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Dance Review | Emio Greco/PC

Landscape of Light and Shadow, Nimbly Crossed

By JOHN ROCKWELL

The Italian dancer and choreographer Emio Greco and the Dutch director Pieter C. Scholten formed their Emio Greco/PC company 11 years ago, and on Tuesday night they presented their hit from 2001, "Conjunto di NERO," for a week's run at the Joyce Theater.

As European intellectuals, the two men are given to elaborate philosophical explications of their intentions. Without wishing to sound like some philistine Anglo-American pragmatist, I found it easier to enjoy their 70-minute piece (plus a prelude as the audience files in) on a visceral level. Where it works very well.

The title translates as "Conjunction of Black," and this is work that plays with darkness to compelling effect. The sides and back of the stage, until the end, are black, fading to infinity. In the prelude a dancer (Suzan Tunca) can be barely seen moving in a strip of light at the rear; you can make out her feet in silhouette, sometimes her hands. There is a low, mechanically repetitive throbbing sound.

As the piece proper begins, Ms. Tunca is revealed facing the rear of the stage on pointe (Mr. Greco's early training was in ballet), wearing the same woolly black, dimly translucent shift they all wear (until Mr. Greco strips to his shorts).

The piece consists of Mr. Greco, Ms. Tunca and four others - Ty Boomershine, Sawami Fukuoka, Barbara Meneses Gutiérrez and Nicola Monaco - dancing together in various combinations, in precisely rehearsed and executed synchronization. Their movements are intense and fierce, with lots of sharp leg thrusts, twists and flailing arms. At one point three of them lie on the floor, banging their heads on the ground.

The movement is coordinated with the ambitious, brilliantly realized lighting (by Henk Danner), which sometimes crisscrosses the stage on the diagonal, sometimes consists of strips of light that gradually fill the floor, sometimes offers pale rectangles or rectangular black holes. Toward the end little red lights appear along the back, and finally the sides and rear are lighted to reveal more woolly black material.

All this is abetted by Wim Selles's superb sound collage, mostly low throbs, like the dynamo of a starship, punctuated by metallic clanks and, toward the end, electric-guitar rock. This last, in conjunction with puffs of smoke as from a hookah, seems a little blatant, like the V.I.P. room of a club; better the mystery of the rest.

Along with Mr. Greco's experience with the Belgian dance-theater conceptualists Sahraoui, it is his own wordless theater or even an animated artwork. Whatever, on Tuesday it held one's interest and then some.