

ULRR

Artist statement for 'The House of Bernardó Alba'

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Artist Statement

Title: The House of Bernardó Alba

Date: 5 May 2023

Location: Black Box Theatre, Galway, Ireland

Author: Breandán De Gallaí

Other contributor(s): non-author, e.g. band/orchestra members, dancers, actors, technicians, etc.

Cast and Creatives:

Maria Josefa – John FitzGerald

Bernardó Alba – Breandán de Gallaí

Poncia – Laura Lundy

Prudencius & Servant – MacDarragh FitzPatrick

Augustias – Shannon Burke

Magdalena (Pepe) – James Greenan

Amelia – Caoimhe Ennis

Mantirio – Sarah Fennell

Adeló – Odhrán McLaughlin

Co-Director & Dramaturge: Michèle Manahan

Co-Director & Choreographer: Breandán de Gallaí

Composer: Natasa Paulberg

Lighting Design: Tim Feehily

Context: Part of Galway Theatre Festival 2023

Research trajectory and creative development:

Ériu's production of *The House of Bernardó Alba* forms part of an ongoing choreographic research trajectory exploring how Irish traditional dance can operate within contemporary dance-theatre contexts. My practice regularly situates Irish dance within interdisciplinary theatrical forms, combining movement, music, and dramaturgy to extend its expressive possibilities beyond conventional performance settings.

In this production, Federico García Lorca's final play provides a powerful dramaturgical framework through which questions of power, gender, and social control can be explored through embodied performance. The work also reflects a broader creative interest in transnational dialogue between cultural traditions. By bringing contemporary Irish music and dance into conversation with Iberian cultural references, the production investigates historical and cultural parallels between Ireland and Spain, particularly their shared experiences of civil conflict and the shaping influence of Catholic social structures.

Extension of knowledge:

The production contributes to knowledge in arts practice research by demonstrating how traditional dance vocabularies can function as tools for contemporary theatrical storytelling and critical inquiry. By integrating Irish dance within a dramatic interpretation of Lorca's text, the work expands the narrative and emotional range through which Irish dance can operate in theatrical contexts.

A further choreographic contribution lies in the exploration of parallels between Irish percussive dance traditions and Iberian flamenco practices. Through choreographic dialogue between these forms, the work identifies shared expressive structures across distinct cultural traditions and opens new possibilities for intercultural artistic practice.

The project also engages with gender and sexuality through a Queer interpretive lens. By reimagining the central figure as Bernardó, a father rather than a mother, and by casting some of the daughters as sons, the production opened new interpretive possibilities within Lorca's narrative. This reconfiguration allowed the work to suggest Bernardó as a figure whose authority and repression might mask a closeted sexuality, while Adelo — a reimagined Adela — was presented as openly gay and in love with the village's desired young man. The production deliberately played with the ambiguity of Bernardó's own relationship to this figure, creating a tension in which desire, repression, and power intersect. Within this interpretation, the possibility of inappropriate familial dynamics was also suggested, intensifying the atmosphere of secrecy, control, and moral hypocrisy that lies at the heart of Lorca's work.

This interpretation also acknowledges Lorca's own biography. As a gay man living under a deeply conservative social order — one later violently reinforced by Franco's regime and supported by the authority of the Catholic Church — Lorca himself experienced the

pressures of repression that haunt many of his plays. Approaching the work through this lens therefore allows those suppressed themes of sexuality, desire, and social control to surface more explicitly within the production.

Impact for wider society:

The House of Bernardó Alba engages audiences with themes that remain highly relevant in contemporary society, including gender roles, social control, and the lasting influence of religious and cultural norms within domestic life. By presenting these themes through dance-theatre, the production offers audiences a visceral and embodied way of reflecting on questions of identity, power, and belonging.

The work also contributes to broader public understanding of the cultural and historical connections between Ireland and Spain. Through performance, discussion, and dissemination, the production reaches diverse audiences including theatre-goers, dance communities, students, and scholars.

Indicators of excellence, significance and prestige as appropriate to the project:

The production represents a significant interdisciplinary undertaking for Ériu Dance Company, combining theatre, music, and choreography within a large-scale dance-theatre production involving an ensemble cast and an extended theatrical format beyond the typical duration of many contemporary dance works. Through its ambitious scale and engagement with major theatrical literature, the work demonstrates the capacity of Irish traditional dance to function as a sophisticated contemporary performance language within interdisciplinary theatre contexts.

The project was supported through Arts Grant Funding from the Arts Council of Ireland, reflecting sustained national recognition of my artistic work. Over more than a decade, I have progressed from receiving small bursaries and project-based support to securing consistent annual funding, an indication of the confidence placed in the work by peer assessment panels and the Arts Council's strategic funding structures. Notably, Ériu is currently the only Irish dance artist-led company in receipt of annual Arts Grant Funding.

The production was presented as part of the Galway Theatre Festival and in partnership with the Black Box Theatre Galway, demonstrating the work's recognition within Ireland's professional theatre and festival circuits. These partnerships, alongside my ongoing collaborations with artists across disciplines through Ériu, contribute to my reputation for innovative contemporary work rooted in Irish traditional dance.

Related documents:

Video excerpts of performance: <https://doi.org/10.34961/researchrepository-ul.28581560>

Press release: <https://doi.org/10.34961/researchrepository-ul.28582214>

Photo album: <https://doi.org/10.34961/researchrepository-ul.28582262>

Poster image: <https://doi.org/10.34961/researchrepository-ul.28286885>