

Unknown Pleasures

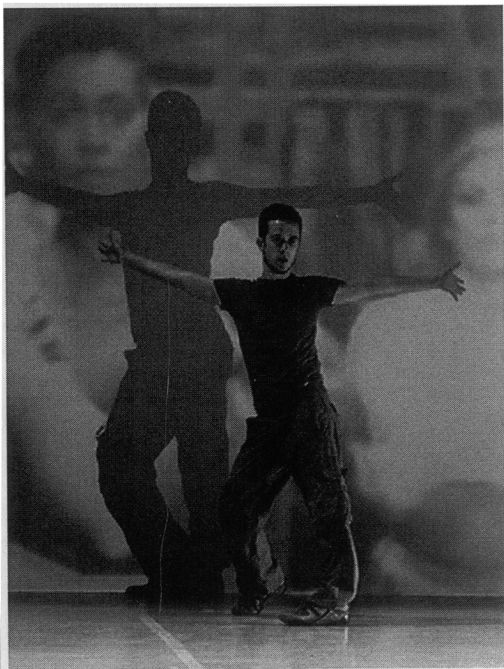
Pere Faura explains to Gareth K Wile the connection between contemporary dance and musical theatre.

Musical Theatre is a problem. Apart from its frustrating dominance of London theatre, it can be a tired vehicle for poor song writing, trite emotionalism and dubious stars. Its formulaic approach to entertainment, and its frequent lack of any challenging content sets it apart from more 'serious' performance.

Pere Faura, however, is using the musicals as an inspiration for contemporary dance, in a humorous yet intense look at the nature of seduction. Having done his frenetic time in the chorus line, he brings that energy to his solo *this is a picture of a person I don't know*.

"I think I never let the musicals go," he admits. "I spent many years with them, learnt a lot from them, so they have been always part of my history and my inspiration." His choreography, which interacts with live and pre-recorded video, has its roots in the musicals' eclecticism. "What attracts me to them is their multidisciplinary: the combination of all the possible scenic disciplines you can mix together on stage."

This is not an uncritical appreciation. "The same element



that attracts me to them also makes me hate them in a way," he continues. "If we look at old traditional musicals, they all seem to play with these elements in the same way, following a similar formula to produce entertainment." His own shift to modern dance

escaped this trend. "Contemporary dance is always trying to re-invent its own formula. At least, that's how I position myself as contemporary dance artist."

picture is a brave and direct comparison between the performer's job and the way that

individuals invent themselves for seduction or socialising.

"I believe that performing a dance show is like going out partying. You dress up nicely, you go out, you look around you, who is there in front of you, and you start dancing, sweating, talking, getting crazy or doing what ever you feel like, just with the purpose of seducing, of being watched and liked, just to have a short encounter with people you don't know, and you will probably not see them again. And at the end you smile to them and you leave. It is clearly a one night stand."

Picking up on a theme once expressed memorably by Janis Joplin, that performing is like having sex with a room full of strangers, then going home alone, *picture* concentrates on loneliness, setting the magical routines of classics like *A Chorus Line* or *Singin' in the Rain* to contrast the colourful fantasy with the grim reality.

"I was feeling very lonely during the time I was making the piece," he laughs. "For the first time in my career, I decided to take my personal life and experiences as source of inspiration, and base the whole dramaturgy of the

show on it. In that moment it made sense, but I haven't done it ever again."

Aware of the dangers of falling into self-indulgence or narcissism, he decided to reference musicals "which belong to the collective memory of everyone, so my private problems become more universal when explained through elements of collective recognition."

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This enlightened re-imagining of the musical as a sort of modern mythology allowed Faura to make a connection between this popular form and the supposedly more serious arts. To the suggestion that contemporary dance permits a more complex expression of emotions, he is cautious.

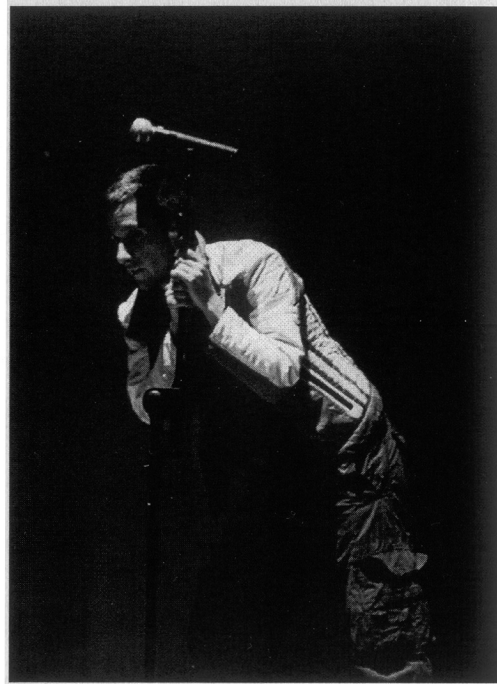
"It's not that contemporary dance allows you to talk about different themes than musicals, more serious or important; musicals can deal with the exact same issues, like loneliness, nostalgia or memory, that I deal with in my show of "contemporary". The difference is in how it is done. To express loneliness in musicals, we would probably see a man alone on stage, illuminated by a spot light; the rest of the stage would be dark or blueish,

he would sing how lonely he feels, and the song would be in minor tone. All the elements combined would be sending the same message in a rather too obvious and illustrative manner. Contemporary dance tries always to find new ways in these combinations to create scenes that have more than one layer of interpretation, so the resulting scene becomes more subtle, more suggestive,

rather than just explanatory in one dimension."

Faura's 'new ways' include extensive use of video, making him one of the many dancers who have become interested in the possibilities of technology, and expanding his solo into something more immersive and dramatic. With the video footage accompanying him on stage, the lines between live and recorded are blurred, much like the lines between the fantasy and reality of the performer's life.

Faura is obviously not afraid to grapple with emotive material- his other works have explored striptease and clubbing. His deconstruction of the mechanics of seduction is a warning to both performer and audience not to allow the fantasy to overwhelm the real,



as well as a nuanced plea for a less performative and more compassionate construction of identity. As *picture* makes clear, we are all engaged in creating versions of ourselves that are defined by the need to impress or seduce, and that our own personality and desires can be swamped by our fictions. By exploding the myths, Faura is offering another escape from constraining pressure.

this is a picture of a person I don't know
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6- 16 August 2009 (not 11) 19:00, £5.00
2 for 1 9 & 10 August at 19:00
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