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THE NEW YORKER



THE THEATRE

American Utopia
Hudson

David Byrne stars in this gorgeously designed, deliciously fun, and intermittently politically intense revue of old and new songs, modelled on his recent world tour. Here, the singer and songwriter is backed by a rangy, versatile, exuberant band—made up, he notes pointedly, mostly of immigrants—and dances barefoot with an unmannered silliness that casts an ironic light back on his cooler, more insouciant days fronting Talking Heads. Behind them is a huge three-sided wall of metallic-looking beads—a seventies relic made futuristic. Most important, the songs sound great. Byrne and the band cover Janelle Monáe's protest song "Hell You Talmbout," which includes a recitation of the names of victims of police violence, with a fierce sincerity, and perform old favorites with a buoyancy sometimes reminiscent of New Orleans brass ensembles. When I went, two women stood up and shyly started to dance. By night's end, everybody had followed their lead.—*Vinson Cunningham* (Through Feb. 16.)

for all the women who
thought they were Mad
SoHo Rep

The space-time continuum is bent out of shape in Zawe Ashton's play: it's never quite clear where the action takes place, or when. The lead character, a career woman named Joy (Bisserat Tseggai), spends most of her time in a transparent box. The enclosure could signal an office, or a manifestation of Joy's mind; there are no obvious answers. Ashton (who is also an accomplished actress, currently starring in "Betrayal," on Broadway) prefers the poetic to the naturalistic as she explores Joy's increasing distress with a system—professional, medical—that is rigged against black women like her. Body horror mixes with magical realism when Joy's pregnancy progresses in the blink of an eye; the way that Ashton and the director, Whitney White, handle this section is the most gripping part of a show that too often relies on vague, frustratingly elliptical lyricism.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli* (Through Nov. 24.)

for colored girls
Public

In this ecstatic new production of Ntozake Shange's 1976 choreopoem, "for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf," directed by Leah C. Gardiner, the characters are a swarm of unnamed women, identified only by the color each wears. Their talking and singing and dancing and rigorous listening make up the whole intensely varied texture of the show. It's a delicate work, a bittersweet cabaret held together only by the alchemical relationships among the actors onstage. Adrienne C. Moore, as Lady in Yellow, is as funny here as she was as Black Cindy on the TV show "Orange Is the New Black," but infinitely warmer, cannier, and more empathetic. At several points, Sasha Allen, as Lady in Blue, leads the ensemble in its sung numbers, seeming to pull the sad or lovely or touchingly naïve stories spoken by her castmates onto a higher and more terrifying plane.

When Okwui Okpokwasili, as Lady in Green, appeals to a former lover, "I want my stuff back," the mind somersaults at the thought of all that must have been taken.—*V.C.* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/4/19.) (Through Dec. 8.)

Power Strip
Claire Tow

Sylvia Khoury's play about the refugee experience, set in a border-adjacent periphery of Greece, means well but only rarely hits its mark. The opening is bleak: Yasmin (Dina Shihabi) sleeps alone outdoors, on rocky terrain, and has to fight off Khaled (Darius Homayoun), a fellow-Syrian who's trying to steal her space heater. Their acquaintance turns intimate, and we learn how brutal life has been for Yasmin. That information is valuable and worth staging, as are the vagaries of life in refugee camps—desperate attempts at making money, scarce water, random violence. But "Power Strip," directed by Tyne Rafaeli for LCT3, rarely gets behind those facts to make its people real. One problem is that the acting isn't so hot: both leads struggle tonally through a text that means to plumb the humor in darkness but often ends up too silly by half. Our moments of pathos with Yasmin—a real hero, with a story to tell—are too thin, and too far between.—*V.C.* (Through Nov. 17.)

Seared

Robert W. Wilson
MCC Theatre Space

In Theresa Rebeck's deliciously tense new comedy, an all too talented chef (Raúl Esparza) takes full credit for the excellence of his Park Slope bistro and deserves the blame for its imminent failure. He's an asshole—dictatorial, hotheaded, self-impressed, hypersensitive, faux philosophical, misanthropic, hypocritical, perfectionist, and craven—but he meets his match when his exasperated business partner (David Mason) brings in a breezy restaurant consultant (Krysta Rodriguez) with mysterious methods. Moritz von Stuelpnagel's direction is so precise, and the humor so rooted in character, that the cast—including W. Tré Davis, as a chronically underestimated waiter—can elicit big laughs from the smallest of gestures, especially in the nail-biting second act. Tim Mackabee's impeccably accurate, wonderfully overstuffed—and functional—kitchen set is a pleasure to examine all on its own.—*Rollo Romig* (Through Dec. 15.)

The Sound Inside
Studio 54

Mar y-Louise Parker's magnetism is hard to pin down, largely because it comes from somewhere antecedent to any line she delivers or gesture she executes. Hers is an art of thought, and it's edifying to watch her puzzle through an idea just before she parts her lips to convey it. "The Sound Inside," an interesting, uneven play by Adam Rapp, directed by David Cromer, is worth seeing for the chance it offers Parker to wrinkle her brow. She plays Bella, a wry writer and professor in the middle of a crisis. Meeting a new student, Christopher (Will Hochman), sends her ideas about writing and life into a messy spiral. The play is delivered partly in scenes, but mostly in monologues that sound more like prose than speech. As Bella, Parker reaches

for a phrase in that way of hers, then rushes to write it down. This interplay between showing and telling—display and description—often feels forced, but it points toward a promising formal breakthrough that Rapp doesn't quite reach here.—*V.C.* (Through Jan. 12.)

