

# Troupe From Barcelona Illuminates Life's Ascents and Plunges



Tristram Vales

Danat Danza, the dance troupe from Spain that performed Saturday at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

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BECKET, Mass., July 5 — A huge, stylized seesaw dominates the action in "El Cielo Está Enladrillado" ("The Sky Is Paved With Bricks"), with which Danat Danza, an experimental dance troupe from Barcelona, Spain, is making its United States debut.

For the audience sitting in the Studio Theater at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival here on Saturday, the long board's violent swings came as a surprise. Initially, the seesaw had masqueraded as a raised platform when the company's six dancers and a violinist had first emerged into a dimly lit performance space below. The board's curved fulcrum, resting on poles, was concealed by hanging curtains.

Once the covering was ripped off, the structure, superbly designed by José Mencheró, dazzled in its architectural form. At a tilt, it resembled a Constructivist tower.

Yet in no time, its turbulent ups and downs matched the physical daring of the dancers. Losing its literal definition, the seesaw became a metaphorical device for extreme swings in emotions and relationships.

Like a growing number of European contemporary dance troupes es-

## Performers demonstrate their daring at Jacob's Pillow.

tablished in the 1980's, Danat Danza has a style rooted in fearless physicality. The dancers think nothing of flinging themselves around or on the floor, scampering up the slopes of the seesaw, jumping from its heights or in the most breathtaking passages, weighing each end of the board down with frenzied stamping and bouncing dances.

This physical springboard has a conceptual counterpart. "Cielo" was inspired by "Los Caprichos," Goya's famous series of caustic and satirical etchings. The point of departure is the spirit of Goya rather than his exact images. Stylistically, Danat Danza takes off on its own.

The troupe was founded in 1984 by Sabine Dahrendorf, who was born in Germany, and by Alfonso Ordóñez, both of whom studied at the cradle of Spain's current avant-garde dance boom, the Institut de Teatro in Barcelona. Like most of their French coun-

terparts, the choreographers do not use a codified dance idiom. The drawback is a movement range that if exciting on the instant, runs into an expressive dead end once repetition sets in. At the same time, the immediacy of many passages stems from the directness emerging from the dancers' powerful projection and energy. Their technical skills, especially in the sometimes brutal partnering, is never in doubt.

In the end, "Cielo," to be performed July 9, 10 and 11 at the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C., becomes a work about male-female relationships, especially emotional manipulation. Macho attitudes are prevalent as women are sent flying into the air like twisted rag dolls, but female aggressiveness is evident as well.

Goya's nightmare fantasies and social criticism is sensed in the background. A man carries an Art Deco chair on his head; the cast plays blindman's buff; the tormentors become the tormented.

These images, adapted from "Los Caprichos," are presented fleetingly, though, and while the first theatrical scenes may be based on particular etchings, the atmosphere makes for a more generalized theme drawn from

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Goya: the flight from reason. Instinct rules. Erotic dances abound and not just for duets but for group gropes. The seesaw is a perfect symbol here of instability within stability. For all its physical risk-taking, "Cielo" is extremely formal in its structure and patterns. The far-flung dancers are scattered across the stage, but they frequently wind up in unison when needed.

The dominant darkness of mood is

conveyed through shifts in lighting, often created by performers moving crates containing lights. The three-part structure of the piece is firm with a quasi-narrative, a formal play with the use of the seesaw and a final imagistic tone. The men throw scores of oranges across the floor to the disheveled women, and the piece ends with a cessation of hostilities. A man cradles a woman in his arms. The long-haired women wear short dresses that hint at an 18th-century style, but they also wear the short boots

that give them the child-woman look of other contemporary European experimental troupes.

If it sometimes falters as a whole, "Cielo" nonetheless mixes echoes of the past and a tempo of the present with dynamic originality. Besides the choreographers, the admirably bold dancers were Amalia Cabeza, Susana Castro, Beatriz Fernández and Josu Lazameta. Jean-Luc Plouvier and Bernard Plouvier composed the soundtracklike score, played on tape and live on the violin by Joan Morera.

DANAT

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