

The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/04/arts/dance/los-angeles-dance-scene.html>

The Los Angeles Dance Scene. Yes, There Is One.



Dancers performing “PowerShift” as the TL Collective at the L.A. Dance Project headquarters.

Paul Antico

By **Roslyn Sulcas**

July 4, 2018



LOS ANGELES — “No nudity at all,” said a dance presenter, incredulously, as she emerged from the final showing of the [DCA LA Dance Platform presented here in early June](#). “That would never happen in New York.”

But the dance showcase — a first-time event that offered a three-day run of 39 dance works attended by around 70 dance presenters and professionals — was not about what is happening in New York, or London or Berlin. It was focused on dance in Los Angeles, a city where companies, big and small, classical and contemporary, have historically struggled for visibility and viability.

One man is nonetheless convinced that the city has much to offer dance audiences worldwide. Ben Johnson, the director of performing arts for the city's Department of Cultural Affairs, which hosted the event, put the platform together (with the help of many others, he stressed) to show how vibrant the dance scene has become here over the last few years.

"When the dance field learns about American dance only through a New York-centric frame, we miss out on the richness of the form being practiced in other parts of the country," said Mr. Johnson during a conversation between sessions. Los Angeles, he added, citing the seminal modern dance choreographers Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis, Lester Horton and [Bella Lewitzky](#), has been a "hidden city of dance for a century."

Major dance personalities have moved to Los Angeles over the last few years. Benjamin Millepied, the former New York City Ballet principal and director of the Paris Opera Ballet, founded the L.A. Dance Project in 2012, and [last October opened a rehearsal, performance and residency space](#) in the downtown arts district. William Forsythe, one of the world's foremost choreographers, is a professor at the University of Southern California's Glorya Kaufman School of Dance. Dimitri Chamblas, a former dancer and film producer who is a well-known figure on the European dance scene, is now the dean of dance at [California Institute of the Arts](#).

In their wake have come [other important dance names](#): former City Ballet principals, like Jenifer Ringer and James Fayette at the [Colburn School](#), and Sébastien Marcovici and Janie Taylor at the L.A. Dance Project. Choreographers have migrated too: Kyle Abraham, Aszure Barton, RubberLegz, Danielle Agami and Melissa Barak among them.

Small troupes and more ambitious outfits abound. Mr. Johnson said that if the platform had been longer, it could have featured hundreds of artists, who were "telling the L.A. story."

And yet, as organizers and choreographers pointed out on several occasions during the event, Los Angeles is not generally considered an important source of new talent or a regular destination on the calendars of those who program

dance seasons at theaters or festivals. Many of the presenters who attended the platform — which coincided, deliberately, with [the annual Dance/USA conference](#) — had never previously visited the city in a professional capacity. “For me, the big tangible was witnessing my colleagues discover a new dance scene in their own backyard of America,” Mr. Johnson said.

The companies and artists that stood out were largely names that are in fact already known to dance audiences: among them, Ros Warby, RubberLegz and James Gregg (under the company name of [Wewolf](#)), Kyle Abraham and [Milka Djordjevich](#), whose “*Anthem*” provided a stunningly good finale to a long first day.



From left, Dana Wilson, Megan Lawson and Jillian Meyers of the Seaweed Sisters.

Roger Martin Holman/LA Dance Chronicle

But there were discoveries too. Micaela Taylor, whose company the TL Collective performed her “PowerShift” at the L.A. Dance Project headquarters, combined breaking and popping techniques to create a precise and inventive physical language, offering abrupt, truncated isolations of body parts in combination with vibrating upper bodies and high kicking legs. A too-short filmed excerpt from “Electrogynous,” by d. Sabela Grimes, a faculty member at the Glorya Kaufman school, offered an invigoratingly kinetic account of a mother-daughter relationship.

Solos abounded. Mecca Vazie Andrews, occasionally singing and talking, offered a rambling but commanding piece that moved between folky, stamping movements to tap routines and jerky, puppetlike sequences. (She ended with a communal inhale-exhale sequence and exhortations to “receive positivity” and “take a moment of silence”; definitely not a New York experience.) Austyn Rich’s solo (“Sigh, This Is Probably the Longest Title in History and Very Exhausting to Read in One Breath”) showed the influence of both Mr. Forsythe and street dance in his emotive paean to those killed by police brutality.

Black Lives Matter, social justice, activism and gender politics were strong threads throughout the works on show. Jade Charon Robertson, Gina Young, Bernard Brown, Shamell Bell and Mr. Grimes all evoked these issues in their work. (Mr. Grimes offered a defiantly contrary view: “Black pain is very profitable in this country; we are focused on black joy.”)

Narrative pieces, unusual in the contemporary dance world, also cropped up. Kybele Dance Theater’s “Neo Noir” enjoyably evoked a Dashiell Hammett world of murder and betrayal; Mr. Brown’s “Box” told the tale of a slave who mailed himself from captivity to freedom; a film excerpt from Janet Boston’s “Anaïs, a Dance Opera,” incorporated dance, song and projections in recounting the life of the writer Anaïs Nin.

Commercial dance, a huge industry in Los Angeles, was also a clear influence, with work by Sheetal Gandhi and the Seaweed Sisters suggesting an intersection of these worlds. “There’s really no ‘L.A. aesthetic,’ but a strong awareness of the crossover between concert and commercial” dance,” said Catharine Soros, who is president of Center Dance Arts, and is on the boards of the L.A. Dance Project and Ate9 Dance Company.