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Andrea Mohin/The New York Times
Tony Neidenbach and Eilzabeth DeMent of the Liz Gerring Dance Company in "Lichtung/Clearing."

Opening Doors And Reaching New Heights

MULLING over the dances of 2010 my mind flies first to three modern-dance works I saw this spring, all by female choreographers. In March, at the [Baryshnikov Arts Center](#), the choreographer Liz Gerring presented the premiere of "Lichtung/Clearing." I [watched this twice](#); both occasions showed powerfully the world she had created onstage.

Was it a wildlife study? Was it a psychodrama? Possibly both. Arresting from the outset was the seven dancers' blend of precision and wild looseness. The entire physique of each performer looked intensely motivated.

To me and many others Ms. Gerring was new. One colleague who shared my enthusiasm told me that her previous work had been altogether less remarkable. Maybe "Lichtung/Clearing" is a one-off lucky strike — many choreographers have had those, and some have built careers on them — but I can't help hoping that a new door has opened.

Pam Tanowitz was already widely known in downtown New York before 2010; but with "The Wanderer Fantasy" at [Danspace Project](#), St. Mark's Church, this already good choreographer [broke through to new levels of accomplishment](#). Some

choreographers find Danspace awkward, as the audience is usually on three sides, but Ms. Tanowitz handles both three-dimensional space and the fourth dimension of time (and music) with unusual authority. She has a strong sense of history too. She lets you know when she's referring to past choreographers and when she's diverging from present ones. Contrasts abound: stillness versus movement, one against many, vertical beside horizontal, slow and fast.

In May the dancers-choreographers Sara Rudner and Dana Reitz revived "[Necessary Weather](#)," a 1994 collaboration with the lighting designer [Jennifer Tipton](#). This work, performed in silence, is surely the apogee of Ms. Tipton's art; and — as it had been in 1994 — it was probably the greatest single dance evening of my year. Light becomes one drama after another: sometimes startling, often playful. And the sensuous richness of Ms. Rudner's quality of motion makes me feel, as I have often felt over the decades, that there simply is no greater dancer in the world: the bend of her knees, the lusciousness of her feet, the rippling of her spine, the endless variety of her rhythm — these are, even now that she is in her 60s, [without equal](#).

Turning to ballet, perhaps the greatest marvel has been the development of the ballerina [Sara Mearns](#) at [New York City Ballet](#). The [Peter Martins](#) production of "Swan Lake" has obvious problems, notably in its garish décor and costumes, but in a performance in February she outshone it. It's not enough to say that hers was the greatest single performance of the double-heroine Odette-Odile I've seen in 20 years; she led me back to the internal dance drama of both characters in ways I had begun to despair of encountering again.

Her build and beauty are not conventional. She's the best example before the American public today of how talent can reshape our ideas of allure. As Titania in Balanchine's "Midsummer Night's Dream," in the central roles of his "Diamonds" and "Cortège Hongrois," as the Lilac Fairy in "The Sleeping Beauty" and as the most jubilant of the three muse-sirens in Alexei Ratmansky's new "Namouna: a Grand Divertissement," the blaze of her dancing was a vital force.

In June another ballerina, Alina Cojocaru, gave a single guest performance in [American Ballet Theater](#)'s production of "The Sleeping Beauty," and in most of Act I she achieved something similar, making me and others feel we could forget for the moment every other interpreter we'd seen in the role. Her talent too is transcendent. Her point shoes feature large (though soft) blocks, yet who could miss how exquisitely she uses those feet? Like every part of her, they're expressive. She, like Margot Fonteyn and Gelsey Kirkland, has a vulnerability that can make you want to cry for no good reason.

When it comes to purest classicism, however, our current exemplar is male: [David Hallberg](#). In Ballet Theater's "Sleeping Beauty" his line, his stance, his phrasing all epitomized the ideal. In Ashton's "Dream" he found choreography that inflamed him, and the "Orpheus" Blest Spirit solo that he danced in "Kings of the Dance" (March, City Center) was a revelation of Elysian grace. Ballet Theater has other superb male dancers. Ballet today knows no performance as definitive as that of Herman Cornejo's Puck in Ballet Theater's "Dream." But with Mr. Hallberg we watch history in the making: male style is taken to new heights.

Not all of Ballet Theater's Ashton revivals fully succeeded. Most performances of "The Dream" and the "Thaïs Pas de Deux," however, widened the scope of the New York ballet season. Balanchine remains the predominant choreographer of our era, but no better provider of an alternative view of classicism has yet emerged than his exact contemporary Ashton. The luster of the "Dream" performances were the high points of the ballet summer.

Also at Ballet Theater, Natalia Osipova had her second guest season, showing again her phenomenal gifts. Her jump was at its most astounding in Act I of "Don Quixote," and that's where she best displays her virtues of life-enhancing Bolshoi vitality. But it's also apparent that she's a serious artist. Though her Aurora in "Beauty" was nowhere near as touching or refined as Ms. Cojocaru's (these guests appeared in successive performances on the same extraordinary day), hers covered far the wider arc over its three acts.

I end with a dancer who is not yet great and perhaps may never become great. He simply shows what can happen when an artist with enough potential comes within the domain of the right artistic director. In March young Matthew Renko was already eye catching at the [Kennedy Center](#) in Washington in the Suzanne Farrell Ballet Company's corps de ballet; in particular he danced one of the three men in Balanchine's "Donizetti Variations." In the same company's November season he took the lead male role in Balanchine's "Source" as well as the Harlequin in "La Sonnambula" with irresistible verve. He's the brightest example in a bright company that works in very limited conditions. Dancing as if his heart was in every step, he made a fuller impact on me than many of the world's most brilliant technicians.