

Chicago Tribune

DANCE REVIEW 'Saudade' ***

Dave Rousseve dances 'Saudade'

By Sid Smith | Special to the Tribune
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In "Saudade," David Rousseve tells tales of a handful of tragi-comic characters, drawn from a couple of centuries, to explore a searing paradox at the heart of our experience.

At the start, he asks the boldest of questions: What is the meaning of life? That's a lot to expect from a 100-minute dance-theater work, featuring Rousseve and a handful of dancers from around the world. Though uneven, "Saudade" manages a respectable, touching effort to provide an answer.

The stories include that of a slave girl enduring a rape by her master while her sister secretly holds her hand in comfort. A curmudgeon finds companionship, and love and loss, from a mangy alley cat with a broken tail bent like an antenna "on a TV not worth watching." A man in a hospital, dying from pneumonia, finds solace in "I Love Lucy" reruns.

The term "saudade" means bittersweet and is associated with the Portuguese fado music at the center of the melodic score. Throughout, Rousseve crosses the stage in a diagonal, pausing to tell these stories. Alternating with his enactments are frenzied, id-like, loopy and lyrical dance dramas from the small troupe evoking paradoxes analogous to those in the stories: joy and despair, freedom and bondage, mastery and servitude—embodied in such tropes as the eating of a red hot chili pepper.

The ensemble dance swings from riveting to indulgent or unrelated. But Rousseve is a master monologist and artful mimic, seductively charming even as the truth of what he speaks stabs you in the gut.

"Saudade" plays through Saturday at the Dance Center of Columbia College, 1306 S. Michigan Ave. For tickets: 312-369-6600 or colum.edu/dancecenter.