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
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.