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Aspen Santa Fe Ballet is a Gem of a Dance Company

By [Andrew Blackmore-Dobbyn](#), 27 April 2017

[Aspen Santa Fe Ballet](#) impresses as a group of artists that will try anything. In every dance of this program, they were fully immersed in creating a rich theatrical experience. They are not just dancers, but rather are fully engaged performers with awareness of themselves, one another, and the audience. They are dancers, actors, and thoughtful people. They come across as dedicated to bringing dance works to life and that they mostly succeed is a testament to great artistic vision. To see them do a piece once seems insufficient because everyone is doing something worth seeing and you can't take it all in on one viewing.



Pete Leo Walker in *Eudaemonia*

© Rosalie O'Connor

Cherice Barton created *Eudaemonia* intending to say something about happiness and the ways we seek it. It had moments that were very good. When one dancer was standing at the tip of the stage and leaned far out into the audience with her legs held by other dancers, it was powerful. Another section had the dancers seated in chairs in a circle that looked as it might have been a group therapy session that devolved into a compelling dance. Other elements struck me as off notes that were irritating. I can't be sure whether it was my fault or the choreography that was lacking. I feel an immediate resentment when anyone exhorts me to be happy. Am I just a curmudgeon or is pursuing happiness a banal goal? This piece was my least favorite of the night.

Alejandro Cerrudo's *Silent Ghost* was a poetic ode to longing and loss. Michael Korsch's lighting was key to enhancing the atmosphere with its soft tones. It opened

with the haunting music of Kid Creosote & Jon Hopkins, a sort of Blues meditation that was itself ghostly. Special about Cerrudo's choreograph is his ability to create intimacy between dancers with small gestures. One dancer makes a circle of his arms and his partner moves her head through the space created. They touch each other in places that aren't used often in dance partnering: holding each other's heads, touching just above the waist, behind the knee. These gestures draw your attention to the connection between the partners. They moved fluidly around each other and twined around, above and below, their bodies in constant contact. Cerrudo's choreography made the most of each dancer's ability and personality. They were all expressive and affecting.



Huma Rojo
© Rosalie O'Connor

Cayetano Soto's *Huma Rojo* closed the show with a spectacle that was part Tropicana floor show, part camp extravaganza. Clad in identical red costumes, the dancers began by preening and leering to a recording that promised dating success. Soto clearly has a wicked sense of humor. Then it kicked off with some delightful old tunes from the golden age of Latin Jazz. Bandleaders Xavier Cugat and Pérez Prado figured large as their music was iconic in that era. Soto's choreography was taut and rapid, giving emphasis to the complex rhythm and there were frequent moments that gave dancers solos that highlighted their special abilities. Splayed fingers behind the head symbolized a headdress while hands cupped over genitals indicated scandalously tiny costumes. There was an atmosphere of barely contained glee as they scampered across the stage, stopped, strutted, leaped around, and generally cavorted. There were only eight dancers in *Huma Rojo* but Soto kept them moving on and off stage so well that it often seemed like there were at least fifteen of them. I'll confess that I wanted to join them, it looked like that much fun. I left the theater in a euphoric state that lasted until I got home. That's a great show.



Craig Black and Emily Proctor

© Rosalie O'Connor

ASFB is a gem of a contemporary dance company that notably produces its own, original work with new and emerging choreographers. Kudos to Tom Mossbrucker and Jean-Philippe Malaty for putting this company together. The talent of these twelve dancers is unique. They function as a versatile and engaging ensemble and they seem capable of doing just about anything. They exude good will and you feel that they all enjoy working together. There is a vitality that you long to embrace, even when there's a piece you don't love. Catch this company wherever and whenever you can.

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