

great home to showcase Aurora's unique perspectives on media arts, but also a great place for artists to come together and collaborate. Kudos to the Aurora team!

LW: Pegasus Theatre, the company behind the eye-popping Living Black & White shows, is moving to Addison. The tales of fumbling detective Harry Hunsacker and his "good friend and paid-by-the-hour assistant Nigel Grouse" have been a staple at Richardson's Eisemann Center—especially on New Year's Eve—but will now live at the newly restructured Addison Performing Arts Center. And Avant Chamber Ballet opens their new home in January!

HIDDEN-ISH GEMS

NW: Lydia Hance's [Frame Dance](#) may have a quiet footprint but I am always impressed by how she keeps refining and honing her mission while developing her multi-gen Frame Dance Ensemble, along with several other education based programs. Frame Dance's annual Mise en Scène is always a summer highlight. The annual film fest, Frame X Frame, is still going strong and opened with Keith Glassman's *Lives Beyond Motion* at Houston Ballet. Glassman's poignant documentary offered an inside lens into the male dancing body and mind, featuring legendary dancers and choreographers discussing their careers, the AIDS era, and most importantly, why they dance. Through testimony, footage of seminal choreography, Glassman weaves a true to life film about the men in dance. Hance wraps up the spring season with a restaging of Merce Cunningham's *50 Looks* May 16-17 at Rienzi.

Group Acorde is another excellent Houston dance group that feels under the radar. Lindsey McGill and Roberta Paixao Cortes regularly present compelling shows and this past year included guest artists Jasmine Hearn and Dawn Dippel.

Nameless Sound's *They, Who Sound*, held most Mondays at Lawndale Art

Center, constantly draws a robust crowd for shows smartly curated by Nameless Sound founder Dave Dove.

LW: [Avant Chamber Ballet](#) in Dallas is such a standout boutique company. In 2026, it'll premiere two original ballets and launch a new subscription series aimed at families. We have operas and theater for children, so why not ballet?

TG: Not sure if this is hidden, as much as "if you know, you know," but all the live performance programming I've seen at Rice Moody Center this year has been exceptional. Much of that programming is done in thematic connection with exhibitions in the galleries, which makes the experiences even richer. Their production of Leigh Fondakowski's docu-play *Spill* about the Deepwater Horizon disaster reminded me of the true depth and breadth of theater, how it can portray tragedy on epic and then deeply individual scales from one moment to the next. The cast were all local actors giving some of their best performances of the year, the director a professor at Rice's Center for Environmental Studies, and the design crew were a mix of local veteran theater artists along with Rice students who definitely have a future in theater. Likewise when they bring in artists from out of town like Choreographer Gabrielle Lamb to create a site specific movement piece for their exhibition *Bio Morphe*, it made for some exciting immersive dance.

SC: These two hidden gems have actually been active for a very long time on the Houston classical chamber music scene. Axiom Quartet is doing some of its best playing these days and boldly programmed the complete Shostakovich string quartets this season. That's all 15 deeply challenging works in one season! Houston Brass Quintet has been really creative with their programming. At their fall concert in collaboration with Houston Early Music, historical fencing was featured along with the music. I never thought I would be watching fencing at a concert. It was a really fun pairing and the audience loved it.



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Allegra Herman, Tiffany Mangulabhan, Victoria Sames, and Amy Saunder performing as part of Dimensions Variable: Gabrielle Lamb at Moody Center for the Arts. Photo by Frank Hernandez.

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION

TM: Ballet Folklórico de México de Amalia Hernández's show at Austin's Long Center was an engrossing theatrical event. Dozens of dancers and musicians presented contemporary as well as historic dances that were enhanced by sumptuous costumes, extravagant sets, and sophisticated lighting design. So much expert skill and heart-felt commitment were on display that the audience was literally dancing in the aisles and shouting "Viva Mexico!" along with the performers at the end of the evening.

designers Aaron Johansen and Jamie Milligan to fashion an environment that was claustrophobic, and versatile, and had plenty of jump scares.

TG: *American Psycho*, design seeped, like a bloody crime scene, all the way out the Zilka Theatre house, turning the Hobby Center Lobby into an 80s video store. Even the programs looked like a slick 80s magazine. Rec Room always does amazing work in their very small space, and this year their ultra realistic garage turned DJ studio in *Toros* was another marvel. I highlighted both Rec Room's Stefan Azizi and Leah Mazur in my story about [small stage design](#).



BEST DANCE

LW: [Bruce Wood Dance Dallas](#) had such a strong season, including a Robert Battle premiere, and Charles Santos always goes above and beyond with the [TITAS/DANCE UNBOUND](#) series.

TM: Lindsey, I second the shout-out for Charles Santos and TITAS/DANCE UNBOUND. This performance series excels on so many fronts: diversity of styles, great mix of US and international artists, superb production values and, of course, stunning choreography and performance. But I give it kudos for another element—lengthening the season. Instead of closing with the “Command Performance” gala in April or May, for the past couple of years there have been additional performances in May and June after the Gala. I’m all for this ten-month season!

NW: Performing Arts Houston's presentation of Hung Dance's *Birdy* featured gorgeous choreography by rising choreographer Lai Hung-Chung, outstanding lead dancer Cheng I-Han, and the entire ensemble. Big thanks to Performing Arts Houston's Meg Booth for helping to organize this historic tour for this young troupe. Dance Source Houston AIR 2025 residents Adele Nickel, Ashley Clos and Paty Lorena Solórzano each created outstanding researched-based works for the Barnstorm Fest. Everything about Houston Contemporary Dance Company's Resolve concert in April shined with polish from the choice of choreographers: Andrea Dawn Shelley, Kacie Boblitt, Taryn Vander Hoop, and Natasha Adorlee, to the fabulous dancers. Gabrielle Lamb's quartet of dancers Allegra Herman, Tiffany Mangulabhan, Victoria Sames, and Amy Saunder stretched our ideas of what it means to be a moving human as they explored the *Bio Morphe* exhibit at Rice's Moody Center for the Arts as part of Dimensions Variable.

SC: I was very impressed with Houston Contemporary Dance Company's *Fall Collections* show. Yue Yin's *Citizen* was a standout: expressive, dynamic, and intense. The dancers were superb in this physically demanding work. The other works on the program showed wonderful variety and the ensemble really made each their own.

TM: It is tough to choose – I saw so many great shows in 2025. But Ronald K. Brown/EVIDENCE's performance at the Winspear Opera House in Dallas was absolutely electric! TITAS's jubilant season opener featured African and contemporary dance performed with both complete commitment and total abandon by the company's wonderful dancers. Company directors Ronald K. Brown and Arcell Cabuag joined the company for a danced curtain call at the close of a performance that felt more like a celebration.

TG: Maybe this belongs back in trends or maybe this is too much information about me, but I was intrigued by several amazing performances of dance depicting violence. I'm thinking about the rumble scenes in Houston Grand Opera's *West Side Story* (who knew HGO could feature such