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Aspen Santa Fe Ballet launches L.A. residency with stirring, cinematic dance

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Aspen Santa Fe Ballet has been splitting its home base between Colorado and New Mexico, but over the weekend the dance company took its first leap toward calling Los Angeles home too.

With a fittingly
cinematic program
Saturday at Valley

Performing Arts Center, Aspen Santa Fe Ballet launched a three-year residency at the Northridge theater. The company will revisit VPAC over the next two years and commission new works by Los Angeles choreographers.

On Saturday, Brazilian choreographer Fernando Melo's "Re:Play" was the blockbuster of the night, capturing snapshots of movement in fragmentary flashes of light, like the frames of a film. The expertly cut lighting design by Seah Johnson catches a man in midstep, a woman in freefall and two men paused before a punch



Aspen Santa Fe Ballet's Emily Proctor and Anthony Tiedeman in choreographer Fernando Melo's "Re:Play." (Michael Alvarez)

as waving light beams fade to black. A jaw-dropping pulsing light ring overhead adds even more drama to the darting action below.

The mysterious fall of woman in white (Emily Proctor) unravels a marvelous whirlwind of inexplicable encounters that viewers are invited to untangle, just like the twisty end of a Hitchcock film.



Craig Black, left, and Joseph Watson in "Re:Play." (Michael Alvarez)

If "Re:Play" is suspense, then Spanish choreographer Alejandro Cerrudo's "Silent Ghost" is the indie love story. Sad, somber and set to the strains of angsty-alternative guitar, the piece is a melancholy meditation on love and loss. Tender duets between Seia Rassenti and Anthony Tiedeman, then Craig Black and

Proctor dramatically uncouple with heartbreaking simplicity -- a gut-wrenching drop to the floor, or a slow walk away. The dancers never let the vibe veer into melodrama.

Spanish-born choreographer Cayetano Soto's "Huma Rojo," a cheeky number grooving to Latin mambo music, provides the comic relief. Dressed in red from head to toe, dancers strut their stuff -- ruffling their hands like peacock feathers, fanning themselves down with flapping wrists. The whole dance is rather fidgety, but these are entertainers who don't care how silly they look.



Craig Black and Emily Proctor in Alejandro Cerrudo's "Silent Ghost." (Rosalie O'Connor)

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is ready for its Hollywood closeup.