



## The Evolution of Ballet Hispanico

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Tina Ramirez founded Ballet Hispanico in 1970 to give Latin choreographers, dancers and the Latin community at large a place to hone their craft and give voice to the Latin experience in the new and old world. Where under Tina Ramirez's leadership Ballet Hispanico evolved into dance company that is recognized internationally and

attracts some of the most talented Latin global artists, Ramirez put lots of emphasis on recognizable Latin movement styles from flamenco, indigenous Hispanic folkloric dances and dance styles that form the diasporic bridge between the old world and the new. Under Eduardo Vilario aegis Ballet Hispanico is presenting a much larger embrace of the Hispanic diaspora, seen through the lens of ever-evolving movement styles, accurately expressing this larger embrace to modern audiences. Ballet Hispanico's short season at the Apollo Theater wholly demonstrates this evolution. Vilario recognizes that Latin culture is no longer 'the other' or the exotic; it is the here and now.

This modern perspective is made all the more evident in the musical choices found in the company's current repertoire. In most dance companies the choreography and the performance level of the dancers is front and center and the main attraction; however, in this outing the music is the driving force behind the ballets with the dancers serving as supportive component to the music. This is not only an evolution for Ballet Hispanico, it is also a good thing. And a

manifestation that perhaps the dance world is moving beyond personality-driven artists that drive box office—consider the dance phenomenon of Nureyev and Fonteyn in the 1960s; Baryshnikov, Jamison, and Kirkland in the 1970s, and other dance stars in the 80s and 90s— and moving toward a more integrated approach where all elements that make a performance possible are equally important.



"Espiritu Vivo" images courtesy of Paula Lobo

The ballet on the program seen at the Apollo Theater that best expressed this evolution of Latin movement styles is Ron Brown's "Espiritu Vivo." Brown has established an oeuvre for creating ballets that infuse popular dance styles into choreography that is also steeped in more codified movement disciplines. This melding of dance forms is an integral part of Brown's "Espiritu Vivo." Originally made for Ballet Hispanico in 2012, after a five-year absence, gratefully this fully realized work is back in the company's repertoire. And it is currently danced with passion and soulful vibrancy. Exploring the intersection of African and Latino diasporas, Brown seamlessly melds Horton, Graham, and Dunham techniques with dance styles that come out of Santeria, later becoming more recognizable Latin Caribbean cultural dance styles.

"Espiritu Vivo" opens with an almost monastic restraint and builds toward ecstatic exuberance. For those lucky enough to translate the Susana Baca's music used in this work, the messages of bondage juxtaposed against the liberating spirit of freedom as seen against the African and Latino diasporas comes across loud and clear. Standout dancers in "Espiritu Vivo" include Lyvan Verdecia, whose movement quality was grounded and fully invested, and newcomer Gabrielle Sprave, whose majestic presence filled the stage.

With Ramon Oller's "Bury Me Standing," Ballet Hispanico looked almost like a completely different company. Though this ballet is over 20 years old, Ballet Hispanico performed the work as though it was made brand new on the company. The ever-evolving Ballet Hispanico is demonstrating every season that they can handle almost any movement style and a variety of movement styles in one work. In "Bury Me Standing," Oller not only used a wealth of movement styles but also ingeniously incorporated mime and words for dramatic effect in reference to the alien status of gypsies and the Roma people. Oller's use of the innovative 'airplane' partnering really gives this work a signature look. Standout dancers include Diana Winfree and Nick Fearon.

Creative director Eduardo Vilario brought back Michelle Manzanales' "Con Brazos Abiertos" from the company's 2017 season at the Joyce Theater earlier in the year. This hilarious and thought-provoking exploration of the Mexican-American experience in the US melds folkloric details with canned dialogue from Cheech and Chong and the music of Selena and Julio Iglesias. Like all the works in this season at the Apollo Theatre, "Con Brazos Abiertos" demonstrates that Latin American culture is not an addition to the American mainstream, Latin American culture is an integral part of the mainstream. Viva Ballet Hispanico.



"Bury Me Standing" images courtesy of Paula Lobo



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