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DANCE REVIEW

Proceeding Nacho Duato-Style, Like Fish Darting Through Water

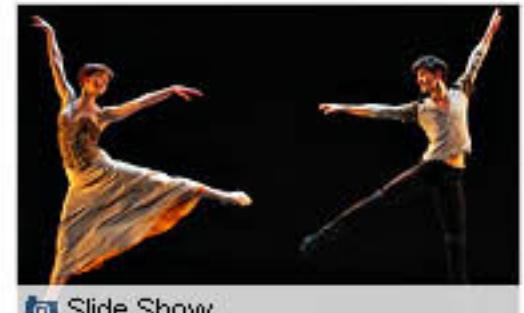
By ROSLYN SULCAS
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The choreographer Nacho Duato ran the Compañía Nacional de Danza in Spain and its associated junior troupe, CND2, for 20 years until — in a storm of recriminations with the Spanish government — [he left](#) last year. Unsurprisingly, the companies won't retain the extensive repertory he created for them. At the Skirball Center on Friday night CND2 presented three pieces by Mr. Duato on a program that is part of a final tour of his work.



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times
CND2 Sandra Guénin and Giuseppe Dagostino in Nacho Duato's "Amoroso" at the Skirball Center. [More Photos](#) »


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The young CND2 dancers are wonderful interpreters of the slippery, fluid style that has won Mr. Duato considerable renown, particularly in Europe. That style combines a ballet-based stretch and line with an earthier, grounded weightiness. At the same time dancers in a Duato work move with the darting ease of fish through water, sliding through a partner's arms, flowing through quick turns and jumps studded with rippling torsos, flexed feet and crooked arms, sudden stops and eye-imprinting lifts.

It's all very appealing to watch, and to listen to. The three works on the program offered the gorgeous Catalan folk songs of María del Mar Bonet in "Jardí Tancat"; Venetian and Neopolitan music of the 16th and 17th centuries in "L'Amoroso"; and Spanish and North African songs in "Gnawa." Mr. Duato constantly but unobtrusively demonstrates his craft. Dancers weave in and out of lines that dissolve into pairs, trios, quintets, a circle and back to a line with kaleidoscopic inevitability. In "Gwana," midway through, a group forms a dense circle near the back of the stage as first one dancer, then another and another is lifted high into the air to the propulsive, percussive rhythms.

It's a thrilling moment, and it shows Mr. Duato's considerable physical and musical responsiveness. But high points like this are watered down by a sameness of vocabulary in the dances. "Jardí Tancat," Mr. Duato's first work (created in 1983 for the junior troupe of the Nederlands Dans Theater, where he then [danced](#)), is still one of his strongest in terms of evoking a specific context.

We feel the urgent pull of the earth for these performers, dancing in an enclosure of sticks, their sense of community, of desperation and hope. Sandra Guénin, Hugo Cortey, Alba Carbonell, Erez Ilan, Heejae Choi and Eliton Barros were all wonderful.

But "L'Amoroso" (also a three-couple sextet) goes by in a blur of prettiness and competence, and "Gnawa" too loses any urgency in its sentimental overlay of water and bird sounds, a candle-carrying procession and picturesque central couple (Hugo Cortey and Ms. Choi) who seem to symbolize ... something. None of that takes away from the superb dancing, particularly from Mr. Ilan in a whirling central solo. How CND2 will reinvent itself remains to be seen; these dancers are ready for greater things.

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