

REPORT FROM SAN FRANCISCO

VOICES OF STRENGTH, THEATRE
FLAMENCO, CID PEARLMAN/
PERFORMANCE PROJECT, HUBBARD
STREET DANCE CHICAGO AND
ALONZO KING LINES BALLETT, ANNA
HALPRIN, TRISHA BROWN, BALLETT
SAN JOSE

BY RITA FELCIANO

For several seasons the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts has presented contemporary African dance. Last year, in a program entitled *Voices of Strength* (October 20, 2012, Lam Research Theater, YBCA, San Francisco), they programmed the work of four female choreographers. I only saw the second evening which showcased single works by Maria Helena Pinto (*Sombra*) and Bouchra Ouizguen (*Madame Plaza*). Both choreographers forwent hyper-kineticism and lickety-split connections. The slow, even glacial pace of these works took some getting used to but they stuck in the mind, perhaps, because their timing seemed so unusual.

Pinto is from Mozambique. Despite its physicality *Sombra* bears the stamp of a kind of intellectual earnestness that pushed it close into an arena in which concept reigns over realization. She made the plastic bucket - ubiquitous in third world cultures - stand for the restrictions put on women's lives. Carrying one over her head, the dancer became a faceless anonymity. Walking on top of them, she struggled for balance. With a bundle on her back, she was the restless wanderer and caregiver.

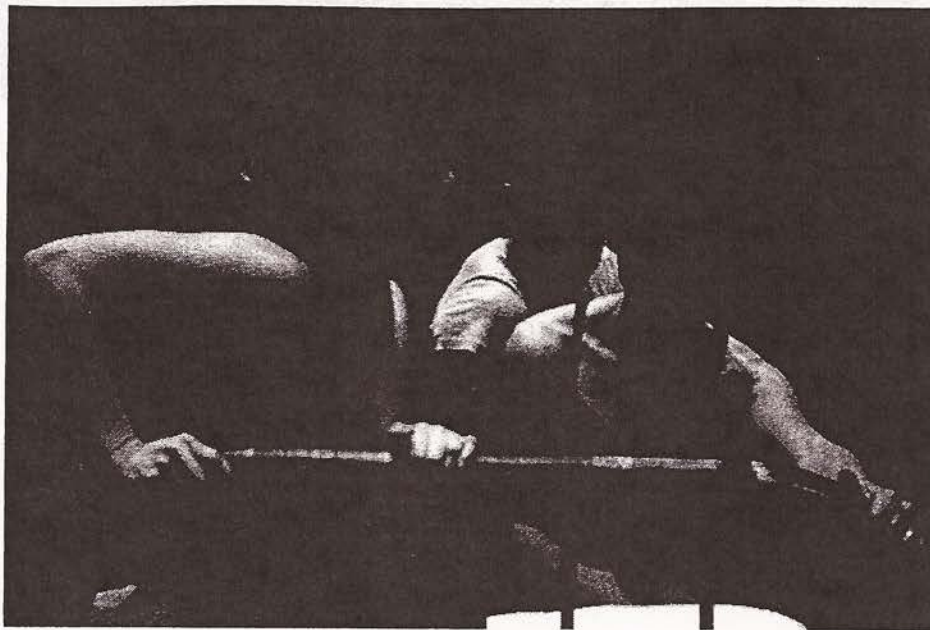
For much of its half-hour length, *Sombra* moved with a ceremonial, mourning quality, broken up with more light-hearted episodes that, however, evinced a gallows humor. Once she metamorphosed into a weird humanoid. With feet stuck in the buckets, she performed a stomping dance, not unlike the South African gum boot dance. In another spot she essayed an extended Tango. The metaphor of the pail, however, had its

limits; when it finally came off her head, it looked almost like an accident.

In *Madame Plaza*, apparently named after a nightclub in Marrakesh, choreographer Ouizguen joined three heavy-set



Theatre Flamenco. Photo by Cat Nguyen.



Cid Pearlman dancers: Damara Ganley, Sarah Day, David King, Nahshon Marden, Molly Katzman. Photo: Beau Saunders.

older women who worked at the club as professional *ata* ("cry") singers. She put a structure together through which the women ever so slowly came to life - as if waking from a dream. At the beginning, they sat or leaned on sofas, rotund, fleshy and somnolent like odalisques waiting for a call that might never come. As they began to move - stepping on the couch, spreading into the four corners of the stage - their bodies acquired articulation. The arms became wings, the fingers fluttering birds. One of the woman began to chant - raw, guttural, primeval, and you remembered Flamenco's origins. But when they rolled themselves like logs, piling on top of each other, they seemed an inchoate mass of limbs and flesh. Yet they enjoyed each other's physicality. Donning ever so slyly a white suit, one of them took on the mannerism of a slinky nightclub patron. That's when you saw that these women controlled their lives, however, sleepy and acquiescent they might appear.

Under the direction of Carola Zertuche since 2008, **Theatre Flamenco** (November 11, 2012, Cowell Theater, San Francisco), one of the Bay Area's oldest troupes, has rejuvenated itself. Zertuche returned to Flamenco's roots as a solo form while extending its reach into new possibilities. The company's fall performance showed a spirit of adventure more usually associated with youth than middle age. Tabla player Sudhi Rajagopal added the luminous bell-like clarity of his percussion to the sometimes harsh-sounding guitars. Nol Simonse, a gifted and versatile modern dancer, stepped in as guest artist. Zertuche simply plopped him into the mix, letting him be who he was.

copying and altering dance gestures. He firmly pulled down the dancers' raised Flamenco arms. In a body-to-body duet with Nino de los Reyes, they melted into a single silhouette.

In his own solo, de los Reyes stepped from one spotlight to another, as if tasting different aspects of Flamenco. Starting quietly to finger-snapping *pitos*, he built into a startling crescendo of footwork and body clapping. It culminated with his triumphantly waving his coat and strutting into the wings. Between the men's bravura machismo, Cristina Hall's take on the playful Guajira stood out as a tribute to Flamenco's connection with Cuba. Exuberantly dramatic, she partnered her fan. A lovely gown - blue in the back and tie-die in front - highlighted her half turns and eloquent back. With pianist Alex Condé, theirs became a jazzy encounter. Still it was Zertuche's grand *Solea*, severe and introspective, that closed this satisfying evening on a high note. Hers is truly Flamenco from the inside out.

Cid Pearlman/Performance Project's *Your Body is not a Shark* (Jan. 11, 2-13, ODC Theater, San Francisco) had advertised itself as examining restrictions - physical, emotional and psychological. The one-hour work was more than that - a finely crafted collaboration between Pearlman and her six dancers (aged 18-64); poet Denise Leto who has a dystonia, a neurological condition which sometimes prevents her from speaking clearly; and cellist/composer Joan Jeanrenaud whose performance career with the Kronos Quartet was ended by the onset of multiple sclerosis.

The idea of limitations floated like a soft sub-current