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DANCE: THE HIGHS

The Dances And Dancers Of the Year

By JENNIFER DUNNING

1. JANIE TAYLOR -- Always an excitingly unpredictable dancer, Ms. Taylor delivered an unforgettable performance in George Balanchine's "Who Cares?" in June in the New York City Ballet season at the New York State Theater. A dancer of exceptional technical gifts and control, she rode the Gershwin song "The Man I Love" like a surfer shrugging her way across the highest wave.

2. HAN-TANG YUEFU -- Car horns honked and sirens blared in the distance, but the Taiwanese music and dance ensemble Han-Tang Yuefu created a luminous stillness on a stage at the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors festival in August. The performers offered a rare glimpse of the intricate, delicate percussion music and serene gliding and tilting dance of the traditional Pear Orchard style.

3. JEANINE DURNING -- Ms. Durning goes about her modern-dance choreography without fanfare, quietly growing in authority. The two new pieces she presented in January at Dance Theater Workshop ("Part One Parting" and "half URGE") were powerful and supremely accomplished in the way they created worlds of charged emotions through plain movement and fast, eddying journeys about the stage.

4. 'TWO' -- Video imagery has been a largely extraneous ingredient in dance. But Neil Greenberg used video (by Greenberg and Charles Dennis) to expand and revitalize the stage space, making it an exhilarating element in "Two," performed in March at Dance Theater Workshop.

5. THE AILEY SPIRIT -- A benefit for the Ailey Dancers' Resource Fund, organized and performed by members of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in July at the company's studios, was the year's most satisfying and provocative workshop program of new dance. The level of invention was high, the staging was sleek and the evening's atmosphere was warmed by that "can-do" Ailey spirit.

6. MONIQUE MEUNIER -- Ms. Meunier's debut performances with American Ballet Theater this summer revealed an unsuspected gift for nuanced, often slyly funny characterization. In particular, this former City Ballet dancer shone as a knowing Queen of the Carriage Trade in Antony Tudor's "Offenbach in the Underworld" and as a curiously gentle, regal Mercedes, so often a mere cliché, in "Don Quixote."

7. ANOTHER LOSS FOR BALLET -- This was the year New York lost yet another promising black ballerina, when Aesha Ash left City Ballet after the summer season to dance with Maurice Béjart's company in Europe. Why do black women appear to have such a hard time rising and remaining in the city's ballet troupes?

8. 'SHADOWMANN' -- Sarah Michelson's new two-part "Shadowmann," performed at the Kitchen and P.S. 122 in April, created two sprawling, surprising worlds that recalled Robert Wilson's earliest performance pieces in their antic detail and reinvention of space.

9. YOUNG DANCEMAKERS -- A larger dance audience got a chance this year, in a Dancenow/NYC festival program in September at the Joyce SoHo, to savor the work of Alice Teirstein and her Young Dancemakers Company, a group of teenagers chosen each year from city schools to spend a summer dancing and choreographing. "Struggle," a solo by John Kasten, stood out for its simplicity and integrity.

A TIRELESS UNIFIER -- Gregory Hines, who died in August, had a remarkably varied career in tap and in stage, film and television acting. But he may be missed most as a tireless unifier in the scattered field of dance, a star whose warmth and genuine concern for his fellow dancers seemed so intriguingly at odds with an often cool, somewhat remote public persona.