

Review: Pillow season opens with bold work

By Tresca Weinstein

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BECKET, Mass. — It was Pamela Tatge, the new executive director of Jacob's Pillow, who welcomed the audience to the festival's opening night on Wednesday. But it was former director Ella Baff who scheduled the opening act (along with the rest of the 2016 season), and she couldn't have made a better choice to kick things off.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, based in both the cities whose names it bears, is an astonishingly accomplished and versatile repertory company. On Wednesday, the dozen dancers performed a program of three works by international choreographers (from Spain, Brazil and Catalonia), each one bold and beautiful in its own way.

An element all three dances have in common is their striking use of light. Fernando Melo's "Re:play," new this year, is a film noir told in a multitude of tiny frames (the lightning design by Seah Johnson has 700 cues). Seconds-long scenes are suffused in hazy light and then fade into blackness; enigmatic characters—a woman in a white dress, a man in a long coat, two men dressed in black—come together in mysterious tableaux before the slate is wiped clean by the dark and a new image replaces it. A circular lighting fixture adds low-tech special effects, from a halo to fireflies. Anyone who's seen David Parsons' iconic "Caught" will recall that piece immediately; it shares DNA with "Re:play."

"Huma Rojo," by Catalonian choreographer Cayetano Soto, is both visually stunning and mischievously clever—it's the Mae West of dances (Soto was actually inspired by a West devotee, Joan Rivers). Packed into skin-tight scarlet bodysuits, the dancers wiggle, flutter, quick-step and shrug their shoulders, followed across the floor by stripes of light. There's a playful wink in every move, even when the choreography is at its most elastic and sensual. The score (standards from Nat "King" Cole, Xavier Cugat and Abbe Lane, who covers "Whatever Lola Wants") adds to the playful, postmodern vibe. But the irony doesn't detract from the power and drama of the dancing.

The quicksilver movement in "Silent Ghost," by the Madrid-based choreographer Alejandro Cerrudo, with lighting design by Michael Korsch, unfurls in dimness and in silhouette. Imagine fish darting through water dappled by sun and shade—a single, unbroken, liquid line of folding, sliding, jumping and turning. Cerrudo's pas de deux remind us of how poignant this wordless art form can be, and how much trust, vulnerability, longing and surrender can be communicated in a simple act of mutual support.

More Information

Dance review

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Jacob's Pillow, 358 George Carter Rd., Becket, Mass.

Program: "Silent Ghost," "Re:play," "Huma Rojo"

Length: Two hours; two intermissions

Continues: 8 p.m. tonight through Saturday; 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

Tickets: \$45–\$75

Info: (413) 243-0745 or <http://www.jacobspillow.org>

Also this week: Juan Siddi Flamenco Santa Fe, through Sunday in the Doris Duke Theatre

<http://www.timesunion.com/tuplus-features/article/Pillow-season-opens-with-bold-work-by-8320426.php>