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Playing With Perspectives

Dream Play
Photo by Craig Turpin

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet opens its dreamy summer season

BY TODD HARTLEY, TIME OUT STAFF WRITER

For acclaimed Brazilian-Swedish choreographer Fernando Melo, whose works have premiered in New York, Chicago and throughout Europe, it would seem that here, in Aspen, the play's the thing – not just in the breadth of things to do here and the theatrical aspirations of his works, but also in the names he gives them.

Melo's last work with the Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, 2016's "Re:Play," repeatedly built and deconstructed a single scene, with 10 dancers moving on and off the stage. Melo returns to Aspen this time with "Dream Play," a work that is meant to give the audience a sense of a constant shift in perspective, with dancers who never leave the floor.

The world premiere of "Dream Play" highlights ASFB's summer season kick-off tomorrow night at the Aspen District Theatre – a night that will also include Alejandro Cerrudo's "Little mortal jump" and a reprise of Cherice Barton's "Eudaemonia." We caught up with Melo before one of the final rehearsals.

ADN: You were born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and earned a scholarship to train in Vienna at age 16. How did that come about?

Melo: I started dancing at a very young age in Brazil, and in Brazilian dance we do a little bit of everything, from classical ballets to musicals and theater. So that was my base for everything that came about, and one of the things that came about was an international competition for ballet in the city of Brasilia. In the competition I was offered a scholarship to study at the Vienna

State Opera Ballet. I was there for two years and also performed a little bit with the company as an apprentice. From there I moved on to Germany. After a period of working in Germany, I moved to Göteborg, Sweden.

Your work "Re:Play" premiered in Aspen on Feb. 13, 2016. What drew you back to town so soon?

The company. The talent of the company and the great artistic directorship that runs the whole show, with Tom (Mossbrucker, ASFB artistic director) and J.P. (Malaty, ASFB executive director). It was inspiring to return to the company after having done a work together, and to have the opportunity to meet an audience again. It's always a luxury for a choreographer to do that, and to reunite with the company's dancers, technicians and artistic directorship after having a great experience with "Re:Play."

What did you learn about Aspen your last time here?

That it's a fantastic mountain town and there's a lot to do and a lot to explore. Also, it's a very welcoming place. It's not crowded, so you get to talk to people, talk to locals. I enjoyed that very much. There's so much to do here, so much nature. I've had the opportunity to experience both weathers – summer and a couple of days in winter, as well – which is great.

What music will accompany the dance and what are you calling the piece?

The piece is going to be called "Dream Play." The music is by Erik Satie, a French minimalist composer, and we also have a little bit of music from Chopin. It's mostly piano work. In my work music plays a specific role in creating the correct atmosphere and mood for the scene. We were looking for something nostalgic that would match the dreamlike rhythmical world that we're creating on the stage.

Earlier in your career, the Chicago Tribune said you possessed "a highly theatrical dance vision, tantalizing in its mild surrealism and fun to watch." Is that what you shoot for in your works?

Not always, but definitely in this one that we're creating right now for Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. In "Dream Play," we invite the audience to experience a constant shift of perspective. The dancers are performing precisely choreographed actions on the floor, and we capture the image that's created on the floor from above and project it back to the audience. So we're creating a shift in perspective. What you see on the floor you see flat and above you. In this way, we're giving the audience a completely different theatrical experience, as well as playing with elements of surrealism.

What themes can we expect to see explored in the piece?

We began exploring this idea of dramatic surrealism, and on the way, during the creative process, we ended up with various dreamlike scenes, so it became a theme



Little mortal jump
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor



Eudaemonia
Photo by Rosalie O'Connor

in the piece as well as the dream – the “Dream Play,” right? Where, for example, the speed is different or gravity doesn’t play a role, it’s very absurd, at times. So that’s what we’re going for with this piece.

Did you create the piece with Aspen in mind?

Yes. It’s a creation for the company, and everything was developed in the studio. I came up with the concept, and we decided that to prepare the studio for it, we had to create props and place a camera and have a way of projecting and see the rehearsal filmed from above. And we created a physical vocabulary, the choreography. The dance in the piece has been reinvented, in a way, because they’re always on the floor. So it was really created from scratch in the studio with the dancers. It’s been a real creative process because the dancers were also very involved in suggesting ideas and movement as well. It’ll be a completely different theatrical experience than one the audience has seen before.

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
*Featuring works by Fernando Melo,
 Alejandro Cerrudo and Cherice Barton*
 Aspen District Theatre
 Saturday, July 8, 8 p.m.
 Thursday, July 20, 8 p.m.
 Friday, August 18, 8 p.m.



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