

weekend



A Melo 'Dream'

Choreographer Fernando Melo premieres a new Aspen Santa Fe Ballet work



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Monday, July 10 - Tuesday, July 11, 8 - 12PM

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COURTESY PHOTO

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Choreographer Fernando Melo, standing, with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet dancers Joseph Watson and Katherine Bolanos in rehearsal; Melo and Watson in rehearsal for Melo's new Aspen Santa Fe Ballet creation; Fernando Melo is creating his second world premiere for Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. His previous work, "Re:Play," premiered in February of last year; Melo, standing, in rehearsals for "Dream Play."

Redefining Dance

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet to premiere an innovative new work on Saturday

Andrew Travers
The Aspen Times

What is a ballet without steps? We'll find out this weekend in a world premiere by choreographer Fernando Melo with the dancers of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet.

Melo, the inventive and adventurous young mind behind the astounding Aspen Santa Fe piece "Re:Play" — which premiered in February 2016 — has crafted a new ballet where dancers do not stand on their own two feet. They are lying down throughout, filmed from above. The fantastic scenes they create on the ground — where they fly and flip and seemingly do the impossible — are projected live onto a movie screen.

"I'm interested in a broader definition or a different approach to choreography than the conventional one," Melo, 36, said outside of the Aspen Santa Fe studio during rehearsals. "I see choreography more like organization. For example, organizing bodies in space, in an organized environment. Organizing the lights and sounds in combination with the movement. There is much more to it than steps and

music. I'm trying to explore that."

The Brazil-born, Switzerland-based choreographer wants to shift the audience's perspective and challenge the expectations of contemporary dance. His "Re:Play" did this by combining stop-motion and strobe lighting, creating an eerie beauty and a work that became a global hit on tour for Aspen Santa Fe.

But he's quick to note that the innovations in these pieces are not technology-driven. The lights — hundreds of precisely timed lights — in "Re:Play" were basically analog theater equipment, he points out. The camera and screen in the new piece "Dream Play," he noted, are standard tools of the theater. He's not dealing with bleeding-edge special effects, though the effect is extraordinary.

"What we're doing is very simple — it's a camera and a projection," he said. "It's a tool that exists in the theater. We're using the tools of the theater to tell a story and give an audience a different experience. It can be a positive or a negative experience, but it will definitely be an experience."

As Melo and his creative team were hashing out the concept for "Dream Play," he said, they

looked at Busby Berkeley films and studied commedia dell'arte tropes. For music, he chose piano pieces by Chopin and by Erik Satie because, he said, "we needed something naïve and melancholic to score the scenes we were developing."

On a recent morning, in the midst of an intense six-week rehearsal and creation process, dancers were sprawled across the floor of the Aspen Santa Fe rehearsal studio. Melo had affixed a fish-eye camera on the ceiling to capture their work, which played live on a flat screen television and simultaneously on a hand-held tablet that the choreographer studied intently.

Theirs is a collaborative process — dancers offered ideas about how they might be able to maneuver on the floor, Melo dropped to the ground occasionally to suggest a particular movement.

"The concept needed a lot of experimentation and try-outs and trial and error," Melo said. "It needs exploration. You're on the floor."

MELO, B6

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MICHAEL ALVAREZ/COURTESY PHOTO

Craig Black and Joseph Watson in "Re:Play."

MELO

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You can't walk. You can't do anything. You're starting from scratch."

Some dancers practiced tossing balls to one another, as Melo perfected a sort of juggling motif that runs through the work — dancers rolling balls to one another at all angles and seemingly defying gravity. Others practiced moving with umbrellas, another prominent prop in the piece.

One whimsical scene they rehearsed that day included a duet between company members Joseph Watson and Katherine Balanos, during which she climbs up his body, eventually standing on top of his head. Once there, she tossed rubber balls back and forth between them. A rope dropped from above and dancer Anthony Tiedeman climbed it. Anna Gerberich entered, appearing to float fairy-like across the scene as she maneuvered on a four-wheeled creeper board. She did flips above the others, eventually taking Tiedeman's hand and pulling him

If You Go ...

What: Fernando Melo world premiere, presented by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet
Where: Aspen District Theatre
When: Saturday, 8 p.m.
How much: \$36 to \$94
Tickets: Wheeler Opera House box office; www.aspenshowtix.com
More info: Melo's new work will be presented along with Alejandro Cerrudo's "Little mortal jump" and Cherice Barton's "Eudaemonia." Aspen Santa Fe Ballet will present an encore of the presentation July 20 and Aug. 18.

out of the top of the frame and flying away with him.

"It takes really skilled dancers to do what we're trying to do," Melo said later.

It's the stuff of dreams or cartoons or, if Melo has his way, the future of dance.

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