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Ballet Hispánico Brings a New Norm

Saturday, April 22, 2017 – by Susan Yung



Línea Recta. Photo: Paula Lobo

A number of mid-sized ballet companies exist in the US, and even in New York alone, but Ballet Hispánico stands out for its dedicated focus on the work of Hispanic artists and themes. The program at the [Joyce](#) through this weekend is also remarkable as all three choreographers are women, a refreshing change. Each of the three works that comprise the evening are quite distinct in form and content.

Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, who created *Línea Recta*, was in the news last fall for her intriguing commission for New York City Ballet, [*Unframed*](#). The dance for Ballet Hispánico takes as a foundation the style and attitude of flamenco. A barefoot Melissa Fernandez wears a red dress with lace bodice and a long, narrow, flounced train that whips and winds around her limbs; four men, bare-chested, wear high-waisted red pants and red socks. Without the heeled, leather soled shoes typical of the genre, the stamping is more attitude than striking force, but there are plenty of gravity-bound deep pliés to convey an earthbound feel. Fernandez dances a duet in which she chafes and strains against the embrace of her partner. She's joined by three women; they all wear shorter versions of the original dress. Eric Vaarzon Morel wrote the original guitar compositions, which move through an array of emotions. The dance captures the general flavor of flamenco in a modern vehicle.



Con Brazos Abiertos. Photo: Paula Lobo

Michelle Manzanales' *Con Brazos Abiertos* ("With Open Arms," made with artistic collaboration by Ray Doñes) is a high-spirited take on growing up as a Mexican in Texas. Manzanales is the director of BH's school of dance. The costumes, by Diana Ruettiger, feature flattering white halter tops to which were added high-waisted lurex pants, and finally flouncy circle skirts for both the women and men. The score is a playlist of charming ballads in Spanish, spoken word (including a joke about Mexicans taking Spanish and getting Bs), and even a cover of Radiohead's "Creep." In one section, everyone wears large sombreros which hide their faces from the audience, raising the idea of group identity, or the lack of an individual one. It pays homage to Mexican tropes with tongue firmly planted, refreshingly, in cheek.



3. *Catorce Dieciséis*. Photo: Paula Lobo

The program ended with 3. *Catorce Dieciséis*, Spanish for the numerical equivalent of pi. Choreographed by Tania Pérez-Salas, it is a study of kinetic patterns and shapes, danced to a medley, with an emphasis on early music. The style feels similar to a number of post-classical choreographers working today, if perhaps a bit less fluid syntactically. Tossed leg extensions and hyper-extended torsos and arms are used frequently. One hallmark was to creative passages of movement that move perpendicular to the audience, rather than the typical, dramatically effective diagonal or lateral crossing. But it was a taste of global contemporary ballet to cap an all-female creator program remarkable for being, in a sense, all in due course.