

Lifestyles

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Dance greats take stage against AIDS

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For lovers of the dance, it was like being in a candy store stocked with goodies — 13 of the world's finest ballet and modern dance companies performing Monday night at Lincoln Center's New York State Theater in Manhattan.

The delicious sense of anticipation created by the occasion, however, did not mask its sobering purpose: The companies were "Dancing For Life," raising money to combat AIDS.

The unprecedented three-hour event raised \$1.4 million to battle acquired immune deficiency syndrome, announced host Mikhail Baryshnikov at the start of the evening.

Where the money goes

Three-fourths of the money will go to the American Foundation For AIDS Research; the National AIDS Network, a resource service for more than 300 organizations; and the Gay Men's Health Crisis, a Manhattan-based organization that offers psychosocial services and educational programs. The rest of the proceeds will be divided among 14 other organizations involved in AIDS care and education.

From the beginning of the evening, it was clear that "Dancing For Life" —conceived by choreographer Lar Lubovitch and coordinated by Jerome Robbins, an artistic director of the New York City Ballet — was not going to be your typical dance gala. Baryshnikov warned the packed audience, which included ballet stars Suzanne Farrell and Rudolf Nureyev, theatrical producer Joseph Papp and columnist Liz Smith, that there would only be one curtain call for each group, "no matter how much you cheer." So there were no prolonged ovations with flowers cascading from balconies and no star dancers in such standard sure-fire crowd-pleasers as the "Black Swan" pas de deux. Instead, "Dancing For Life" offered a brisk program that emphasized ensemble work and serious dance.

One of the program's more intriguing ideas was to bring together companies that have created works to the same composer. In the "Dancing to Bach" section, the Mark Morris Dance Group, dressed in lavender tank tops and yellow gym shorts, offered the first movement of Morris' athletic modern dance piece, "Marble Halls." This was followed by Dance Theater of Harlem, dressed in white practice clothes for the second movement of

George Balanchine's intricate ballet, "Concerto Barocco," and the Paul Taylor Dance Company in the last movement of Taylor's modern-dance work "Esplanade." Here the dancers, wearing dresses, pants and shirts of various colors, drew laughs and cheers from the audience as they slid across the stage and rolled around like tumbleweeds.

That modern dancers and ballet stars could share the same stage shows how far the dance world has come. In the first half of this century, modern dance was East, ballet was West and the twain rarely met. Nowadays, modern-dance choreographers regularly work with ballet dancers, as seen in Mark Morris' "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes" for Baryshnikov and members of the American Ballet Theater, which was previewed at Monday's benefit. With ballerinas parading around like show girls from the Ziegfeld Follies and male dancers doing melodramatic backbends, Morris' new work had a light, quirky touch. It featured Baryshnikov performing a series of turns that gradually slowed to a tango-style score by Virgil Thomson. Here the dancer was at his playful, just-one-of-the-gang best.

Love duet for 2 men

"Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes" proved to be an audience favorite as did the slow movement of Lar Lubovitch's "Concerto Six Twenty-Two," a love duet for two men performed by Sylvain Lafortune and Rick Michalek, members of the Lubovitch troupe.

Another big hit was the finale, which featured members of the New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theater, the Joffrey Ballet and Dance Theater of Harlem in the glittering final movement of Balanchine's "Symphony in C."

After the finale, all the participating dancers—including members of the Feld Ballet, Twyla Tharp Dance, the Martha Graham Dance Company, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and Laura Dean Dancers and Musicians—returned with the artistic directors of their companies for one last bow. As the audience rose to cheer them, the dancers applauded the audience.