

THE ASPEN TIMES

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet debuts new works, celebrates 20th anniversary season

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If You Go ...

What: Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
When: Saturday, Feb. 13, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Aspen District Theatre

How much: \$25-\$74

Tickets: Wheeler Opera House box office; www.aspenshowtix.com

More info: The program features premieres of Fernando Melo's "Re:Play" and Cayetano Soto's "Huma Roja." The company will also perform Alejandro Cerrudo's "Silent Ghost," which premiered last summer. An encore of Saturday's performance is scheduled for Saturday, March 26.

When Aspen Santa Fe Ballet approached Cayetano Soto about commissioning a new piece from him for its 20th anniversary season, the company gave the Spanish-born choreographer the carte blanche creative freedom he'd come to expect from previous collaborations here. But, they suggested, maybe he attempt something with a little lighter touch than his previous local creations, like 2010's "Uneven" and 2013's "Beautiful Mistake."

He took the idea to heart.

His piece, crafted over five intense weeks this winter with dancers at the ballet's studio at Colorado Mountain College, aims for a fun, funny, playful take on contemporary dance.

"It's another side of me that maybe Aspen does not know," Soto said in the studio before a recent rehearsal. "I don't want to do the same ballet over and over again. For what? I keep moving."

The whimsy of the piece is evident from its first moments, as dancers pantomime an arch voiceover about the power of ego — reminiscent of self-help tapes from an off-kilter motivational speaker. Among their moves in that opening salvo is the international dollar-tossing symbol for "making it rain." The exuberant movements that follow include women doing hip-hop-styled crotch grabs, some light butt-slapping, a group movement with echoes of Michael Jackson's iconic "Thriller" dance and male dancers contorting their arms between their legs and doing jazz hands. It all plays out to colorful mambo music by Xavier

Cugat (himself, incidentally, Catalan like Soto) with dancers in bold red costumes by the Paris-based fashion label Maison Ullens.

“It’s not like the other pieces that we create here, where it’s completely physical and athletic and cold, how I like it,” he said. “This time I said, ‘We’re going to be physical, we’re going to be athletic, but I want to see you. So play with the thing that you’re doing.’”

He wanted the 11 dancers in the company to let loose with an exuberant confidence, befitting the opening monologue.

“Although you might not see it, it’s about strong women all around me,” he said.

Thinking about women and power as he contemplated what he wanted to do with the piece, Soto returned to one of his favorite films: “All About My Mother” by Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar. Specifically, he found himself thinking about the actress character Huma Rojo (translated “Red Smoke” in English, played by Marisa Paredes). He named the piece for her.

“It’s an homage, in a way, to all of the strong women in my life,” he said.

“Huma Rojo” is his third ballet to be commissioned by Aspen Santa Fe and his fifth performed by the company. Since Soto’s last local premiere — “Beautiful Mistake” three years ago — he’s become the resident choreographer at Ballet BC in Vancouver and moved to Barcelona after 18 years in Berlin.

Soto cherishes the quiet of Aspen, he said, and the fertile creative environment of the Aspen Santa Fe studio. When he’s here, he doesn’t check email and takes a break from the day-to-day business of his position at BC Ballet.

After months of developing the concept for “Huma Rojo” and five weeks of hard work in the studio here, Soto looks forward to a payoff of just a few seconds on opening night Saturday. The moment between the end of a performance and the beginning of the audience applause, he said, contains a priceless and powerful human connection between viewers, dancers and Soto.

“Sometimes it’s just a few seconds,” he said. “But it contains all of the magic of creativity.”

MELO’S ‘RE:PLAY’

The humor of “Huma Rojo” serves as a counterpoint to the more earnest works in Saturday’s Aspen Santa Fe Ballet program, which begins a yearlong celebration of the



company's 20th anniversary celebration. It also includes a premiere by Fernando Melo and an encore of [Alejandro Cerrudo's "Silent Ghost," which debuted last summer.](#)

Executive director Jean-Philippe Malaty said the evening's — and the anniversary year's — program is meant to reflect the company's creative philosophy. The new piece by Soto represents the company's relationships with choreographers. A commission planned for the summer by Czech choreographer Jiri Kylian is a nod to the contemporary dance masters who have worked with the Aspen-based company.

And "Re:Play," by Fernando Melo, which premieres Saturday, represents the discovery and cultivation of new talent that has become a company signature.

Melo, a native of Brazil who has been dancing and choreographing in Europe to great acclaim since his teens and is now in his mid-30s, spent August in Aspen creating "Re:Play."

Set under dramatic lighting by Seah Johnson, the concept of the work is to repeatedly construct and deconstruct a single scene, with 10 dancers moving in and out, literally replaying the action in what Melo dubbed "a rhythmic journey of images."



"We established roles and relationships between the dancers and created a scene packed with action and reaction movements," Melo explained via email.

The tightly controlled sequences of the piece were put together with mathematic precision. But what they say will be up to the viewers.

"Every so often dance can be experienced in a sensory way which allows us as an audience to grasp real meaning from the movement, almost without being able to put it into words," he said. "This exciting and complex transaction between performer and audience is the nucleus of my work; where the audience plays the crucial role of interpreting the piece. I'd like to invite the audience to approach the piece without expectations, so as to leave room for whatever interpretations may arise for them while watching."

After his first time working in Aspen, Melo spoke highly of the company and its dancers.

"I really enjoyed collaborating with the unique artists at Aspen Santa Fe Ballet — a group of young multi-talented dancers led by a wonderful team," Melo said. "Together they have attracted national and international recognition for their brilliance."

<http://www.aspentimes.com/news/20566925-113/aspen-santa-fe-ballet-debuts-new-works-celebrates>