

ish Ballet's Jeannette Diaz-Barboza and Andrey Leonovitch performed his light-hearted duet, *Apartment*. But it was truly Laguna who stole the show with her exuberant tour de force in Ek's solo *O Sole Mio* set to Luciano Pavarotti's soaring voice.

Such physical abandonment, such joy and force, with her silver hair loose and flying, Laguna was a quirky delight onstage. She embodied the playfulness of the choreography, in particular the times she flew across the floor with the aid of two men (including Ek). She performed a more sombre turn with Ek in his *Memory*, a duet of a middle-aged man remembering his great love. In typical Ek style, the set is minimal with only a few sticks of furniture around which the pair glides and cavorts, often in a sexual manner.

But the three Ek works were hardly the only thing worth seeing at Dance Salad this year. As always, producer Nancy Henderek packs a Romanesque feast into the three evenings, often leaving slightly dazed viewers struggling to remember the entire programme. It included, among others, the English National Ballet, the Royal Danish Ballet, Göteborgs Operans Ballet from Swe-

den, SemperOper Ballet from Germany, Staatstheater Ballet from Germany, Marie-Agnès Gillot and Jiří Bubeníček of the Paris Opera Ballet, China's Xing Liang and the stellar Belgian troop of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui/Toneelhuis. No mere salad, this festival was an all-you-can-eat buffet of international talent.

China's talented Xing Liang was eloquent in his solo *Existence*, bringing a contemporary taste of the Far East to the bill, and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui/Toneelhuis was an explosion of dancetheatre; a wonderful mix of old school Pina Bausch, Japanese manga, tarot and Western mythological archetypes, set to onstage music by Ensemble Micrologus, an Italian mediaeval and Renaissance instrumental and vocal group. What better way to sum up the philosophy behind Dance Salad itself than with such a compilation?

The work presented was a pairing of Cherkaoui's *Myth* (2007) and *Origine* (2008). Daisy Phillips set the mood with Indian goddess contortions to the mediaeval score before being joined by an expressive Kazutomi Kozuki who uses a vaguely Butoh-like crawl, crossing the floor toward her. From there things get even stranger. The talented Kozuki becomes her robe, shoes and a cigarette, before leaving Phillips asleep with an — we can only assume — angry speech in Japanese. Section II showcases a very limber Alexandra Gilbert who emerges from a cloak of hair to perform a solo in which she grasps the ends of the floor-length black wig in her incredibly flexible toes and rolls about the floor. Somewhere in the midst of it all was a man carrying stilt-like poles that doubled as a cross. It was all-in-all an amazing, funny, thought-provoking and certainly groundbreaking work not seen often enough in Texas.

On a more traditional note, or traditional by Cherkaoui's standards at least, was Paris Opera Ballet's angular yet lyrical duet *Rencontre*, choreographed and danced divinely by Marie-Agnès Gillot and Jiří Bubeníček. They embody the talent, training and presence one expects of the Paris Opera Ballet.

Choreographer William Forsythe was represented with his *Steptext*, danced by Dresden SemperOper Ballet whose Natalia Sologub showed the most stunning legs with extensions that seemed to reach for miles. Dressed in a red unitard, she danced en pointe with three athletic men in a riveting deconstruction of classicism and true love.

And, of course, there were fast and flashy ensemble numbers like David Dawson's luscious *A Million Kisses to My Skin* by the English National Ballet. Set to Bach's Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, the company flew across the stage with backs arched and arms and legs aloft. Here Dawson answers the question, just how many arabesques can you cram into one piano concerto? And the answer, like the Dance Salad festival itself, is more than you could possibly have imagined.

Marene Gustin

Houston



This year's Dance Salad, the three-day festival that brings dance from around the globe to Houston, was deliciously flavoured with a strong sprinkling of Mats Ek.

Opening night, April 9 at the Wortham Centre's Cullen Theatre, showcased two of the Swede's works, in which he and his wife and muse, Ana Laguna, danced. Later, the Royal Swed-

den, SemperOper Ballet from Germany, Staatstheater Ballet from Germany, Marie-Agnès Gillot and Jiří Bubeníček of the Paris Opera Ballet, China's Xing Liang and the stellar Belgian troop of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui/Toneelhuis. No mere salad, this festival was an all-you-can-eat buffet of international talent.

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