

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation

Area Scholars at “Dance and the Social City”: SDHS Conference in Philly

by Ellen Gerdes

Think of dance history as Isadora Duncan's autobiography and old videos of Martha Graham? Think again. The Society of Dance History scholars Annual Conference June 14-17 offered presentations addressing subjects ranging from striptease performance in Boston during the 1970s to early twentieth century folk dance education in Chicago. And many scholars revealed complexities of international dance histories – butoh, tango, belly dance, hip-hop, and Indian dance included. Common themes were nostalgia for the “authentic,” dance as social resistance, media representations of dance, and issues of race and sexuality in vernacular dance. Performances by area choreographers expressed the value of SDHS in bridging theory and practice. As an example, Headlong Dance Theater presented [Avalanche](#), a piece performed by five faculty members at Bates and Colby Colleges.

SDHS President Thomas DeFrantz and conference host Donna Faye Burchfield of the University of the Arts welcomed participants and presenters from across the globe. Many Philadelphia scholars and artists presented their wealth of knowledge in our “social city.” Among them were Pallabi Chakravorty with *Dance Revolution: New Embodiments and Media-Citizenry*, Sherril Dodds offering *Popular Embodiments of English Folk*, and Linda Caruso Haviland speaking on “Good looks, good health and a knowledge of dancing”: *Training the stage dancer in Philadelphia in the early 1900s*. (Full listing below.)

Comments by two colleagues follow:

“I’ve been involved with SDHS for almost its entire history, on and off. I was encouraged that so many younger colleagues are interested in dance history and moving into positions of research, teaching, and leadership. I hope many of them are digging into archival work, using materials in a range of languages, and understanding dance history as a sweep of human engagement that is both distinct as a study of its own but also deeply enmeshed in the contexts of politics, economics, religion, other arts, and so on. It’s such a rich field! Where else do we get to really move through and within history?” -Lynn Matluck Brooks

“I enjoyed the presentation ‘Dancing Against the Law: Critical Moves in Bengaluru’s Gay Nightlife’ by Kareem Khubchandani because he integrated his personal dancing experience with theory and politics. There were several memorable moments where Khubchandani danced aspects of his paper, and I was excited by his embodied approach to scholarship.” – Colleen Hooper

Presentations by area scholars were:

Lynn Matluck Brooks: *John Durang: The Engaged Philadelphia Thespian*

Pallabi Chakravorty: *Dance Revolution: New Embodiments and Media-Citizenry*

Sherril Dodds: *Popular Embodiments of English Folk*

Ellen Gerdes: *Chinese Dance and Beijing Opera Ensembles at the Folk Arts Cultural Treasures School*

Brenda Dixon Gottschild: *Keynote Address, “Thinking Joan, Drinking Dance”*

Dionne Griffiths: *Mary Hinkson: Dance, Duality and Selfhood*

Linda Caruso Haviland: *"Good looks, good health and a knowledge of dancing": Training the stage dancer in Philadelphia in the early 1900s.*

Colleen Hooper: *Martha Bowers and Dance Theatre Etcetera: Dancing with the Community On the Waterfront in Red Hook, Brooklyn*

Joellen Meglin: *Ruth Page, Paris, 1950-52: From Ballet Americana to Ballet Cosmopolitan*

Carolyn Merritt: *Buenos Aires, Dancing City*

Laura Katz Rizzo: *The Sleeping Beauty Wakes Up in Philadelphia: Classical Ballet in the American City*

Merian Soto: *Dancing Latino New York: 30 Years of Experimentation*

For more information about the Society of Dance History Scholars, please visit: <http://sdhs.org/>

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