

Der Bund

«Mosaico», Flamencos en route's new production, is a breathtaking work of dance art.

By Marianne Mühlemann, 22 December 2017



*Body architecture and original, moving pictures: Flamencos en route.
Photo: Alex Spichale*

The surprise is perfect. After all, who would have expected a performance at the Dampfzentrale to open with Maurice Ravel's "Bolero" – much less arranged as a delicate chamber music piece.

In the original version for large orchestra a snare drum plays the underlying rhythmic ostinato, which – through its approximately 160 repetitions – creates the magical effect of the piece. In the current interpretation, however, a piano assumes the part of the snare drum; and instead of ever-changing wind and string instruments, which create the famous growing sound swell in the orchestra version, musicians with wind and string instruments alternately produce the quiet magic of the work's acoustic colors.

Everything Breathes, Glows, and Smolders

The new interpretation works. Ravel's music (played by Chaarts, an Argovian newcomer ensemble) represents the heart beat to which the nine male and female Flamencos en route dancers perform their movements. Originating from offstage, the rhythm gently takes hold of the bodily instruments: the feet, arms, hands, and fingers. Here, a shoe sole is being dragged across the floor; there, a talon clatters; a body spins into the darkness, pirouettes multiple times, precise like a saw blade. The flow of the movement halts repeatedly, then continues again, changes its intensity, and takes a new direction. Until – finally – everything breathes, glows and smolders in this fascinating laboratory, in which musical energy is converted into electrifying kinesthetic energy as a matter of course, and in which dance becomes a form of communication.

A Spectacular Journey

Elegance, virtuosity, precision, silence – all are featured in this music and dance production, which segues into the beloved “Canto amor,” written by the late Antonio Robledo, Flamencos en route's own composer and pianist. Guitarists Juan Gomez and Pascual de Lorca as well as percussionist Karo Sampela add a Spanish note to the production, as does singer Vicente Gelo with his bittersweet testosterone voice.

There is a reason why the evening is entitled “Mosaico”. The audience gets to witness a spectacular artistic journey by Flamencos en route – a journey during which the breaks provide the most breathtaking, suspense-filled moments. One such moment occurs when Karyma Nayt, the dancing singer, offers her heavenly song of longing to the earth while hanging head down over the shoulder of a fellow dancer, or when dancers acting as musicians use wooden batons to drum sharp rhythms into the floor, creating an impression of skeletons rattling in the underworld. Individual images appear all by themselves and assemble into an atmospheric entity that results in a sum that is greater than its parts.

Calling Brigitta Luisa Merki's art flamenco does not do it justice. The Artistic Director of Flamencos en route has decades of artistic experience and knows exactly how to get her top-class dancers to use flamenco technique to create new, contemporary forms of expression. “Mosaico” is a perfect example for how easily the Flamencos en route dancers move between styles.

Vitality and Poetry

“Mosaico” features an advanced-level flamenco, which has long been purged of the well-known clichés. Thanks to the continuous work of her free-lance ensemble, Merki now has a platform for mentoring young choreographers at her disposal. This is an added benefit not to be under-estimated at a time when financial support for the arts has decreased to a minimum.

The encounter with the young Spanish guest choreographer, David Coria, in the second part of “Mosaico” is a revelation. Using large movable building blocks as well as simple, highly effective props such as a water basin, in which the dancers gather as if it were a water fountain, drink water and cool themselves down, Coria creates body architecture and original moving pictures full of vitality and poetry.