DANCE

Paul Taylor
David H. Koch

During its Lincoln Center run, Paul Taylor American Modern Dance performs nineteen Taylor works, including one, "Post Meridian," that hasn't been seen in three decades. That dance is a collaboration by Taylor and the artist Alex Katz; four others—"Sunset," "Scudorama," "Private Domain," and "Diggity"—will be featured in a special program, on Nov. 11. Besides classics like "Black Tuesday," "Esplanade," and "Company B," the troupe also performs pieces by three outside choreographers, part of its strategy to expand its repertory beyond the dances of Taylor, who died last year. The three—Kyle Abraham, Pam Tanowitz, and Margie Gillis—represent a wide swath of the dance field: Abraham's style is urbane and internal, Tanowitz's is cerebral and postmodern, and Gillis's is fluid and steeped in emotion.—*Marina Hars* (Nov. 5-9 and Nov. 11-12. Through Nov. 17.)

Maria Hassabi
1014

"Entre Deux Actes (Ménage à Quatre)" began, in 2009, with the artist Nairy Baghramian and the designer Janette Laverrière making an art installation out of an actress's dressing room that Laverrière had fashioned circa 1947. To this, Baghramian later added erotic Polaroids by Carlo Mollino. And now, for Performa 19, she brings in choreography by Maria Hassabi, whose work, closer to slow-moving sculpture than to conventional dance, is best appreciated in installation settings. The performance moves through two floors of a Fifth Avenue town house, finding drama and glamorous tension in the distance between dancers, arranged apart or body against body.—*Brian Seibert* (Nov. 6-10.)

"Bacchae: Prelude to a Purge"
BAM Harvey Theatre

The audience may not learn much about Euripides' "The Bacchae" by watching Marlene Monteiro Freitas's evening of dance theatre, but that won't matter much once Freitas's surreal, grotesque onstage world is unfurled. Five trumpeters and eight dancers scream, sing, and don masks, eventually joining in a mad, mesmerizing rendition of Ravel's "Boléro." Half carnival, half decadent variety show, this seductive "Bacchae" embodies the Dionysian spirit that drives the play, dark side and all.—*M.H.* (Nov. 7-9.)

Kia LaBeija
Performance Space New York

In 1922, the Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer created "The Triadic Ballet": essentially an avant-garde fashion show, with performers posing and



WINTER PREVIEW

Irish Steps, Tap's Swing

As "Riverdance"'s twenty-fifth-anniversary tour approaches (March 10-15, at Radio City Music Hall), one of the mega-show's former stars offers a radically contrasting vision of Irish dance: Colin Dunne, who has spent the past twenty years deconstructing the form, brings a solo evening, "Concert," to the Baryshnikov Arts Center (Nov. 14-16). With the focus and the unpredictability of a veteran improviser, he dances his way through the music of the late Tommy Potts, a sagelike fiddler whose sole studio album, "The Liffey Banks," extended the idea of what traditional Irish music could be.

"Swing is from the inside," the legendary tap dancer Jimmy Slyde once said, referring to that special quality—a mixture of panache and freedom—that elevates a dancer beyond sheer technical brilliance. Slyde had oodles of it, as do the four dancers involved in the show "And Still You Must Swing," at the Joyce (Dec. 3-8). The tap virtuoso Dornmeshia—considered by some to be the best tapper of her generation—has put together a stellar quartet of performers: herself, the tap dancers Derick K. Grant and Jason Samuels Smith, and the modern dancer and choreographer Camille A. Brown. Together and individually, they channel the rhythms and moods of the jazz trio with which they share the stage.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON LANDREIN

Russian music has been a major source of inspiration for the choreographer Alexei Ratmansky, but his newest creation, for New York City Ballet's winter season (Jan. 21-March 1, at the David H. Koch), is set to a cycle of pieces for piano and voice by the Austrian experimental composer Peter Ablinger. In "Voices and Piano"—from which Ratmansky will excerpt—the music mimics the rhythms and pitches of the spoken word. (The full cycle includes passages from such familiar voices as John Cage, Angela Davis, and Mother Teresa.) The choreography adds an additional layer to the exploration of language. Another new ballet for the company, by Justin Peck—who recently created the dances for Steven Spielberg's film remake of "West Side Story," to be released next year—is set to a score commissioned from Nico Muhly.

Last year, it was announced that the British modern-dance troupe Richard Alston Dance Company will shut its doors in 2020, after twenty-five years in operation; it's a loss to anyone who loves the craft of dance, and to those who admire Alston's lyrical voice and vivid response to music. The company will visit the area one last time, at Peak Performances (Feb. 20-23), in Montclair, New Jersey.

—Marina Hars