

Dance festival draws rave reviews

By Michael Baerga
THE DAILY COUGAR

Dance appreciation among Houston audiences excels to a new high, in a flawless showing at this year's Dance Salad Festival.

Houston's annual Dance Salad Festival, which was performed at Houston's Wortham Center, boasted an impressive compilation, featuring thriving and elite international dance companies including Azzopardi Company de Dansa, Garthier Dance, the Royal Ballet of Flanders, Jacoby & Pronk and local company, Texas Ballet Theatre.

The festival is unique to Houston, and gives the nation a rare glimpse at the prestigious works that are being created by choreographic powerhouses worldwide.

Returning for another Dance Salad Festival and premiering a melodramatic duet choreographed by Leon Lightfoot and performed by dynamic partners Drew Jacoby and Rubinard Pronk.

"I think that the lack of appreciation for dance is due to the lack of knowledge in our society. . . You build your palette with lots of exposure to different forms of an art, sometimes, we as viewers

can become greedy wanting instant gratification, something that's pretty and easy rather than investing into something that takes more patience but is far more rewarding," said Drew Jacoby.

As one of the most successful pieces of the evening, the duet between Jacoby & Pronk stood as one of the more solemn works, conveying a message of loss. With interesting light and prop design, utilizing a casket -sized upright box, and grounded yet lush gestures, the couples duet, *Softly as I Leave You*, showcased the new contemporary genre of dance that is vastly evolving. The couple's

conviction and dedication to the intent of Lightfoot's theme was evident in the quirky, yet profound movement qualities throughout. Although vastly accessible to the Wortham audience, the piece forces the viewer to see further than the obviously immaculate technique of the couple. The piece utilizes solos and reactive interactions between the two to display the severing of relationship.

In their initial U.S. debut, Garthier Dance from Stuttgart, Germany premieres their work, *Orchestra of Wolves*, a piece

see **DANCE**, page 7

THE DAILY COUGAR

LIFE & ARTS

Wednesday, April 14, 2010 • 7

DANCE

continued from page 6

choreographed by award-winning and internationally sought after choreographer, Eric Garthier.

"You hear that dance is slowly dying, but when you see a festival like this you know this isn't so," said choreographer Eric Garthier, "I have a different outlook on composing dance, I want people to have fun watching the performance. It's important that the piece leaves you with something. Also I find it important to educate a young public to fall in love with dance because they will take us into the next generation of public viewers, in more than just dance but art collectively."

Garthier's work takes a somewhat different, and comedic perspective of Beethoven 5th symphony. "I like to incorporate a touch of modern [dance] but always with a humorous touch," Garthier said. With amusing movement and interesting formation transitions, Garthier juxtaposes the stern and bravado, familiar Beethoven musicality with a rebellious masked wolf orchestra, ready to devour their prey, a merciful tweety bird conductor. The piece resembles the light and comedic trademarks that Garthier has capitalized on. *Orchestra of Wolves* undoubtedly served as a dynamic introduction for Garthier and his company into the US.

Upon their 25 year since their commencement, Azzopardi Company de Dansa, from Barcelona Spain, showcased their neoclassical ballet and modern blend of dance composition at this year's dance salad.

"I think there's no limit of where inspiration comes from, in this piece the idea of acceleration allows me as a choreographer a lot of options, dance for me relates to everything and if not, your not dancing. Said artistic director Cesc Gelabert, "Dance for me is like a shared dream, in an awakened state, I wish to share a connection with my audience, its important not to please the audience but to consider them, the real moments are when you are being faithful, honest and authentic, to the audience, dance has a soul that is to be observed by the audience."

The company's conviction was evident in the piece they premiered in Houston this year entitled, *Conquassabit*. Within the piece the dancers are bound to a larger than life, statuesque formed curtain that they later incorporate into the movement of the piece. The abstract motif has the audience searching for a storyline but instead delivers a plot of acceleration and stillness within the quality of movement.

With an inventive choreographic license, Gelabert along with co-founder Lydia Azzopardi, set the stage for a novel an influentially accessible. The

success level of the piece lies in the various dynamics the piece includes as it progresses, including a sporadic movement score of intricacies and infused aggression to counter-balance the stillness and quieted moments that exist throughout. The pure dance acceleration provided a solid and

profound closing to the evening.

This year's Dance Salad Festival showcased, yet again, to Houston's audience the artistry that is evident in today's international dance community. Only through the advancement of high-caliber dance education and exposure, through organizations and festivals like

Dance Salad, will the appreciation of the art form of dance expand. To those aspiring dancers and choreographers in Houston, this year's Dance Salad Festival, was indisputably a feast more than a salad of inspiration.

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