and Bollywood dance from India. Choreographer Achinta S. McDaniel's sly blending of classical and street dance is evident in the titles of the world and west coast premieres in the program: *F**k Fusion* (West Coast Premiere), *Diya aur Toofan (the Lamp and the Storm)*, and with a nod to the ankle bells known as ghungroos, *Terpsichore in Ghungroos* (World Premiere). Opening night includes a post performance talk back session with the artists. Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, Bram Goldsmith Theater, 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills; Fri.-Sat., Feb. 21-22, 7:30 p.m., \$29-\$79. <https://thewallis.org/>.



Blue 13. Photo courtesy of the artists.

1. Simple as black and white

When the ballet *Agon* premiered in 1957 with African American Arthur Mitchell partnering white ballerina Diana Adams in a central pas de deux, the barrier-breaking integrated pairing was highly controversial, yet choreographer George Balanchine resisted pressure to recast Mitchell. Photos of that Mitchell/Adams pairing became iconic and the controversy faded over the decades leaving the ballet to join other Balanchine masterpieces on its considerable merits. Not every ballet company can perform *Agon* or other Balanchine ballets without permission from the Balanchine Trust and the presence of a repetiteur who ensures the quality of the casting and performance. Colleen Neary was personally selected by Balanchine as a repetiteur to stage ballets like *Agon* which she has done for American Ballet Theater, Mariinsky Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet and L.A.'s own **Los Angeles Ballet** where she is co-artistic director. In the second offering of LAB's 2019-2020 season, *Agon* joins two other Balanchine touchstone ballets *Concerto Barocco* set to Bach and *Apollo*, which like *Agon*, has music by composer Igor Stravinsky. The Broad Stage, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica; Wed.-Thurs., Feb. 26-27, 7:30 p.m., Fri., Feb. 28, 6 p.m., \$68-\$114. <https://losangelesballet.org/balanchine-black-and-white>.



Los Angeles Ballet. Photo by Reed Hutchinson.

Other dance of note:

Cancelled!! China's modern dance troupe **BeijingDance/LDTX**, scheduled to perform at the Irvine Barclay Theater and the Ambassador Auditorium, has postponed its U.S. tour due to the coronavirus. Ticket holders may contact the theaters for details.

Choreographer **Suchi Branfman** aided by dancer/filmmaker **d. sabela grimes** offer *Rope*. Described as an evening of intertwined dances and conversations about incarceration and freedom, the new work continues the duo's work with movement and the incarcerated. Part of the *Fireside at the Miles* series. Miles Memorial Playhouse, 1130 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica; Sat., Feb. 22, 8 p.m., \$5-\$10. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/rope-an-evening-of-intertwined-dances-curated-by-suchi-branfman-fireside-at-the-miles-tickets-84654224063>.



Suchi Branfman. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Continuing their efforts to demystify dance with performances in unconventional spaces, choreographer Benita Bike and the dancers of **Benita Bike's DanceArt** bring their *Explore Dance* program to this new theater. Dancers include Liza Barskaya, Sarah Gertler, Mikensie Johnson, Clare Kiklowicz, and Trudy Niess. L.A. Mission College, AMP Theater, 13356 Eldridge Ave., Sylmar; Thurs., Feb. 27, 7 p.m., free. <http://www.danceart.org/>.



Benita Bike's DanceArt. Photo courtesy of the artists.

The performance art troupe **Temria Dance Haus** brings choreographer Temria Airmet's latest under the banner *Don't Drink the Kool-Aid*. New works include an examination of feminism in *SOS* and consideration of the systemic effects of the structure of the U.S. in *America May Go to Hell*. Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th St., Santa Monica; Fri., Feb. 21, 8:30 p.m., \$20, \$15 students & seniors. <https://highwaysperformance.org/>.



Temria Dance Haus. Photo courtesy of the artists.

This split bill brings **Andersmith's** *weather // body* with movement and text drawn from multi-generational interviews about change and time. The stage is shared with the group **Materia** blending dance with poetry plus live stream projections and feedback loops of simultaneous improvisational performances in L.A. and New York City. Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th St., Santa Monica, Sat., Feb. 22, 8:30 p.m., \$20, \$15 students & seniors. <https://highwaysperformance.org/>.



Andersmith & Materia. Photos courtesy of the artists.

