

LIFE&ARTS: YEAR IN REVIEW

Columbia stepped lively, took leap into more modern dance

From Staff Reports

COLUMBIA always has been a classical dance kind of town. This year, however, things got moving in new directions.

The resurgence of interest in modern dance was hard to miss and the biggest news of the year. One contemporary dance company celebrated its first anniversary; another one gave its inaugural performances. Both attracted appreciative audiences, as did programs at local colleges and universities.

Of course the biggest audiences go to more traditional dance forms. That's why the city has three classically based dance companies, each with its respective admirers.

Regrettably, discussions among several of the ballet groups about a possible merger came to naught during 2002. That was the year's biggest downside.

Money remained an issue for the dance companies this year, as it did for all performing arts organizations. Even so, season productions weren't trimmed, and everything from money-makers such as "Dracula: Ballet With a Bite" to such standards as "Coppelia" showed off the diversity and quality of dance in Columbia.

The top events of 2002 included:

1. Lifechance. The Columbia Classical Ballet's annual benefit show brought the year's most

Dance



Columbia Classical Ballet's Lifechance benefit show

thrilling dance moments featuring performers from the Boston Ballet and the company's own core of outstanding Russian dancers. Their dancing had Koger Center

crowds jumping and shouting with praise.

2. The return of modern dance. The Power Company turned 1 year old and marked its growth with several original, creative performances in 2002. And Kris Cangelosi's newly organized Columbia Contemporary Performance Group brought a high-energy focus to modern dance. Columbia College, which birthed The Power Company, continued to lead the way with strong student contemporary dance programs.

3. "The Nutcracker." Yes, there are three different productions of this holiday staple by three different companies, and yes, it would be a lot better if they all got together. But the three stagings are good and entertaining, so perhaps we ought to give thanks that in this instance the Midlands overflows with so much dance talent.

In 2003: Completion of some degree of merger not only makes sense but seems inevitable. And look for the continued growth of smaller, risk-taking dance companies.

OTHER VOICES

Lee Lumpkin, board chairwoman, Columbia Classical Ballet since 2000.

"I saw the Youth American Grand Prix competition at Lincoln Center this year, and it was such a wonderful experience that reminded me why I became so interested in dance. To see those in-

credibly talented young people from all over the world with such passion for dance was one of the most amazing, dramatic experiences I've ever had."

Brenda Pugh McCutchen, Columbia College Dance Department, retired 2000, now writing dance textbook and founder of Dance Curriculum Design in Columbia.

"A piece of choreography I saw by the Winthrop Dance Theater in Rock Hill was spectacular. It was called 'In Reeboks She Wore a 3½ Narrow' and choreographed by Jacki McCarthy, a dance student. Despite the humorous title, it had a dark undercurrent, and I learned later it was based on research into the Chinese practice of foot binding. . . . It was visually intriguing, kinesthetically satisfying . . . a stunning piece of work that has stayed with me."

Susan E. Anderson, director, USC Dance Program since 1976.

"There were lots of wonderful moments. One of the best was seeing Julio Bocca with the Ballet Argentina at the Peace Center in Greenville. He's a gold medal winner, and his dancing was absolutely unbelievable. He's a dancer and artistic director and so very talented."

Senior arts writer William W. Starr and dance reviewer Edward Smith contributed to this story.