



[Dance](#)

Year in review: Unbound festival tops groundbreaking year for Bay Area dance

Claudia Bauer December 17, 2018



Yuan Yuan Tan and Vitor Luiz in Edwaard Liang's "The Infinite Ocean" during S.F. Ballet's Unbound Festival. Photo: Erik Tomasson

Between new-company debuts, veteran companies reaching big birthdays and a ballet festival that drew international acclaim, Bay Area dance marked some big milestones this year. There was sadness, too, as the world lost a legend. But the trend is ever upward, toward more of the innovative work and outstanding artists we proudly call our own.

Best fest: S.F. Ballet's Unbound Festival

The world came to the Opera House in April to see San Francisco Ballet's [Unbound: A Festival of New Works](#). The epic 17-day event featured [12 world premieres](#) from [leading choreographers](#) like Christopher Wheeldon, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa and [Arthur Pita](#).

But more important than the international buzz was the homegrown enthusiasm: Longtime subscribers and newbies alike watched, argued and dived deep into the art of ballet.

First-year S.F. Ballet corps member Solomon Golding (kneeling at center) in "Otherness" was among several young dancers who shone during the Unbound Festival. Photo: Erik Tomasson

Ballet's newest stars

The Unbound Festival’s guest choreographers gave featured roles to San Francisco Ballet soloists and corps de ballet members, so the audience got to see dancers like [Benjamin Freemantle](#), [Solomon Golding](#), [Julia Rowe](#) and [Lonnie Weeks](#) for the outstanding artists that they are.

Most noteworthy debut: Dazaun Soleyn

The S.F. company [Dazaun.dance](#) launched in April with “Existence,” an ambitious and striking evening-length work. It seamlessly melded contemporary dance, hip-hop and raw emotion and revealed the distinctive talent of choreographer Dazaun Soleyn.



Jazz drummer Jack DeJohnette and tapper Savion Glover at SFJazz. Photo: Scott Chernis

Most mind-blowing mashup: “Dance of the Drum” at SFJazz

In January, SFJazz brought together [Tony Award-winning tap virtuoso Savion Glover and master jazz drummers Marcus Gilmore and Jack DeJohnette](#) for two nights each. The rhythmic riffing between Glover’s percussive feet and the musicians’ nimble improvisation was electrifying.

Blue-ribbon programming: ODC Theater

ODC Theater Director Julie Potter created thought-provoking programming that brought leading artists to San Francisco and showcased some of the Bay Area’s intriguing talents. From West Coast premieres like Netta Yerushalmy’s dance deconstruction “Paramodernities” (co-presented by Hope Mohr’s Bridge Project and SFMOMA’s Open Space) to co-presentations like Funsch Dance Experience’s “Mother, Sister, Daughter, Marvel” and Bobbi Jene Smith and Keir GoGwilt’s “With Care,” it was a season of must-sees.

Growing trend: immersive performance

The proscenium is so passe — today’s audiences want engagement. They flocked to on-the-hoof shows like [Joe Goode Performance Group’s “Still Standing.”](#) — a dance-theater walking tour of the Haas-Lilienthal House that sold out 27 performances — the San Francisco Movement Arts Festival and ODC/Dance’s “Path of Miracles” at Grace Cathedral, and “Fury,” a rock-ballet remix of “Mad Max: Fury Road” that got 800 people a night to the Midway in Dogpatch.

Biggest birthdays

They’re getting older, but they’ve never looked better. Micaya’s San Francisco International Hip Hop DanceFest turned 20, while [Alonzo King Lines Ballet](#) celebrated 35 years with world-premiere collaborations with tabla master Zakir Hussein and [Kronos Quartet](#). The San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival’s 40th-anniversary shows at the Opera House were its best ever (and that’s saying something).

Biggest loss: Paul Taylor

When [choreographer Paul Taylor died in August at age 88](#), the dance world lost one of its most vivid imaginations and one of the last avatars of modern dance’s golden era. But Taylor’s oeuvre of 147 innovative works will live on, as will his namesake company’s longstanding relationship with SF Performances.

Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener’s “Desire Lines: Retrofit” at SFMOMA. Photo: Charles Villyard

Best use of props: Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener

In “Desire Lines: Retrofit,” presented by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art’s Open Space, the brilliant former Merce Cunningham dancers Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener rummaged through the museum’s supply closet and unleashed glorious chaos with trash cans, ropes, a grocery cart and, eventually, a ladder suspended from a ceiling pipe.

Savviest way to sample dance: salons

Low-key, low-cost and fun, performance salons let audiences dip a toe into new genres, discover emerging artists and peek at works in progress. Ongoing series like Shawl-Anderson Dance Center’s studio showings, [RAWdance](#)’s Concept Series and Levydance’s Levysalon offered a kaleidoscope of experimental work, visiting artists and even commissions, and they’ll continue to run year-round.