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LUMINOUS AND LIVELY FOOTWORK

Banner year for premieres, classic revivals

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Lar Lubovitch Dance Company performs Coltrane's *Favorite Things*.

Photo by Todd Rosenberg.

This was a year of exciting new work, some wonderfully staged revivals, a trifecta from Alejandro Cerrudo and bright performances — all in a dance scene undiminished by tough times. Some highlights:

1. **Cerrudo X 3.** Hubbard Street Dance Chicago's gifted resident choreographer gave us "Deep Down Dos," "Blanco" and "Malditos," three premieres that share his moody mastery of image and sharpening musicality. Cerrudo's work gained recognition elsewhere, for what it's worth, winning kudos in Washington, D.C., and the Hague.
2. **Exciting commissions,** engineered by the Joffrey Ballet's Ashley Wheater, Hubbard's Glenn Edgerton and River North Chicago Dance Company's Frank Chaves, among other artistic directors, made for a banner year of new work from prominent outsiders. James Kudelka, Aszure Barton, Jessica Lang, Victor Quijada, Robert Battle, Sidra Bell and (Chicago's own) Autumn Eckman are among those who delighted and surprised; Kudelka's "Pretty BALLET," Quijada's "PHYSIKAL LINGUISTIKS" and Battle's "Three" are personal favorites.
3. **2010 had plenty of great revivals, too.** American Ballet Theatre's "Fancy Free," the Joffrey's "After the Rain" and "The Concert (or the Perils of Everybody)" and Hubbard Street's impassioned, haunting "Tabula Rasa" were among the luminous.
4. **Broadway's ballet bouquet:** "Billy Elliot," on tour at Oriental Theatre. Director Stephen Daldry and choreographer Peter Darling ditched the scattershot, helter-skelter pop dance of the movie for a stage celebration of classic ballet, embracing not just its artistic pursuit and lifestyle, but its soaring imagery and formal idealism, too — and they gave young Billy a bravura solo luxuriating in its thrills.
5. **The Chicago Dancing Festival** in August brought international stars, local favorites and a grab bag of varied works to the Harris Theater, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Pritzker Pavilion. The outdoor performance included a Royal Ballet team in the pas de deux from "Manon," but it was the indoor concert at the Harris — an ad hoc survey of contemporary dance from Paul Taylor's frenzied, claustrophobic and apocalyptic "Last Look" to Lar Lubovitch's snazzy jazz marvel, "Coltrane's Favorite Things" — that shone the brightest.
6. **"1306 — Ten Years Later"** in September, at the Dance Center of Columbia College. This all-day omnibus, celebrating the Dance Center's 10-year-old South Loop home, not only served up a cornucopia of edgy, youthful local groups, but played as an indirect reminder of the center's key role in constantly hosting experimental practitioners from just about everywhere else.

7. **Luna Negra Dance Theater**, October at the Harris. This important ensemble launched a new phase with the arrival of Gustavo Ramirez Sansano as artistic director. And in his first outing, he introduced the work of an extraordinary Brazil-born choreographer, Fernando Melo, whose "Bate" is a dance-theater Rubik's cube of puppetry, visual novelty, op art and brisk ensemble work.

8. **On the fringe**: Throughout 2010, Molly Shanahan and Mad Shak embodied the independence and tenacity of the off-Loop avant-garde with more installments of their "Stamina of Curiosity" series, a multiyear endeavor pushing boundaries and exploring movement innovation. The latest, "Sharks Before Drowning," whose soundtrack quotes Whitney Houston and David Mamet, among other sources, won acclaim this month when it played at Northwestern University.

9. **"Harold and the Purple Crayon: A Dance Adventure,"** December, at the Harris. Hubbard Street 2 unveiled this instant family classic, an interactive, multidisciplinary treat blending Crockett Johnson's enduring fable, smart choreography by Terence Marling and Robyn Minko Williams and perfect purple animations and projections by Ryan Wineinger.

10. **And they who dance**. In the end, every year belongs to them. Notables, in no particular order, include: Yumelia Garcia, Eduardo Zuniga, Benjamin Wardell, Penny Saunders, Derrick Agnoletti, Meredith Dincolo, Victoria Jaiani, Fabrice Calmels, Valerie Robin, Christian Denice, Ana Lopez and Jonathan Meyer.

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