



PHOTOS COURTESY OF COMPANIA NACIONAL DE DANZA

Alas, Wim Wenders

Spain's Compania Nacional de Danza's 'Alas' took inspiration from the German filmmaker's 'Wings of Desire'

BY **DIANE BAKER**
STAFF REPORTER

Spain's Compania Nacional de Danza returns for a second visit to Taipei next week with its otherworldly meditation on angels and the human condition, *Alas*. The company's visit is part of the 2009 Taiwan International Festival, whose focus this year is on multimedia performances. *Alas*, with its mix of theatrical stage constructions, digital projections and spoken text, aptly fits the bill.

Compania's artistic director and choreographer Nacho Duato collaborated on this 2006 ballet with Slovene theater director Tomaz Pandur, taking as their inspiration parts of the script for German filmmaker Wim Wender's acclaimed 1987 film *Wings of Desire*. The 52-year old Duato has been quoted as saying that he had had no intention of returning to the stage as a dancer but was inspired to do so for *Alas* by Pandur. The reviews of his performances have been uniformly glowing.

Like the film, *Alas* focuses on the angel Daniel, danced by Duato, who longs to leave his metaphysical world and job as a watcher of humanity to join the ranks of humans, with all their fragilities and ills, in order to be with the woman he loves.

In the film, angels watch humans from the rooftops of Berlin. For the stage, Duato and Pandur created a tower of scaffolding and cloth, strong enough to support the dancers clambering around and up it, yet capable of appearing ethereal and ephemeral through a combination of lighting changes and video projections.

Duato, born Juan Ignacio Duato Barcia, has headed Spain's national ballet company since 1990, after a distinguished career as a principal dancer and choreographer with the Nederlands Dans Theater. Under Duato's leadership, the 30-year-old Compania has added more contemporary works to its repertoire and developed its own unique style.

Duato's famed suppleness as a dancer and choreographer is both a product of his natural talent and his unusual combination of training. He began his professional training at 18 at the famed Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in London, before moving on to French choreographer Maurice Bejart's Mudra School in Brussels and finally the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center in New York. His first professional job was with Sweden's Cullberg Ballet, but he was hired away just a year later by Jiri Kylian to dance for the Nederlands Dans Theater. Just seven years later his growing strength as a choreographer led the company to name him one of its resident choreographers, alongside Kylian. Ballet companies worldwide have been eager to add his works to their repertoire, including the Royal Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet, American Ballet Theater and Stuttgart Ballet.

Watching video clips of Duarte's ballets, you can see both Bejart's theatrical influence and the abstract sparseness that has been a hallmark of Kylian's work. There is a fluidity in the dancers' bodies that also brings to mind Lin Hwai-min's (林懷民) technique, especially his *Cursive* trilogy, which will be at the National Theater this September. The water scene at the end of *Alas* also brings back memories of Lin's *Moon Water*.

Compania's performances are the first of four dance-centric entries in the Taiwan International Festival calendar. Next up will be Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon's tribute to Canadian film guru Norman McLaren, *Norman*, featuring dancer/choreographer Peter Trosztner, which starts on March 12. Russia's Marinsky Theater will be back at the National Theater for a long run of *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* starting on March 27, while across the plaza at the National Concert Hall on March 28 will be Klaus Obermaier's feast for the ears and eyes, *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Compania Nacional de Danza's *Alas*

WHEN: March 6 and March 7 at 7:30pm; March 8 at 2:30pm

WHERE: The National Theater, Taipei City

TICKETS: NT\$700, NT\$900, NT\$1,200, NT\$1,600, NT\$2,000, NT\$2,500; available through NTCH ticketing or www.artsticket.com.tw



[SOCIETY]

Blast from the 'stache

Altruism is right under your nose this month with Marchstache, a benefit for the Formosa Cancer Foundation

BY **ALITA RICKARDS**
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Charlie Chaplin, Martin Luther King, Tom Selleck, Frank Zappa and Salvador Dali provide a different kind of inspiration than usual this month, along with fictional characters like Ron Burgundy (played by Will Ferrell in *Anchorman*).

It's not comedy, human rights activism, manliness, music or art that needs to be emulated though: it's the ability to grow facial hair — more specifically, a mustache — that is required.

Marchstache — a portmanteau of March and mustache — is a fundraising event being

held throughout March nationwide in support of the Formosa Cancer Foundation. Organized by Kaohsiung-based Canadian expatriates Eric Lepp, Mark Stewart, Ryan Parsons and Kari Pasick, it takes its inspiration from Australia's Movember charity drives.

By growing whiskers and soliciting pledges, or by sponsoring a 'stache, individuals can help to raise money for the foundation's ongoing work improving the quality of medical care for cancer treatment and reduce the incidence of cancer through public education. Information focuses on encouraging a healthy diet and lifestyle and early detection. All of the proceeds from Marchstache will go to charity.

"Taiwan is a place that, as expats, we have been able to take a lot from, whether it be language, culture, opportunities or adventure," Stewart said. "Marchstache is one way we can give something back locally while at the same time supporting a cause that transcends where any of us might come from."

Pledge sheets can be picked up at



This man attended the Movember party in Sydney in 2007. Movember raises money for charities that support men's health.

PHOTO: REUTERS

participating venues — called "home bases" — including Brass Monkey in Taipei and Foster Hewitts in Kaohsiung. Home bases in Taichung, Tainan, Taoyuan and Hsinchu are to be announced. Check marchstache.com for updates, a list of participating venues or to download a pledge sheet.

Among the suggestions for subnasal broom action: the arty Fu Manchu (Johnny Depp); the lip-swathing Walrus (Ron Burgundy); or Burt Reynolds's signature Chevron, a toned-down version of the Walrus. Charlie Chaplin made the Toothbrush famous before Hitler ruined it, and Salvador Dali's was so unique that the style is named after him. Martin Luther King Jr sported a tidy pencil mustache sometimes known as a "mouth brow," bikers proudly ride with their Horseshoes blowing in the wind, and even Frida Kahlo is an inspiration to a brave few.

The faint-of-heart and follicularly challenged are welcome to make private donations or volunteer at one of the home bases. There will be a party at the end of the

month at each home base, where mustaches can be compared. "We're hoping the parties will give prizes for the best mustaches and best efforts for people who can't grow more than a few hairs," said Pasick.

Stewart has been "trying on and off for years to grow a mustache" but has been "quite unsuccessful." "Maybe with a full month I will be able to have someone from across the room say 'hey, that guy has a mustache,'" he said.

For more information about the Formosa Cancer Foundation, call (02) 8787-9907 or go to www.canceraway.org.tw.

EVENT NOTES:

WHAT: Marchstache

WHEN: March

WHERE: Foster Hewitts, 30 Wenjhong Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市文忠路30號), tel: (07) 555-0888; Brass Monkey, 166 Fuxing N Road, Taipei City (台北市復興北路166號), tel: (02) 2547-5050

ON THE NET: marchstache.com