

Dancers shine amid a dark frenzy

DANCE REVIEW: These dancers may be going through hell, but their demonic moves are razor-sharp.

By Camille Lefevre, Special to the Star Tribune

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Arrive early to Emio Greco|PC's "Hell." As the audience members find their seats in the Walker Art Center's McGuire Theater, the Amsterdam-based troupe gives them a sneak preview, lip-synching and swooshing on stage to songs like Midnight Oil's "Beds are Burning" and Springsteen's "Pink Cadillac." They're a formidable presence in gender-neutral, see-through black sheaths, their lean bodies (from very small to very tall) pulsing with party-time energy.

But that's just a warm-up. With a sinister change in tone, they disappear and a minimal set is revealed: a long-dead tree; an arch lit up with marquee lights; a robot spotlight resembling R2-D2 from "Star Wars," and another aimed harshly at the audience. It's a purgatory in which, for the next 90 minutes, the dancers engage in a non-narrative tour de force of extreme physicality, infusing each movement with distilled ferocity.

Performing mostly in unison, the dancers execute their razor-sharp moves with the deadly swiftness and precision of martial arts. They twist and buckle in on themselves like buildings imploding. Sensuous tremors course through their bodies. Ballet *port de bras* and *petit changements* have a demonic desperation. The momentum is relentless. Even the stillness is intense.

When the movements become repetitive, an earsplitting crash in the score (comprised of a simple tinkly melody, space-age blips, tango music, babies crying) stops the action and sets it on a new course. Sawami Fukuoka whispers or sings. The mesmerizingly statuesque Suzan Tunca, wearing a monstrous Afro, quietly molests Fukuoka, her leg resting on the shorter woman's head. Or Greco, as a black-clad Mephistopheles, insinuates himself less as a leader than as a fellow shadowy soul.

As the piece intensifies, the dancers strip off and re-don their costumes -- mostly basic boy-cut underwear -- with increasing frequency, at one point even stepping into each other's discarded sweaty items to trade identities.

When the fully nude ensemble gathers under the bare tree like a group of Adams and Eves, then bursts forth to the thunderous strains of Beethoven's 5th, they become a live-action Hieronymus Bosch painting via a minimalist sensibility. Their bodies -- lit stark white, cool blue or golden -- are at once unabashedly pure, and marked with the scars and musculature of their physicality. In "Hell," these bodies, stripped to their essence, are the ~~essence and ecstasy of humanity. And where the body is paramount -- which is how~~ vanished, which is also what Greco's "Hell" feels like.

Camille LeFevre is a Twin Cities dance critic.