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Rodgers and Hammerstein is key in 'Fräulein Maria.'
Photo by Steven Schreiber



H. Art Chaos' 'Rite of Spring' involves a tub of water.
Photo by Etsuko Matsuyama



Michael Trusnovec and Laura Halzack of Paul Taylor Dance Company perform 'Beloved Renegade.'
Tom Caravaglia

Dances for all

With a chock-full lineup, ADF wants to lure you with the glory of performance BY ROY C. DICKS, Correspondent

DURHAM - As the American Dance Festival gears up for its 32nd season in the Triangle (and 76th as an organization), its position as the world's top modern-dance venue is unquestioned. Although the number of performances has been reduced slightly compared with the last few seasons, this year offers a range of styles and categories.

ADF has a core audience of devoted regulars who know the glories of the festival. If you fall into that category, check out our insider's highlights for the season's most exciting events.

Some fans of classical ballet might think ADF veers too far from the world of point shoes and tutus. If you're one of those, see the ballet lovers' guide for some surprises.

And there are still people who just don't think modern dance is for them. If you've never been to ADF, take a look at the Myth Busters guide for some eye-openers. see page 5D for your ADF guide

Myth-busters: Misconceptions about modern dance

Modern dance is ugly and unpleasant. Modern dance explores every possible movement and combination of bodies. Not all of those efforts are "pretty" in the traditional sense, but there are many gorgeous images and lovely designs in modern dance. Try Paul Taylor's lyrically uplifting "Mercurial Tidings" or Shen Wei's "Re-" series with its breathtaking combination of Asian arts, rituals and music.

Modern dance is weird and incomprehensible. Modern dance, like contemporary art, is experimental. The choreographer may be playing with light and shadow and

juxtaposition of patterns, or creating a back story from some personal experience. Luckily, there's no "right" interpretation, so take from it what you will and give it your own meaning. For starters, revel in the designs of the amazing, entwined bodies of Pilobolus' "Ocellus" or supply your own experiences to the journey being taken in Mark Morris's "Excursions."

Modern dance is dark and moody. Virtually every emotion and feeling is expressed in modern dance, including the somber and serious. But many pieces are light and airy and often quite funny. Choreographers love to surprise and shake up expectations. You'll find yourself laughing out loud at the vaudeville-like "Walklyndon" from Pilobolus and the country-and-western posturings in Mark Morris' "Going Away Party."

Modern dance uses dissonant music and loud noises. Much experimental choreography is matched to experimental music and sound effects. Choreographers use a range of compositions, including classical music, traditional jazz and pop tunes. This season, there's Francis Poulenc (Paul Taylor's "Beloved Renegade"), Fats Waller (Twyla Tharp's "Sue's Leg" from Aspen Santa Fe Ballet) and Rodgers and Hammerstein (Doug Elkins and Friends' witty "Fräulein Maria").

Modern Dance often isn't even dance. The category allows the broadest definition of "dance," including ordinary body movements and average endeavors, which choreographers explore to find art in the everyday. Starting points for this approach include the accumulating power of repeated gestures in Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet's "Decadance" and the amazing combination of people and chairs in Pilobolus' "Rushes."

Ballet-lovers' guide

Modern dance was a reaction to the strict confines of ballet -- point shoes, rigid upper bodies and traditional storylines. Yet then, as now, most modern dance choreographers have ballet training, and many incorporate balletic elements into their work. This year's ADF tagline, "Where Ballet & Modern Meet," reflects that influence. Here are this year's pieces that any ballet fan can appreciate:

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet: The company lives up to its name with "Red Sweet," Jorma Elo's fast-paced work taking classic ballet steps and poses and giving them a witty spin. There's also William Forsythe's "Slingerland Pas de Deux," with traditional partnering but more fluid lines and stronger angles, and Laura Dean's classically influenced "Night."

Paul Taylor Dance Company: "Mercurial Tidings" offers precise spins and buoyant leaps matching Schubert's music, while the new "Beloved Renegade" shows off the lyrical beauty of clean lines and formal poses.

Mark Morris Dance Group: "A Lake," set to a Haydn horn concerto, is filled with classical movement filtered through a contemporary twist.

Insider's highlights: Most anticipated performances

Shen Wei Dance Arts: World premiere of all three parts of "Re-," the choreographer's look at the conflict of differing cultures.

H. Art Chaos: First ADF performance of its acclaimed "Rite of Spring," a dark look at victimization, employing a bathtub of water and menacing midair suspensions.

Pilobolus: Two ADF-commissioned premieres, "Redline" by co-founder Jonathan Wolken and a piece by the Israeli choreographers Avshalom Pollak and Inbal Pinto, who created "Rushes," the 2007 ADF hit with all those chairs.

Paul Taylor Dance Company: "Scudorama," his dramatic 1963 work, unseen since 1973, depicting eight dancers as souls in purgatory.

Past/Forward (ADF dancers program): The reconstruction of Laura Dean's perpetually whirling, kinetically shifting "Infinity," originally premiered in 1990.

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When: Thursday through July 25

Where: Durham Performing Arts Center and Reynolds Industries Theater

Cost: \$22-\$43

Contact: 684-4444 or 680-2787

www.tickets.duke.edu

Online: ADF daily video blog at:

americandancefestival.org/cyberdance

N&O coverage at:

newsobserver.com/adf.

This week: Thursday-Saturday, Shen Wei, "Re- (I,II,III)" at DPAC.

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