



Dance Salad

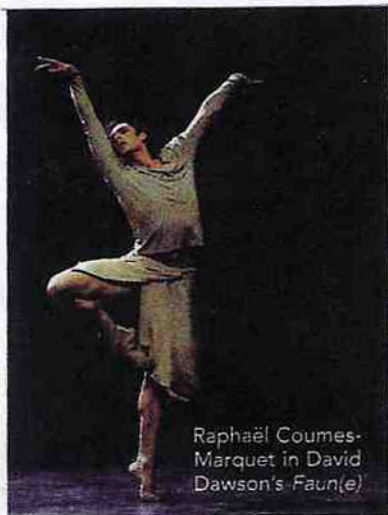
Wortham Center, Cullen Theater
Houston, TX
April 1-3, 2010
Reviewed by Wendy Perron

Dance Salad offered a tantalizing array of mostly European companies that we rarely see in the United States.

The festival reached a poetic peak with Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's *Loim*, performed by Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève. In the last of three excerpts, one man dragged two others who were limp but alive. Two more joined, and finally the one in charge—a Mother Courage figure—was hoisted aloft. He ended standing tall with the others nested below like a family that has seen all sides of a war.

Another high point was Christian Spuck's *The Return of Ulysses* (adapted for the festival), danced with bite by seven men and one woman from the Royal Ballet of Flanders. Eva Dewaele, as the reluctant Penelope, kept looking offstage right, waiting for Ulysses to come home, while the men tried to seduce her, mount her, tire her out. She emerged a hero—and so did Spuck for his witty and bold choreography.

Drew Jacoby and Rubinald Pronk's luscious dancing lent Lightfoot/Leon's



Softly As I Leave You a richly melancholy tone. She began thrashing in a box, they found each other, he ended inside the box alone. Along the way you came to admire how they brushed past each other and somehow helped each other become themselves.

Admirable too was Mark Godden's *Miroirs* for Mexico's Compañía Nacional de Danza. In three excerpts, serene symmetrical moves eventually—haiku-like—resolved into surprising asymmetrical images.

The extravagantly tall Raphaël Coumes-Marquet, guesting from Dresden SemperOper Ballet, and lithe Esteban Berlanga of English National Ballet took turns watching each other dance in David Dawson's *Faun(e)*. Androgynous, sensual, stretching like taffy, they performed what was more like two overlapping solos than a duet.

Leticia Oliveira of Texas Ballet Theater shone in Ben Stevenson's rhapsodic *From the Corner, Pas de Deux*, in which she and Carl Coomer circled one another with caresses and swirling lifts. Just the elegant way she turned her head revealed her to be

a ballerina of the first order.

Netherlands Dance Theater contributed a stealthy, noirish excerpt of Kylián's *Toss of a Dice* that held one's attention completely. Lesley Telford and Medhi Walerski performed it with quiet intensity.

Companies from Spain, Hungary, France, and Norway presented less than stellar excerpts. Perhaps they would have fared better had they done whole pieces. Taken out of context, excerpts don't always work. But whatever the shortcomings as seen by this viewer (who was a guest of Dance Salad), the level of dancing never dipped below excellent. ■