

DANCE



Credit: Jong Duk

COMPAÑÍA NACIONAL DE DANZA – BACH: MULTIPLICITY/ FORMS OF SILENCE AND EMPTINESS

SAT APR 17 | 8PM // SUN APR 18 | 7:30PM

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"Breathtaking sweep, vibrant musicality, and vivid Spanish soul." *The Boston Globe*

Compañía Nacional de Danza

Founded in 1979, the Compañía Nacional de Danza was transformed in 1990 by renowned dancer/choreographer and artistic director Nacho Duato, who adopted a more contemporary style while holding true to classical precepts. The Company's search for an identity was affected by a polemical debate between classicists and modernists that lingered until the 1980s, confronting the possessive custodians of classical ballet orthodoxy symbolized by the sacred canons – the patriarch Marius Petipa, the splendid Russian School, and its Diaghilevian offspring. Taking Isadora Duncan's lead, those wanting to break with tradition followed the paths of Ruth Saint Denis, Ted Shawn, and Doris Humphrey, culminating in Martha Graham's overflowing garden and that of her European counterpart, Mary Wigman. In these fertile grounds, Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Alwin Nikolais, and many others flourished. Towards the end of the decade, the debate that separated the two sides became increasingly obsolete, thanks to the wide appeal of neo-classical ballet that came from the spell of that wizard of choreography, Maurice Béjart, and the consecration of postmodernism. Once a creator breaks free of the obligation to be modern, he/she can breathe fresh air into creativity and inventiveness.

Any choreographer today may answer, as Twyla Tharp did when asked within which choreographic style she should be classified, "I dance." Based on his extensive academic training and his openness to other universal figures of choreography (Kilian, Forsythe, van Manen, and Mats Ek, among many others), Nacho Duato reflects this feeling, placing the Company alongside other similar groups internationally that carry out the healthy practice of synthesis, admitting, in intimate communion, classical techniques and modern languages and vice versa. To these, he adds essential Spanish characteristics. The Company is firmly linked to Spain's recent history, reflecting the new forms and challenges of the country's own modernization.

- Delfín Colomé

ON CULTURES

IRENE GÓMEZ CASTELLANO



The Spanish National Dance Company is coming to Carolina to present a choreographed homage to the baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Multiplicity: Forms of Silence and Emptiness

is the evocative title for the company's attempt to translate the solemn complexities of such works as The Art of Fugue into contemporary dance steps. For many, Bach represents spirituality made audible, and his music can inspire the terror and fascination of the religious sublime. Emil Cioran, the Romanian philosopher so famous for his aphorisms, once quipped that "without Bach, God would be a second rate figure." It will be fascinating to see how the great Nacho Duato – the company's artistic director as well as its lead male dancer – bodies forth the energies of Bach's music in his choreography. Surely Duato, whom I always imagine as a sort of blond angel in black leotards, will be up to the challenge. Seeing Bach from the point of view of his choreography promises to be electrifying.

It is somewhat ironic that I, a native Spaniard, shall be taking in my first performance of this company in North Carolina. But the cultural productions of one's own nation, like some impressionist paintings, may perhaps be viewed to best advantage from a distance. Though born and raised in Spain, I only felt true respect and appreciation towards my own culture when I crossed the Atlantic and tried to teach US students the language and literature of my own country, from which I was now as far away as

they were. When I decided to emigrate, I was suddenly transformed into a humble cultural ambassador and thereby forced to see my own culture from a very different perspective. I had a similar experience when my husband, a native of Staten Island, New York with no Hispanic roots at all, first introduced me to flamenco, the music that, for good or ill, has come to be seen as the essential representation of "Spanishness." For me, from Valencia, where flamenco has no deep roots, this music was merely part of the cultural static of a bygone day, whereas for my husband, who came to it as a wide-eyed student of all things Spanish, its initial exoticism eventually drew him, and me thereby, into the beguiling vortex of its exquisite joys and sorrows.

It is perhaps when one is far away from one's own culture, one's own family, one's own home, that the notion of "home" itself appears in its true character, and perhaps when one is an outsider that one understands oneself (maybe with a little guilt) as part of a culture that has been already left behind. What is taken for granted is often not appreciated, and sometimes only lack, and distance, and estrangement make culture possible. The distance between contemporary dance and Bach's music is immense. But perhaps this very distance will provide these Spanish performers with the intellectual and emotional charge necessary to transform Bach's baroque music into modern dance before our eyes, bringing the familiar into an unfamiliar light, and providing us a new way to experience old classics that we thought we knew already.

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