

January 15, 2018

# The New York Times

Review of **Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater**'s performance at the Joyce Theater as part of the American Dance Platform January 12 & 13, 2018

Chief Dance Critic, **Alastair Macaulay**



Photo: **Andrea Mohin**



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**Alastair Macaulay**, New York Times chief dance critic since 2007.

This **@andrea\_mohin** photograph of **Crystal Ruiz** of **Ensemble Español Dance Theatre** (from Chicago) may suggest she's the only one onstage in the company's production of Ravel's "**Bolero**" (twenty-five years old but having its **New York premiere** last weekend).

Actually she's one of five women who set "**Bolero**" going; by the end, the Joyce stage is filled by more than a dozen men and women, with cloaks and fans.

It was once said that Ravel had exhausted waltz rhythm by the end of "La Valse" but had exhausted Bolero rhythm by the beginning of "Bolero"; certainly it's a dangerous score for any choreographer to tackle. (My prize always goes to the ice-dance version staged by Torvill and Dean.)

But it's **amazing** for how much of the time the **Ensemble Español** production works, chiefly because it works by means of counter-rhythms, as if resisting the Bolero as long as possible.

*My "New York Times" review has been facebooked, tweeted, posted. Monday 15 January.*





## THE NEW YORK TIMES ONLINE AND PRINT REVIEW

**Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater**, from Chicago, tackles a range of Spanish material. The second of its three items, *“Duende Gitana (Gypsy Soul)”* — a flamenco trio for the dancer **Irma Suárez Ruiz**, the percussionist **Javier Saume-Mazzei** and the singer **Paco Fonta** — exemplified the merits of live music, so had a freshness lacking elsewhere.

The first, *“Iroko”*, made interesting connections between Spain, Africa and the Americas, but to music by Manuel Parrilla (taped) that made the experiment feel ersatz.

These were **New York premieres**, as was its 25-year-old production of Ravel’s *“Bolero”*, choreographed by the troupe’s founder **Libby Komaiko**.

Though this is a hard score to bring off in dance terms, Ms. Komaiko’s choreography manages remarkably well, principally by its use of counter-rhythms. Alas, the final few minutes suddenly added an absurd excess of big theatrical effects (cloaks, fans)—though, like every *“Bolero”* staging I’ve ever seen, **it wowed the audience.**

shoe, the Lindy — and he’s funny, charming, elusive, seeming always to resist categorization. In “Variations,” he and two colleagues, Brittany DeStefano and Gabe Winna Ortiz, bring off marvels to excerpts from Bach’s Goldberg Variations, smoothly tying a football to every keyboard note and yet always revealing fresh resources of pressure, idiom, physicality. In “Meet Ella,” Nathan Bligh and Mr. Teicher bring a wider lexicon to several of Ella Fitzgerald’s most crazy live improvisations; her inspired lunacy brings out the same in them. The more I see of Mr. Teicher & Company, the more I want to see.

I’ve also seen Philadelphia before. One of several important troupes in Philadelphia, it has terrific performers, with high energy and marvelous fluidity of physical texture. A pity then that the two items the group danced here — Francisco Gella’s “Between the Lines” and Ray Mercer’s “Super B” — were just formulaic, modern soft-shoe ballers.

Good to see that several of these Joyce troupes exemplified ethnic genres.

The Hawaiian group Haku o Kekaha kept extending the potential of its genre — hula — throughout its performance of “Hilakapolohe.” Rhythm, music, formation and body language kept changing, and so did the sense of both ritual and charm.

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Trinity Irish Dance Company, in a quintuple bill, took the virtuosic footwork of Irish step dancing and led it in multiple directions. Step dancing often brings its performers remarkably high on the toes. Here, pointwork was not uncommon — though it thrilled less, with a largely percussive downward emphasis, than the fan of other footwork, in which the springing instep seems to connect wonderfully with the outward action of the entire leg. You could have appraised it just in terms of gender studies: Several dances were all-female; some included two men, as if on the women’s terms. And just as I was feeling that, for all the wonderful speed of this genre, everything was too metrically regular, a number of solos confounded me, with effects of complexity and syncopation that astounded.

Charm and individuality weren’t enough to carry the Los Angeles company body-traffic through its three items; and in Halesh Schechter’s “Dust” they weren’t even useful. (Too many of Mr. Schechter’s works are exercises in post-apocalyptic gloom.) The most varied and appealing piece was Matthew Norman’s “A Million Voices,” set to Peggy Lee songs. This was a preview of a work that is likely to be extended when it has its official premiere in May. It exemplifies the dramatic skill Mr. Norman — who makes dances for small companies all over the States — has in highlighting moments within the group, and the brilliant American naturalness he infuses when he is on stage.

Above, from left, Gabe Winna Ortiz, Brittany DeStefano and Caleb Teicher performed “Variations,” set to Bach’s Goldberg Variations. Left, Crystal Ruiz of Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater in “Bolero.”

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