



Grace Parazzoli | For The New Mexican

FLOOR WORK

FERNANDO MELO
at ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET



Jonathan Crane

During the performance of Fernando Melo's new work, *Dream Play*, by Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, audience members won't necessarily be looking at the dancers — not in the typical sense. Melo's piece presents an inventive way of seeing dance. The performers will be on the floor, and their movements filmed and projected onto a screen in real time. The piece is included in an evening of mixed repertoire from the company on Saturday, July 15, at the Lentic Performing Arts Center.

"We are playing with perspective," Melo said, speaking in between rehearsals in Aspen. "We are playing with giving the audience a different performance, a different experience of a theatrical show. ... The audience plays a very important role in interpreting the piece. It's a concept that tricks the eye of the audience and invites them to experience this shift of perception."

The rehearsal process required its own shifts in perception — and, for the ASFB dancers, a shift in physical position. During the piece's six weeks of development, the dancers were lying and moving on the floor, an unusual space for professionals used to making the floor a springboard for vertical movement. "We began by exploring what is possible on the floor, and what movements we could do. How can you reinvent things like walking, sitting, standing? We spent a period of exploration where we discovered what is and what is not possible in the studio."

Melo credits the company's dancers for their dedicated engagement with the process of figuring out what is and isn't possible. The rehearsals, while exceptional in their spatial demands and unfolding movements, are typical for Melo in that they are an exploratory, collaborative process, with each person contributing their insights. "As a result, you have the most unforeseen results — the most exhilarating ones. Things you couldn't have imagined start to emerge." Music for the piece is by Erik Satie and Frédéric Chopin. Melo views music as vital to creating a dance's atmosphere. "It's there to support the scene that we're creating" — but not, as is often the case with choreography, as the determiner of when steps must occur and what the dance must therefore become.

This is Melo's second commission for ASFB, following his 2016 piece *Re:play*, which the *Los Angeles Times* praised for "capturing snapshots of movement in fragmentary flashes of light, like the frames of a film." Melo visits Santa Fe from his home base of Gothenburg, Sweden, where he is rehearsal director for the GöteborgsOperans Danskompani. After leaving Rio de Janeiro at age sixteen, the Brazilian choreographer trained with

the Vienna State Opera Ballet before performing with Ballett am Rhein in Düsseldorf and the GöteborgsOperans Danskompani. He has created works for a number of dance companies including Holland's Introdans, Chicago's Luna Negra Dance Theater, and New York's Ballet Hispanico.

He has also choreographed for the opera. The difference between working with dance troupes and opera companies, according to Melo, is like flying "an airplane or driving a Porsche. They both go very fast, but there are different buttons you need to press." Whereas opera involves collaborating with artists with widely divergent talents — from the conductor to the extras to the dancers and, of course, the singers — dance companies offer "one set of skills in the room, and one language that you can very easily call, and immediately everybody understands."

The evening's two other works are at once whimsical and reflective: Cherice Barton's *Eudaemonia*, which premiered earlier this year with ASFB, considers the definition and ceaseless pursuit of happiness. Barton's work has spanned Broadway and television — she choreographed Katy Perry's performance at the 2015 Grammy Awards — and her eclectic background shows in *Eudaemonia*, an observed-from-all-angles study of how uncomplicated joy can be. The company first performed Alejandro Cerrudo's *Little Mortal Jump* last summer, a popular piece originally choreographed for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago in 2012. It too has a playful element, along with passages of tremendous emotional resonance. The piece is set to a musical collage that includes works by Tom Waits, Philip Glass, and the band Beirut.

The works by Melo, Barton, and Cerrudo collectively present an opportunity to reflect on the measureless scope of choreographic innovation. Melo explained, "I'm interested in creating works that explore a broader definition of choreography. From my perspective, there is more to dance as an art form than simply setting dance steps to a musical score. For me, choreography is more about organization and organizing the bodies in space, in an organized environment, and organizing the stage elements, like sound, lights." The result for audiences, as Melo noted, is nothing less than a shift in perception — and in perspective. ◀

details

- ▼ Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, mixed repertoire
- ▼ 8 p.m. Saturday, July 15
- ▼ Lentic Performing Arts Center, 211 W. San Francisco St.
- ▼ \$36-59 | 505-988-1222 | www.ticketsantasfe.com



Fernando Melo, far right, during rehearsal; left: *Dream Play*; courtesy Aspen Santa Fe Ballet

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