Legendary choreographer Paul Taylor's *Esplanade* is performed by USC dance students with live music from USC's music school. Set to music from J.S. Bach, the work is one of the late choreographer's masterpieces. The post-performance discussion with several faculty members will focus on Taylor's legacy and the symbiotic relationship among dancers, musicians, choreographer and conductor. USC Gloria Kaufman International Dance Center, 849 W. 34th St., University Park; Wed., Feb. 26, 6 & 8 p.m., free with reservation. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/paul-taylor-celebration-usc-kaufman-and-usc-thornton-perform-esplanade-registration-91696824671>.



USC Dance Department. Photo courtesy of the artists.

This museum's artwork provides the setting for contemporary choreographer Jennifer Backhaus and her eponymous **Backhausdance** in *Triptych*. Created in response to artworks in the museum, the immersive, tri-part dance will allow audience members to experience the event at their own pace. Orange County Museum of Art, 1661 W. Sunflower Ave., Santa Ana; Sat., Feb. 22, 3 & 4 p.m., free with reservation. <https://www.ocmaexpand.org/events/backhausdance>.



Backhausdance. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Modern dance, spoken work and more are part of *Black Butterfly*, a **Project21** dance performance

commemorating Black History Month. San Bernardino Valley College Auditorium, 701 S. Mt. Vernon Ave., San Bernardino; Thurs., Feb. 27, 7 p.m., free. <https://www.project21dance.org/>.



East Meets West. Photo by Stephanie Berger.

With a stated purpose of enhancing the conversation between east and west coast choreographers, New York City's **Dylan Crossman** partnered with L.A.'s **Cathy Fairbanks** for an evening of collaborative works *East Meets West*, to present a semblance of a whole. The organizers pay tribute to the late modern dance legend Merce Cunningham with *Cunningham Centennial Solos* arranged by Crossman who danced with the Cunningham company. Other participants include Darren Kinoshita, Kathrine Helen Fisher, and Patricia Zhou. Pieter, 420 W. Avenue 30, Glassell Park; Sat., Feb. 22, 8:30 p.m., free with contribution to free bar or boutique. RSVP to dylancrossman.dance@gmail.com.

With inspiration drawn from August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, Caryl Churchill's adaptation, and the poems of Anne Sexton, the **Wallis Studio Ensemble** and choreographer Madeleine Dahm unveil their new physical theatre work *Lucid*. Although developed under the auspices of the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, this event is at another theater. Hudson Theatre Mainstage, 6539 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood; opens Thurs., Feb. 20, 8 p.m., then Fri.-Sat., Feb. 21-22, & 28-29, 8 p.m., Sun., Feb. 23 & March 1, 3 p.m., \$20. <https://thewallis.org/>.



Project21. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Just in case there are not yet enough interpretations, director/composer Mat Sweeney and creative producer Sebastian Peters-Lazaro bring the talents of their eclectic performance ensemble **Four Larks** to bear on Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. The troupe has drawn high praise and enthusiastic audiences for its ongoing partnership with the L.A. Chamber Orchestra and was last seen conducting an immersive excursion through the afterlife with the Getty Villa environs standing in for ancient underworld in *Katabasis*. This new project draws on choreography and set design by Sebastian Peters-Lazaro with a dozen performers who double as musicians. The text and libretto from Sweeney promises a cautionary consideration of modern technology lurking in Shelley's classic tale. The Wallis, Lovelace Theater, 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills; opened Wed., Feb. 12, 8 p.m., then Tues.-Fri., 8 p.m., Sat., 2:30 & 8 p.m., Sun., 2:30 & 7:30 p.m., thru March 1, \$60. <https://thewallis.org/Frankenstein>.



Four Larks' "Frankenstein". Photo courtesy of the artists.

In its 41st and latest endeavor *Volta*, **Cirque Du Soleil** spotlights bicycle street sports and acrobatics associated with the world of BMX including a full-blown BMX park for what is billed as a "breath-taking finale of non-stop acrobatics on wheels." The action will fill the signature Big Top here before moving to Orange county. **Dodger Stadium**, 1000 Vin Scully Ave., Elysian Park; Tues. thru Sun., March 8, various dates, times & ticket pricess at <https://cirk.me/VOLTA>. **Orange County Fair & Event Center**, 88 Fair Dr., Costa Mesa; Wed., March 18 to Sun., April 19, various dates, times & ticket prices at <https://cirk.me/VOLTA>.



Cirque du Soleil. Photo courtesy of the artists.

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