



Ballet Hispánico's Program of All-Female Choreography a Powerhouse

April 25, 2017 – Bonnie Rosenstock



Ballet Hispánico's New York season at The Joyce (April 18-23) delivered a strong and engaging program by three Latina choreographers from diverse backgrounds. What the choreographers had in common was great artistry, a clear and exciting vision and the gifted dancers of the Ballet Hispánico to interpret their works.

"Linea Recta" (2016) by award-winning choreographer Colombian-Belgian Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, takes flamenco out of its traditional tablao form and reinvents it into a

contemporary dance context, where communication between the sexes is foremost. At first, we see a lone dancer's back to the audience; she is wearing a bright red ruffled exaggerated train. But when she turns around, the front of her lacy dress is leotard length, which allows her to move freer than with a cumbersome train, which is required for bailaoras to master. She manipulates the train to wrap herself in it and to play with it in various ways. The male dancers pull her with it, hang her upside down from it. The other female dancers wear the same leotards but are without trains and they are all barefoot, so no possibility of taconeo (fancy flamenco footwork). The bare-chested men are outfitted in high-waisted red trousers and red socks. There are lovely lifts and lively, intricate ever-changing partnering. Both the men and women dance with two fans in new ways. The dancers are accompanied by an original composition by Dutch-born flamenco

guitarist Eric Vaarzon Morel, who like Lopez Ochoa, is a product of a European upbringing. (In 2003, she was hailed a “rising star of the Dutch dance scene.”) The collaboration between the eight dancers, choreographer and musician is masterful.



Having its World Premiere, "Con Brazos Abiertos" (With Open Arms) by Michelle Manzanales, explores with affection, nostalgia and humor the iconic Mexican symbols that she was disinclined to acknowledge as a Mexican-American child growing up in Texas, caught between two worlds that both clash and combine. Her inventive choreography interweaves folkloric images, set to music that includes Julio Iglesias; a protest song; rock in Spanish, including son jaracho, which aims to preserve the traditional music, dance and culture of Veracruz; and spoken word from our favorite stoners Cheech & Chong; a poignant bilingual poem, “Con Brazos Abiertos,” by Dominican-American native New Yorker Maria “Vida” Billini-Padilla; and a funny riff by Edward James Olmos about how “being a Mexican American is exhausting.” I recommend watching it on YouTube.



One section features the dancers in big Mexican hats with little balls hanging from them, performed to a Spanish song. There’s also a terrific solo for female dancer in a big hat and a most sublime duet with gorgeous lifts, set to Radiohead’s “Creep” spoken by a young woman, who laments “I don’t belong here; I wish I was special.”

The last section features 14 dancers whirling in capacious billowing white skirts to a song about Méjico, a fitting finale to a heartwarming work.

The last piece, "3. Catorce Dieciséis" (3.1416) by Mexican choreographer Tania Pérez-Salas, like its reference to Pi, is more cerebral. She drew inspiration from it to reflect what she says is the circularity of the human condition and our movement through life. And her choreographic movements are brilliant, with the dancers' intense unity of group movement while rolling on the floor or moving through space. There are also duets, which are performed to perfection. The music by Vivaldi and other Baroque old masters captures the intensity and joy.



Ballet Hispánico, 167 West 89th Street, New York, NY 10024. Telephone 212-362-6710. For more information about performances and classes, go to ballethispanico.org.

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