

Ponderosa Post



TROPICAL ESCAPE #1 Reviewed by Jennifer Polins

Created and performed by Marcio Canabarro and Csaba Molnar. Premiered in Budapest at Arthus Theater in May 2015. German premiere at Ponderosa TanzLand Festival, July 11, 2015.

For the past 15 years, The Ponderosa TanzLand Festival has hosted subversive summer programming geared towards improvisational performance practices that focus on acknowledging space and place, include politics and infuse somatics. The festival is housed in a stone and brick- 500-year-old farm complex that has been slowly transformed into a lively community and artist residency, 50 minutes from Berlin on the Polish border.

The Kuhstall- once a massive cow barn, now boasts a 3000sq foot dance studio/performance space. Vivid and beautiful is an understatement. Ancient tree trunks whittled into beams jut out on angles and clay-brick walls and wooden ceilings frame the white dance floor. The Kuhstall has framed an impressive list historical performances, process oriented experiments, and been an incubator for initial research for many international performance practitioners.



Photo: Tom Doherety

Tropical Escape #1 - heavy with tanztheater grandeur, sprinkled with virtuosic male technique, and cut just at the right moments with informality is “totally Ponderosa”. The work is the first full evening duet by collaborators Marcio Canabarro (Brazil) and Csaba Molnar (Hungary). The choreographers describe Tropical Escape as a “study of filthy dreams.” Mr. Canabarro was a P.O.R.C.H festival participant and collaborator with two of Ponderosa’s most influential and dedicated queer teaching artists: P.O.R.C.H facilitator and visionary: Peter Pleyer, a Ponderosa’s poster boy: Keith Hennessey. Canabarro and Molnar- work as technical multi skilled drag queens to create a fantasy world where otherness is the norm and transformations of space and character and narrative abound. The work is laboratory of raunchy references that honor and steal from their trainings and influences and is an inspirational example of how workshop materials can be transformed into art.

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Audience enters the Kuhstall that is distorted into fantasy world with a movie soundtrack of “King Kong” blasting many balloons and the floor is textured with a layer of inflated, milky plastic, taped down around the edges with lights shining softly from underneath. A massive balloon of plastic lurks in the corner. As the audience sits an air pump interrupts the music and starts to loudly inflate a giant dark plastic figure that sags and waves with the force of the air. Soon the “mother figure” as the choreographers describe her, becomes animated by a body moving it from the inside, dancing gestural choreography to the epic music for our amusement. A quick deflation reveals Canabarro and Molnar- adorned in balloons sticking up out of their heads and bodies held on with pantyhose that blur the characteristics of their faces and genitalia. They proceed with the best rendition of “L’après-midi Dun Faune” that I have ever seen- literally to the music of Debussy. Balloons under their heels force them to dance for the entire section on relevee. The duet is committed to their choreography to the point of absurdity, intertwining balloons and bodies into cliché sexual innuendoes, two bare assed fawns- throwing in balletic vocabulary- so irreverent it becomes relevant.

Canabarro describes the performance as a “collage of fiction and hollywood, porn, Italian movies, South American soap operas, French ballets, entertainment figures, birthday parties and rituals.” Another theme is the dramatic sound of popping balloons- balloons pop-filled with clothes that are put on, balloons pop - filled with flour and glitter and colored liquids that fill the space and cover the performers, popping balloons activate the space with a violent explosive sound that snaps us to attention.

An Italian Soap opera sound track begins a lip sink duet between the performers who create a literal theatrical scene that slips into abstractions and alternate scenarios. A porn movie soundtrack takes over, the lip sinking pauses and a post-modern Cunninghamesque duet develops. The climax of the piece happens with the long drawn out climax in the sound- as the dancers commit to lip-sinking with choreography that again transforms the multiple orgasms into alternate scenarios- ending with Canabarro mouthing “YES- YES- OH MY GOD- YES” as he fakes his suicide.

The work ends with a laid back, personal lecture revealing the theoretical inspirations and processes behind the work. References span from the literature to fine art to dance: see list at end of article. There is a slide show and the performers merge their own histories with the histories of visual artists- performance artists- dance theorists and composers.

Peter Pleyer remarked that this new work is entirely self-produced and the set, costumes, and script is created by the performers for each performance. It takes the dancers about five hours to set up, with materials that fill a huge space but can be transported in one suitcase. Canabarro was Pleyer’s student and performer in INVISIBLE UNDERCURRENT- where Pleyer recognized compatible making strategies such as: “a newly discovered interest in EPIC- newly discovered interest in collage, interest in the juxtaposition of artifice against informal/ found against personal- a playful inquiry posed in coffee table speech- a theatrical confusion in what is performative and what is casual.”

Pleyer shared-“ that as a teacher and choreographer who works with people- its very rewarding to see smart dancers developing work from the teaching on such a level- without being to obedient to the exercises. He spoke of LOVE being an essential element in his work- and that the element of love was clearly present to make a work like this- to share it with Ponderosa and the festival- the love for the place- the love for the studio- it will not look at good anywhere else.”



references: Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres/ La Grande Odalisque / 1814, Guerrilla Girls / 1985 , Mary Beth Edelson / Some Alive American Women Artists / Last Supper / 1972, Marcel Duchamp / L.H.O.O.Q. /1919, Marcel Duchamp / Rrose Sélavy, Testo Junkie: Sex , Drugs and Biopolitics in the pharmacopornographic era/ Beatriz Preciado / 2013, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics / José Esteban Muñoz/ 1999, Carrie Mae Weems/ from the series Ain’t Joking : Mirror Mirror / 1987-88, Karen Finley, King King Theory / Virginie Despentes / 2006, Paul Gauguin / Te Arii Vahine / 1896, Eduard Manet / Olympia / 1863, Nijinsky / L’Après-midi d’un Faune / 1912Dancenoise, T. Osa Hidalgo - De L a Riva / Two Spirits: Native Lesbians and Gay Men / for Royal Eagle-Bear Productions / 1992Merce Cunningham / 1968, Andy Warhol, Fred Herko, Jack Smith, Crusing Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity/ José Esteban Muñoz / 2009.