



Review: Ballet Hispánico at The Apollo



Ballet Hispánico presented its annual program at the Apollo Theater on December 1st and 2nd with three works embodying the strength of Latin culture. The evening began with a 1998 ballet by Ramon Oller, danced by the

full company of 12 dancers. *Bury me Standing* takes on the qualities of a sweeping epic poem. The journey of the oft-marginalized Gypsy people is depicted as one of strength, faith, and perseverance. Mark Gieringer stands taller among the dancers as the lead, but also as a leader—a bastion of the religious ties that help to bind the culture together. Gieringer glides across the stage so smoothly as to almost levitate, commanding audience attention even while the full company dances around him.

Throughout the piece, a through line of unwavering support is woven. Through intimate partnering sections, large groups of celebratory flamenco-inspired dancing, and even the earth tones of the costumes and lighting, an endurance comes to light. *Bury me Standing* is a wonderfully varied and captivating ballet that embodies a culture through vignettes of its individual people.

Ronald K. Brown's 2012 piece *Espiritu Vivo* is a lively and vivid piece for eight dancers. It's a gorgeous study of the human condition in the Afro-Caribbean choreography that Brown has

come to be known for. The piece takes the audience through the five stages of grief following a tragedy.



Notable is the piece's lack of melancholy. The dancers are wearing bright colors, and with warm lighting, the upbeat music is lightened even more. Brown's intricate and earthy choreography conveys that the essence of grief within Latino/Caribbean cultures is celebration of life, not mourning of death.

The evening closed with a new work by first-time choreographer Michelle Manzanales, titled *Con Brazos Abiertos*. With striking lines, expressive music, and props, Manzanales paints a portrait of growing up as a Mexican-American, the child of two worlds. The ballet pits the two cultures against each other, exploring the ways in which they both clash and come together. *Con Brazos Abiertos* stands out within the evening as particularly timely, and the piece's lead female solo takes that on in an especially poignant way. She stands in the spotlight, stripped down to her underwear, and dances a slow, heartbreaking duet with a sombrero -- the usually celebratory hat hanging precariously on her toe, or landing heavily on her chest—the weight of a culture she can't run away from, but doesn't quite know how to handle.

Ballet Hispánico rarely disappoints, and this year's program once again stood up to expectations.