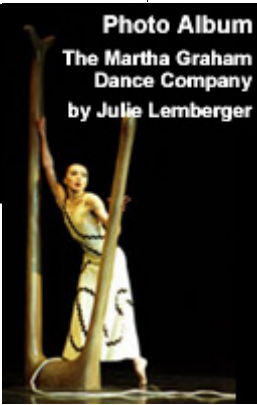


Sasha Waltz & Guests **MAY 27-28**
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Flash Review, 6-4: 'Twenty to Eight' and under an hour
 Moving in with Sasha Waltz

By Jordan Winer
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SAN FRANCISCO -- What do you get when you mix five dancers from five different parts of the world, five chairs, a long table and a refrigerator holding nothing but a Coke and a raw chicken? Believe it or not, a superbly engaging evening with Sasha Waltz & Guests at the San Francisco International Arts Festival.

"Travelogue 1 -- Twenty to Eight," seen May 27 at the Cowell Theatre, goes by in a blur. The dancers -- perhaps more properly called athletes -- obsessively repeat actions both mundane and extraordinary. Doors are opened and slammed shut over and over as oblivious couples pass in and out, missing being smashed up only by the sliver of a second. A man carries a woman, then a moment later he himself adroitly mounts her shoulders as she walks him against a wall, giving us the sudden vertiginous feeling that he is now walking sideways. In this instant, like in much of the show, our perspective is delightfully skewed.

Waltz whirls us into a sultry tango-like love duet in which the stunning Edivaldo Ernesto gyrates and lifts himself and his partner into all sorts

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of contortions.... Then we drift into a young girl's room as she listens to a bubble-gum pop song on the radio. A man opens the door wrapped only in a towel, smiling awkwardly. The girl freezes, the man smiles uncomfortably and recedes. Is this two apartments that share an entrance? Or one family in a large house? Or are the residents roommates? Two couples? A commune? Who knows or cares.

The original music composed by Tristan Honsinger swells and moves briskly with violins, sexy bass, and other gypsy-like tunes. This mixes well with sounds the dancers make with bags of bottles, a sewing machine and their fists striking the table.

Thomas Schenk's set is simplicity itself, candy-striped walls covered in scuff marks with enough give for the dances to bounce off them like a gym mat.

Andre Pronk ties this all together with a bare bones lighting scheme that works beautifully, especially when he has light refracting off small bits of mirror.

The company is stellar. Besides the lithe and catlike Ernesto, from Mozambique, there's his counter male, Davide Camplani (Italy), twice his age but with equal grace. The men have a mysterious and frenetic duet that is over too soon.

The women are of equal power. The show begins with Mamajeang Kim (Korea) delivering a monolog on top of a refrigerator. Kim is the smallest in the company, but moves with a wonderful controlled muscularity. Yael Schnell (Israel) and Florencia Lamarca (Uruguay) round out this trio of distinct women. In one dance all three lay on the floor and fold, unfold, refold and flap their legs around making a sort of origami-like dance that mesmerizes.

In the program booklet, Waltz noted that in her work, "The language is expressive and emotional, but still leaves space for abstraction." It was very clear from the audience's laughter and the standing ovation that it is fortunately not the other way around. I for one, having dragged an innocent date there, was glad not to find another choreographer who makes emotion the poor stepchild and abstraction the favored one.

The greatest achievement of this re-mounting of a work that premiered in 1993 is that it does what Art is supposed to do, but so seldom does: lets us experience wonder and delight.

Is there meaning here? Certainly.

Much menace exists in some of these relationships. Waltz is everywhere showing us dancers bumping, thrusting, kicking, climbing over each other and pushing each other off of things. A man is lifted then left mid-wall, hanging there. What's he do? He climbs to the top and sits smiling over the action like a benevolent Humpty Dumpty.

But the ineffable feeling I was left with was not one of hopeless strife or conflict, but rather of the wonderful grace of the simple action.

Watching these five people stuck inside this kitchen that is halfway between Leave it to Beaver sunlight and Samuel Beckett shadow, seeing them go through all the simple actions we do everyday: chit-chat with neighbors, break off a piece of bread, lie, cheat, deceive, flirt, seduce, or take a chicken out of the fridge, and seeing them do it with so much grace and athleticism, makes one feel rejuvenated and refreshed.

And all this in one hour!

I'm ready for Act Two.

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