

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet Makes Impression Company Thrives, Entertains Throughout the World

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Silent Ghost with Seia Rassenti Anthony Tiedeman. Photo by Rosalie O'Connor.

Some dance performances leave an indelible mark. They are emotional, well presented, and have a sense of humor. They are entertaining. They are comprised of finely trained artists who are immaculately rehearsed. These artists don't just execute steps, they dance; they use the choreography as a vehicle to speak with their bodies and they do it really well.

This was the single performance of the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet at the South Miami-Dade Cultural Arts Center in a collaborative presentation by SMDCAC and Culture Shock Miami. Continuing on a celebratory of 20 years of existence, the ASFB delivered their first Southern Florida presentation with choreography by three well known choreographers and included two ASFB new commissions.

One complaint freelance choreographers often have is that they are always meeting a new group of dancers. Not so with ASFB. If the choreographer is the right fit, ASFB uses the choreographer repeatedly so there is familiarity in the working environment. The dancers are known, the style and demands are known and yet, the choreographer is not an in-house person. It's a win-win collaboration. This was the case with all three choreographers.

ASFB Artistic Director, Tom Mossbrucker says, "We don't work with a choreographer just once, we like to develop relationships. These consistent voices have also imbued the company with its identity."

The first piece on last weekend's program was by Jorma Elo, the highly awarded resident choreographer of Boston Ballet who has created substantial works for every major classical ballet company, and numerous works for ASFB. Elo danced for both classical and contemporary companies and it shows in his creations.

"1st Flash" is a contemporary work that includes fleeting balletic steps to the glorious music of Jean Sibelius. Glorious is an apt word to describe the movement. While today's contemporary dance can be dry, non-emotional and rather pedantic in pace, this piece was anything but. Gestures that were staccato and fast morphed into expectant stillness. There was a cause and a reaction for every move, all delivered with drama and elegance. The choreography was complex but you never saw steps. Romance is a word that is not often associated with contemporary dance, but here, there was romance. The dancers, who appeared in a various assortment of solos and duets, included the liquid Jannell Figgins, mighty Joseph Watson, charming Seia Rassenti, dynamic Pete Leo Walker, the fetching Sadie Brown, and the talented Anthony Tiedeman. These were stellar dancers individually who became a unified and dramatic ensemble. One was curious to see if this positive pace would continue.

After joining Hubbard Street Dance Chicago in 2005 as a dancer, Alejandro Cerrudo was soon garnishing praise as a choreographer. He was appointed as Hubbard Street's first in-house choreographer in 2009 and now, Cerrudo's name is known as a choreographer world-wide. ASFB continues their established relationship with Cerrudo in this latest commission entitled "Silent Ghost." The dancers didn't do this piece 'a little.' It was all or nothing presented with assurance and attitude. A sensitive duet by Figgins and Rassenti culminated in a sweeping and touching pairing of Emily Proctor and Craig Black. It is rewarding to see dancers who look at each other.

Barcelona based Cayetano Soto rounded out the evening with "Huma Rojo" a blast of color in red. Mostly known in Europe and beginning to forge a following in the States, Soto has been working with ASFB since 2009. Starting with words endorsing the merits of 'confidence,' we are taken through a humorous and, sometimes all too real, look at the inner emotions of human strengths and weaknesses. Are we manly enough, are we girly enough or are we just plain scared? Familiar tunes from Ray Barretto, Nat "King" Cole, Xavier Cugat and his Orchestra, Abbe Lane and Pérez Prado and his Orchestra were inspiration and backdrop for a look at ourselves. These dancers can take tongue-and-cheek to a whole new level and do it with style, aplomb and dynamics.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet artists are balletically trained and work together about 40 weeks a year. It shows. They know one another and their craft intricately. Maybe this is why they can look at each other, why they have an intimacy that is felt into the audience, and why they are so immaculately rehearsed. It is certainly a quality that imbues the performance with something that is hard to describe, but is certainly felt when it is there. Directors Mossbrucker and Jean-Philippe Malaty are doing something very correct.



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