on stage

SIZZLIN’ STEPS

Chicago’s fall dance season set to soar at a fever pitch

BY HEDY WEISS

Every dance is a kind of fever chart, a graph of the heart,” said Martha Graham, that grande dame of American dance. And this fall, the “fever chart” in Chicago is set to high as the city’s stages welcome everyone from Mikhail Baryshnikov to Edward Villella’s Miami City Ballet, from the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (arriving soon after the death of its namesake) to Chicago’s own Joffrey Ballet in an evening-length work based on Shakespeare’s “Othello.” And that’s just for starters.

Here’s a look at some of the highlights of the next few months:

THE AUDITORIUM THEATER
50 E. Congress; 1-800-982-2787

Miami City Ballet (Oct. 2-4): Under the artistic direction of Edward Villella, a long-time leading dancer with George Balanchine’s New York City Ballet, this company, founded in 1963, has become one of the largest and most virtuosic troupe in the U.S. and one of the strongest interpreters of Balanchine works. In its Chicago debut it will perform Balanchine’s “Symphony in Three Movements” (set to Stravinsky) and “Valse Fantasie, 1935” (a quartet to the music of Glinka), as well as the classic Petipa “Black Swan Pas De Deux” from “Swan Lake” and Twyla Tharp’s galvanic “In the Upper Room” (to music by Philip Glass).

The Joffrey Ballet in “Othello” (Oct. 14-23): Shakespeare has long been fertile material for the ballet, with choreographers turning to “Roméo et Juliet,” “The Taming of the Shrew” and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Jose Limón created a four-dancer take on “Othello,” but Lar Lubovitch turned this tale of envy and a crime of passion into a full-length work. The ballet, first performed in 1997 by American Ballet Theatre, features an original score by Elliot Goldenthal (who won an Academy Award for creating the soundtrack for partner Julie Taymor’s movie, “Frida”), and a set by the dynamic Russian-bred designer George Tsypin. The Joffrey’s nine new company members will be on view, too.

Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet (Nov. 1-16): Founded in 2003 by Nancy Laurie (a Wal-Mart heir), and currently under the artistic direction of former Alvin Alley American Dance Theater’s Benoit-Swan Pouffer, this ensemble of 16 dancers focuses on acquiring and commissioning new works by the world’s most sought-after emerging choreographers. I’d see this program just to catch “Ten Duets or a Theme of Rescue” by Canadian-born choreographer Crystal Pite, whose work for the Nederlands Dans Theater, performed here this spring, was astounding. Pite’s piece is set to Cliff Martinez’s soundtrack for the film “Solaris.”

Also on the program of this troupe, which is known for its daring, athletic movement, its blend of ballet, contemporary and popular dance, and its use of intriguing multimedia effects, will be Didy Weyman’s “frame of view” (to music by Osvaldo Golijov; Jacques Offenbach, and the singing of Nina Simone and Dean Martin), and Jo Stromgren’s “Sunday, Again” (set to Bach).

Ana Laguna and Mikhail Baryshnikov

AT THE HARRIS THEATER
FOR MUSIC AND DANCE
205 E. Randolp; (312) 334-7777

Mikhail Baryshnikov and Ana Laguna (Sept. 25-27): After selling out his brief engagement here in 2007, Baryshnikov (still gorgeous to watch at 61), is back. And this time he’s bringing Ana Laguna—a Spanish-bred dancer who has spent much of her career with Sweden’s famed Cullberg Ballet—to dance with him. The program includes solos for Baryshnikov (Alexei Ratmansky’s...