

The Boston Globe

DANCE REVIEW

Playfulness and passion from Ballet Hispánico

By **Janine Parker** GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 28, 2017

BECKET — Ballet Hispánico's artistic director Eduardo Vilaro has said that the troupe's title notwithstanding, the company is "a new envisioning of American modern dance." It's an intriguing idea, particularly since a main mission of the New York-based group is to present dance through a Latino lens.

Indeed, of the three choreographers whose works Ballet Hispánico is performing at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival through the weekend, one is Spanish, one is Belgian-Colombian, and one (Vilaro) was born in Cuba. The works also largely reflect the company's members' classical training: modern and contemporary dance and yes, ballet, figure heavily in the choreography.

In his 2013 "El Beso," Gustavo Ramírez Sansano playfully captures the theatricality of Zarzuelan music (the score is a potpourri by Tomás Bretón, Ruperto Chapi, Reveriano Soutullo, Juan Vert, and Amadeo Vives) through his abstract and often madcap depictions of love and lust.



BROOKE TRISOLINI
Dancers of Ballet Hispanico in
"Linea Recta."

Sansano's inventive movement vocabulary is inflected with surges of directional changes, as if the dancers are being whipped here and there by invisible force fields. In his opening solo, Johan Rivera Mendez vividly expresses this notion. Soon, he's pursued by Shelby Colona: He's uncertain, while she unabashedly offers herself to him, comically pulsing her pelvis in his direction, or, when all else fails, flinging herself onto him. Alas, in the end, though he kisses her on each cheek, he declines. This and other rejections are only brief ripples in this otherwise fun romp. Refreshingly, the featured "successful" coupling of Christopher Bloom and Mark Gieringer avoids any overtly masculine clichés. The duet is simply lovely, with the two men lifting each other and sharing weight softly, as if testing the perimeters of this new romance. When they kiss, the passion speaks volumes.

The "straight line" in Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's 2016 "Línea Recta" refers to the phrase's "straight to one's goal" connotation rather than a claim to direct lineage to flamenco dance. The choreography — particularly in the dancers' now stark, now sinuous port de bras punctuated by fingers formed in spiky tendrils — is indeed inflected with that highly stylized genre, but Ochoa purposely strayed off-path. Unlike flamenco's notable lack of physical contact, here touch is prominent. In two striking sequences rife with breathtakingly acrobatic partnering, a single woman is lifted, tossed, and maneuvered by one or all of the cast's four men. Happily, Ochoa doesn't reduce the women into manipulated dolls: They are strong, independent. In the opening section, the sumptuous Melissa Fernandez wields her long red ruffled train (Danielle Truss's handsome costume designs include contemporary takes on bata de cola skirts for the women and high-waisted pants for the men) with artful confidence, coiling herself in and out of it.

Set to Eric Vaarzon Morel's lush music mostly composed of acoustic guitar, the dance is an evocative pleasure, the movement styles organically woven rather than self-consciously patched together.

While Vilaro's 2009 "Danzón" likewise takes its cues from a cultural treasure, references to Cuba's "official" dance and music are more nods than quotations. Set to a score

anchored in Dizzy Gillespie and Frank Paparelli's familiar "A Night in Tunisia," the company dances with an easygoing brio, as ensemble work evaporates harmoniously into smaller groupings and back again. The choreography is full of balletic pirouettes and allegro, but peppered with shimmying shoulders and wiggling hips. The central pas de deux performed by Fernandez and Lyvan Verdecia is more sweet than sexy; that kind of old-school gentleness permeates the whole work. A few soloists dance further out onto the ledge — Bloom with an extraordinary bonelessness, Jenna Marie with friskiness, Verdecia displaying an explosive but whisper-soft virtuosity — but all in all it's a party of a dance that might be happening anywhere a group of happy people are congregating.

BALLET HISPÁNICO

At Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, Becket, through Sunday. Tickets \$35-\$78. 413-243-

0745, www.jacobspillow.org

Janine Parker can be reached at parkerzab@hotmail.com.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater/dance/2017/07/27/playfulness-and-passion-from-ballet-hispanico/FgZQ26DDo3DbVbo9DJlqjN/story.html>