

# DANCE VIEW TIME

Washington, June 07, 2009

## Fresh Wind from Spain

**"Sense fi" and "Conquassabit"**

**Gelabert Azzopardi Companyia de Dansa**

**Lang Theater**

**Atlas Performing Arts Center**

**Washington, DC**

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**by George Jackson**

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With not a castanet or percussive heel in sight or even a whiff of a Nacho Duato mannerism in the air, Cesc Gelabert and Lydia Azzopardi's company blew in from Barcelona\* to give us a fresh slant on Spain's dance. This small group\*\* isn't constituted in the usual way: about two thirds of the cast is male and just a single performer is past being young - he is company director, teacher and choreographer Gelabert. The dancing is contemporary insofar as it has a casual finish and eclectic vocabulary but dancing it is. There's pulse and form, and not merely the pedestrian movement that bonds so much of "dancing" Europe. High energy, firm power and clear contours are at this company's command. Gelabert isn't shy about showing these accomplishments and did so for two quite different works. The costumes by his co-director Azzopardi helped him to individualize the dancers even when they performed as a corps. What an elegantly democratic designer she is!

"Conquassabit", the program's second half, was singularly eye catching. Gelabert takes us into the outdoors to portray a hurricane's three phases - the leading edge of the whirlwind that can absorb or destroy, then the calm eye of the storm, and ultimately the tempest's tail that summarily expels what was absorbed or whisks it off. Using astutely chosen selections of Handel's instrumental and vocal music, the choreographer builds crescendos of turning, twisting and near flying. A force of nature had been let loose on stage, but Gelabert also inserts cameo moments for the human passions. As the dancers spin past like jets of wind, one or more than one will for instants materialize as mortal bodies to reveal their susceptibilities as erotic, cruel or frightened beings. This poignant

maelstrom calls for a cast of just 8.

Gelabert himself was the eye of the storm. His scalp is shaved (once Harald Kreutzberg's signature, but not uncommon these days). He was dressed in a narrow, velvety black suit with a blood red shirt collar showing. The figure he cut was intense, even when not moving. Action was deliberate. It consisted of pantomime motion (mostly gestural) and dance (balancing, centering and positioning). There were passages of pure solo, but also portions against a corps. The other dancers used the soloist's gesticulations and torso configurations but swept past him with runs and leaps. This entity at the hurricane's core became ominous and, akin to Death in Jooss' s "The Green Table", will likely lodge for a long time in viewers' memories.

"Sense fi", the program's first half, is described as "an interior journey". Much of it is slow. As a journey it didn't really go anywhere from its starting point although it had cycles, definitely intensifying and then unspanning. This dance seems to be a dream or at least a daydream. Its music by Pascal Comelade is as eclectic as Gelabert's movement material. The sound is electronic or instrumental or sometimes natural but not assembled into as consistent a language as the choreography. More apparent than in the whirlwind dance work were aspects of the company's technique. Ballet training showed forthrightly, and Gelabert made use of, particularly, the stretched line of his three women - Julia Cortes, Virginia Gimeno and Manon Greiner. The men\*\*\* seemed strong caractere/democaractere types.

At first glance the costuming for the company looks as if the dancers had been allowed to choose what they would wear. Then one notices both coordination and that each individual looks unmistakably distinct yet good. That implies the presence of an outside eye - undoubtedly Azzopardi's. In "Conquassabit" black was the dominant color. It was contrasted not only with the blood red in one instance but also with some white and of course flesh tones. The diverse pieces of clothing all gave a sense of revealing anatomies. In "Sense fi" one was less aware of colors and cut, more of the costuming's moody atmosphere.

I wouldn't at all have minded seeing a third piece by Gelabert, Azzopardi and company.

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\*The company is resident at Barcelona's Teatre Lliure.

\*\* The program lists 10 "performers". I counted 9 in both pieces.

\*\*\* The (younger) men were listed as Roberto Gomez, Romain Guion, Elia Lopez, Salvador Masclans, Alberto Pineda and Charles Washington.