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Preview: Ballet Hispanico's CARMEN.maquia



Above: **Ballet Hispanico's** Chris Bloom and Kimberly van Woesik in rehearsal for **CARMEN.maquia** Photo: Nir Arieli

Normally I don't do previews of upcoming dance productions unless I'm planning to see them in performance. **Ballet Hispanico's** premiere presentation of Gustavo Ramirez Sansano's **CARMEN.maquia** happens to fall on a night when I have tickets for the New York Philharmonic. But because I admire the Hispanico dancers so much (and their director, Eduardo Vilaro, is such a

wonderful guy) I jumped at the chance to see a rehearsal today. I was so impressed with the work - for so many different reasons - that I have to send out the word: this is a must-see dancework. Ticket information for the November 22nd performance at the Apollo Theater [here](#).

Luckily, photographer Nir Arieli was available to meet me and document the rehearsal today, which - as it turned out - was the first 'costume-run-thru' of the full work. I'm so grateful to publicist Michelle Tabnick for arranging things and to **Ballet Hispanico's** rehearsal director Michelle Manzanales for welcoming us to the studio.

As a long-time opera-goer (yes, I even went to the *Old Met!*) Bizet's **CARMEN** has been in my blood for over half-a-century, starting with my first experience of hearing the great Rise Stevens singing the '*Habanera*' on an old LP my parents owned. I know all the music intimately...and 99% of the words, which I found myself singing along today.

I don't want to give away any secrets, but Mr. Sansano takes a non-literal stance towards the opera's score for his new ballet, and he even incorporates music from other Bizet works. One interpolation in particular was truly daring, but I'm not going to spoil the surprise. In terms of relating to the story as told in the Bizet opera, we have dancers representing Carmen, Don Jose, Escamillo, and Micaela as well as smugglers, cigarette girls, and soldiers. But the choreographer makes some stunning re-assignments of music normally associated with one scene in the opera to a different situation in his ballet. For example...no, wait...you'll have to go and find out for yourself!

In fact, I should not really say anything more lest I say too much. But I will mention that the black-and-white costumes are inspired by Picasso's drawings, and that the personifications of the main characters by the marvelous Hispanico dancers transcend steps, acting, and music to create living, breathing men and women who wear their passions proudly. The work is provocative in so many different ways, from the aforementioned musical placements to the characterizations of the major players (they don't always fit our stereotyped ideas), and even a bit of nudity.

So, rather than let too many cats out of the proverbial bag at this pre-premiere stage, I'll share with you some of Nir Arieli's rehearsal images. I had a terrible time deciding which ones to include, because I wanted to post them all.



Kimberly van Woesik (Carmen)



Kimberly van Woesik and Chris Bloom (Don Jose)



Mario Ismael Espinoza (Escamillo)



Min-Tzu Li (Micaela) and Chris Bloom



Min-Tzu Li and Chris Bloom



Melissa Fernandez



Jessica Alejandra Wyatt



Jamal Rashann Callender



Joshua Winzeler, Johan Rivera Mendez, and Lauren Alzamora



Christopher Hernandez and Marcos Rodriguez



Martina Calcagno



Johan Rivera Mendez and Marcos Rodriguez



The ensemble



Min-Tzu Li and Chris Bloom

The following images are from a duet for Carmen and her toreador: Kimberly van Woesik and Mario Ismael Espinoza:





All photography by [Nir Arieli](#).

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