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Review: Tanz Farm series ends its second season solidly grounded in its vivid future

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By Cynthia Bond Perry



Catellier's "Cepi Corpus, Cepi Choros: the anatomy suite" at Tanz Farm. (Photos by Thom Baker)

Broadly appealing dance works have seemed second in priority to Tanz Farm's mission to bring the best of the avant-garde to Atlanta. Last weekend's season closer, featuring works by Gustavo Ramirez Sansano and Greg Catellier — didn't have the controversial edge like works by Sidra Bell or Israeli duo Niv Sheinfeld and Oren Laor. But the evening was thrilling. It showed that the performance initiative, produced by the Goat Farm Arts Center and gloATL, in its second season, is doing more than push boundaries.

Catellier's "Cepi Corpus, Cepi Choros: the anatomy suite" and Sansano's "El Beso" ("The Kiss") demonstrated that Tanz Farm's performance series continues to attract artists of national and international note while giving Atlanta artists and audiences access to them.

It was especially exciting to see Sansano's work at this time. The choreographer's style is unique, showing influences of European contemporary dance and his native Spanish culture. About a year ago, Sansano left his post as artistic director of Chicago's Luna Negra Dance Theatre and returned to Spain. Just last month, Sansano made his New York choreography debut with "El Beso," to critical acclaim. And in November, Ballet Hispanico will premiere Sansano's full-length *CARMEN.maqui* in New York.

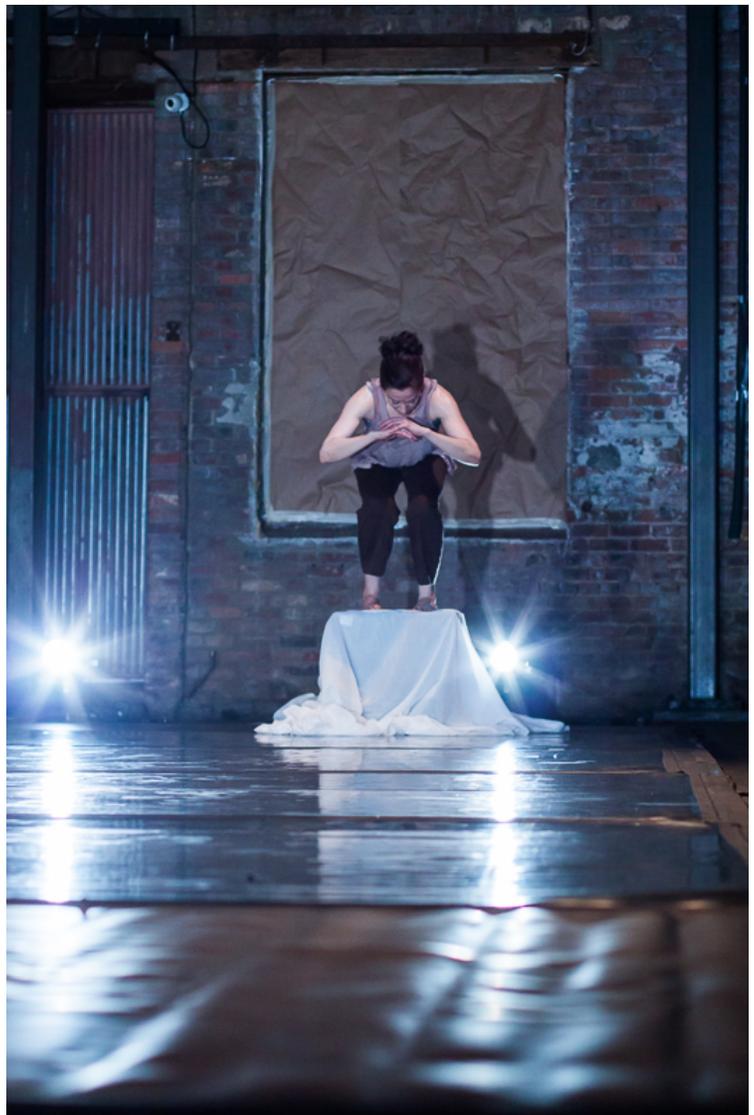
The performance revealed another way Tanz Farm's mission benefits the community. Local artists aren't often privileged to the ferment and competitiveness of New York; the shared program seemed to inspire local dancers to push themselves to higher levels of artistry.

Catellier's piece mimicked anatomy illustrations.

According to Catellier, "Cepi Corpus, Cepi Choros" translates to "I took the body, I took dancing." It is a fitting title for a work that takes static poses from 16th-century anatomy illustrations and turns them into joyous, rolling dance phrases that carve through space, relishing pure movement.

The work was part of "Corpus Mysteriis" which will run September 18–20 at Emory University, the fourth of a four-part series of evening-length works dealing — each in turn — with time, space, energy and the body.

Starting on a small pedestal upstage at the audience left, one dancer after another posed on a cube, then took the oddly awkward pose into movement. One might pitch off, opening the body into a five-point star pattern reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. Carried by another dancer, the first figure sailed overhead, much like the soaring voices in composer Caroline Shaw's "Partita for 8 Voices."



With gliding ease, dancers took pleasure as their fingertips traced arcs through space, leading the arm to carve an arc through the air, which would carry the performer into sweeping circular pathways across the stage; dancers whirled into the floor and rebounded effortlessly into one-legged, vertical balances.

Atlanta newcomer Kristin O’Neal, in a duet with Catellier, supported him as he leaned into her. Trading roles, she slipped a leg over his arm, flowing into a series of turning lifts while two female voices oscillated gracefully between notes. O’Neal showed facile modern dance technique with a mature, comfortable stage presence. Her arrival eases the sense of loss caused by the departure Alex Abarca, who danced in Catellier’s piece with wholehearted commitment and focus and who leaves in the fall to pursue an MFA in Dance at New York University.

Ballet Hispanico tends to appear in larger venues, yet Goodson was an ideal setting for “El Beso,” scaled down from its original 14-member cast to 7 dancers. The Spanish-flavored contemporary work explored the kiss in many permutations — from polite social greetings to abrupt goodbyes to lush, passionate duets.

Sansano chose music of the Zarzuela, a Spanish form of musical theater that was popular until the Spanish Civil War. Selections by various composers gave the piece a raucous, comic feel. Its brassy orchestral sound inspired a vocabulary of agile speed; of quick, tight gestures bursting in different directions; of sudden direction changes springing off a bent-kneed stance. Dancers often moved with a contained muscular effort that nonetheless pulsed with clarity and vigor.



Sansano’s “El Beso.”

“El Beso” starts and ends with dancer Christopher Bloom, center stage, a solitary figure running forward. Dancers surrounded him like whirlwinds. Their hands begin reaching out to touch arms, shoulders and faces.

Music harkened the bullring. Kimberly Van Woesik, focused intently on Bloom, cautiously advanced toward him. Her fingers approach him, walking down her own arm. She pulled her arm inward, restraining herself. At the end of her careful approach, Bloom quickly ended the encounter with a perfunctory peck.

Later, all seven moved in a cluster, propelled by its own sparklike impulses in the form of touches and kisses. Restraint fell away in a duet between Bloom and Jamal Callender. He approached Bloom from behind, with a gentle touch on the shoulder, which turned into a passionate duet. Their kiss turned into a series of lifts; they tumbled over one another; it was luscious, spontaneous and breathlessly romantic.

“El Beso” was humorous, daring and acutely musical. It seemed the shared program brought out the best in both companies. Let’s hope Tanz Farm will continue to bring extraordinary work to Atlanta, and guest artists who’ll inspire our home-grown creatives to soar to greater heights.

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