

CHELSEA CLINTON NEWS

Since 1939

DANCE

Swiss Movement

Zimmermann & de Perrot make their U.S. debut in New York

BY SUSAN REITER

Persistent—and no doubt annoying—interviewers may inquire exactly who does what in creating the imaginative, label-defying works of Zimmermann & de Perrot. Martin Zimmermann and Dimitri de Perrot, the two Swiss artists who comprise this adventurous performance duo, patiently explain that it is the dialogue between them that is at the heart of their collaboration, and that everything else flows from there.

Their collaboration has flourished for more than a decade now, and their works, with quirky titles like *Oper Opis* and *Chouf Ouchouf*, tour regularly all over Europe. Until now, they had not performed in the United States, but this week that omission has been rectified, as they bring *Gaff Aff*, which they have been performing since 2006, to the Baryshnikov Arts Center's new Jerome Robbins Theater. Zimmermann & de Perrot's appearances there inaugurate May Nights in the Jerome Robbins Theater, a month of dance and related events.

In the hour-long *Gaff Aff*, an ingenious, rather homespun scenic design consisting mainly of inventively employed cardboard panels and a rotating turntable stage set the scene for an inventive, whimsical yet probing blend of mime, dance and music. As de Perrot intently and rhythmically spins and scratches a series of vinyl discs at a cluttered side table, Zimmermann, lanky and endearingly gawky, negotiates with a recalcitrant attaché case, and copes with the revolving universe in which he finds himself, and gradually builds an increasingly complex structure—a home perhaps, or possibly a refuge.

Speaking from Montreal, where they performed *Gaff Aff* last week, the two men offered just enough insight into their unique collaboration to placate an inquiring questioner, yet left enough to the imagination—as well they should. Each outlined how they came together to explore theatrical possibilities, fusing their backgrounds: both went to art school and Zimmermann then studied circus arts while de Perrot moved into composition and DJing. “We came to stage by completely different ways. We were so different, and had such different ideas,” says the soft-spoken de Perrot. “But we had the same pleasure of watching people and laughing about things, about ourselves. So we had a really nice dynamic to invent things together.”

“We are still developing our world,



Zimmermann & de Perrot's *Gaff Aff*.

which is a world between music, dance, circus and art. We both direct and do the décor. The décor is really the base for our work, and from this décor we develop everything—the music, the characters, the movement,” explains Zimmermann. The development of a new piece requires seven or eight months, and they don't perform other works while they are in the midst of that process. “We start with nothing; we don't have a text. Dimitri composes the music; I do more the choreography. We are both directors. At the end, we make a mixture between everything. We are like sculptors.”

“We create the whole play together—the ideas we have for the stage set, for how we want to draw these characters, what we want to tell with them,” said de Perrot. “What we both have in a strong way is a really visual view of everything. Also, my music has something visual, how I approach it. I compose music on my computer, and then I press it on vinyl. On the records I have sounds, rhythms, tones, single notes, sound effects. And on stage I re-mix all this into a live music composition, which is guiding this character. Maybe you can say I'm like the alter ego of this character, maybe I'm the soul, he's the body, maybe we are one. Maybe I'm the puppet-master. You don't really know.”

In their earlier works, they worked with, and for, other performers but always

functioned jointly as directors. *Gaff Aff* marked the first time it was just the two of them performing. They have performed it over 200 times, and in the meantime have created two other pieces that are also currently on tour. *Oper Opis*, a 2008 production in which five performers join them, received acclaim in London recently. For their newest creation, they directed and designed the décor, but left the performing to the amazingly nimble, strong 12-member Moroccan acrobatic troupe whose show *Taoub* was seen last year at the New Victory Theater.

It is thanks to a couple of eminent dance figures that they are making this American

debut. First, the late choreographer Pina Bausch invited them to perform at her company's 2008 festival in Germany. When Mikhail Baryshnikov attended their performance, his enthusiastic reaction led him to offer his theater for their local debut. “For us, it was a really nice story,” Zimmermann said modestly. “We're still a little nervous. I think it's a dream to play in the States, in New York.”

Gaff Aff

May 4-8, Jerome Robbins Theater at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37 St. (betw. 9th & 10th Aves.), 212-868-4444; 8, \$25.