



Festivals of discovery
Montpellier danse and julidans 2011

Dance in France was represented by Didier Theron, Bartabas (with Ko Murobushi), Laurent Pichaud (with Deborah Hay) and Menard and Laurier who are discoveries of long-term festival curator Jean-Paul Montanari, and appeared to inspire a ‘circus’ theme within the festival. This representation of the French scene indicated the kind of diversity that real funding commitment for dance can produce over time.

The recurrence of Ravel’s Bolero itself seemed a template for a ubiquitous compositional trend toward repetition and duration as a means of creating drama. Reading Doris Humphrey’s choreographic treatise while at the festival provided a striking historical counterpoint. Humphrey’s insistence on an ideal composition built of variation and balance in the service of ideas is replaced here with a foregrounding of form and self-aware strategies supported by clean, clear and charged movement languages. A visitor to Australia through a connection with Strut Dance’s director Agnes Michelet in Perth, Theron’s take on the score in Shanghai Boléro is beautifully articulated in his program notes; “approaching the mechanics of desire from a technical point of view.” Three sections present three different performances to the complete score on a bare, black stage. The first ‘take’ involves a cast of a dozen or so female dancers dressed in black shorts, long-sleeved tops and stilettos. Walking in grid patterns in perfect time to the music, the catwalk aesthetic is first broken by two of the women holding hands. This develops with couples and trios grabbing and embracing each other in endlessly different ways, changing partners, groups as well as pulling their tops up over their heads, or onto their heads, to reveal black bras. The work follows Ravel’s build, never dropping the swinging walk, with more complicated clusters of women and a final merging of all of them, joining to lift one dancer and disappearing in a second on the last notes. This is desire formalised as partnering and separating, encountering and disconnecting. The second take features three male dancers in black jeans who begin a bouncing rhythm from side to side and forward and back that continues throughout the score. This bouncing energy contrasts with the drawn out swagger of the women, the male dancers lacking the poise and proficiency of the women, looking more physically and technically pedestrian. In the third take, the cast come together in various states of dress/undress in a series of tableaux held for a consistent number of bars, rotated to show every angle, then mixed up until the dancers run into dynamic frozen compositions. The quality of the poses ranges from baroque and sublime to flat and disconnected, but the drama of the compositions is complete and thrilling. Another dancer is raised into the air and then, once again, the dancers are gone with the final notes.

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