



Pacific Northwest Ballet in Paul Gibson's *The Piano* Dance on tour at City Center's Fall For Dance Festival

Courtesy of City Center

Tour De Force

The country's largest ballet companies take to touring.

By Jocelyn Anderson

Though touring is an expensive endeavor for companies with many dancers and elaborate sets, more and more large ballet companies are returning to the road.

American Ballet Theatre, which regularly appears in Southern California and Washington, DC, will stop in several additional cities, including London and Paris in February and March. Other companies such as the Houston and Pacific Northwest ballets have made touring a priority in the last couple of years. Even New York City Ballet performed in Chicago for the first time in more than 25 years last October.

"Touring is company-building," says Stanton Welch, artistic director of Houston Ballet, which performed in New Orleans and in Montreal and Ottawa, Canada, in 2006. "It gets us more shows, and that's what we're after."

For most companies, the trick is figuring out what ballets can hit the road compactly—and economically. Generally, contemporary mixed bills travel well because they don't require a lot of scenery and costumes to be trucked from city to city, although choreographers may have to make slight changes to accommodate a stage's size.

"I don't want to get in the position where we say we can't go because we would be missing a foot of stage space,"

says Welch, who is also a choreographer. "We need to get to the people."

Miami City Ballet has made touring a part of its season for the past 20 years. It regularly performs throughout southern Florida and usually adds more locations in the fall and spring. Last fall, MCB toured the Midwestern states.

"[Touring] gives dancers more weeks of performing and the opportunity to be accepted outside their province," says MCB Artistic Director Edward Villella. "Probably one of the more important things is to achieve a national reputation."

Building a name outside a company's home city can be important because then the company can seek national funding. Plus, some areas might not have their own ballet companies.

"It brings a level of quality to the hinterlands," says Villella. "I danced all over this country as a guest, and it was really important. It was a question of showing isolated areas what was going on in vibrant areas."

Welch agrees, adding that touring can spark a bigger interest in ballet and help companies find their fans. "It's our job," he says. "If they can't come to us, we'll go to them. And we want to show them quality, not eight swans running around pretending to be 24. You need to see how it was intended to be. That's important." □