



## Ballet Hispanico – Spring 2017

April 27, 2017 – Joel Benjamin



Ballet Hispanico, under the artistic direction of Eduardo Vilaro, has become a sleek, sensual dancing machine, its Latin ambiance proving to be its strong point. What other modern dance troupe can raise an audience's temperature the way that this company does? The fact that it is celebrating its 45th Anniversary is a credit to its founder Tina Ramírez's vision and fortitude and Mr. Vilaro's brilliant direction. Three works, one brand new, filled the Joyce Theater stage,

beginning with *Línea Recta* (2016) by Belgo-Colombian choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa to flamenco guitar music by Eric Vaarzon Morel.

At first a solo figure, wearing one of Danielle Truss' fabulous red costumes suggesting a cross between a tutu and a long flamenco gown with train, stood regally in silhouette, dead center. Red was the initial main color. Michael Mazzola's lighting highlighted the dramatically sexual subtext.

A group of men entered wearing high-waisted red pants. They variously manipulated the young solo lady, pulling on her train, lifting her and otherwise romancing her. Different colored

variations on these costumes appeared as the men vs. women theme danced in an exciting combination of Spanish dance and classical ballet steps zipped across the stage. Fans became weapons; sexuality became a weapon; and even the costumes, as they exposed the bodies, whether lined up, arms extended formally or lying helpless on the floor, became weapons in the war between the sexes in which, according to Ms. Ochoa, nobody wins but everybody enjoys playing at.



The new work was *Con Brazos Abiertos* by Michelle Manzanales (with the artistic collaboration of Ray Doñes) to a folksy/pop score using the words and music of Cheech & Chong, Julio Iglesias, Edward James Olmos and several others, making for a colorful and witty aural ambiance. Ms. Manzanales' ballet was a paean to the hybridization of the two countries that influenced her, Mexico and America.

She wittily used odd juxtapositions of national symbols: sombreros with bikinis; ballet steps with Mexican folk dancing; political statements (a duet to references to the Trump wall) with clichés (an opening image of the entire company posing as matadors). An upbeat, full company ending was optimistic about the historic joining of Mexicans and Americans. Diana Ruettinger's costumes were smart as was Joshua Preston's lighting which contrasted cartoonish color schemes with moody shadows.

The final work was *3.Catorce Dieciséis* (a reference to the mathematical figure Pi) by Tania Pérez-Salas to Baroque music by Vivaldi, Frescobaldi and others. Pérez-Salas' choreographic style is jagged and quick. Her dancers, wearing Amanda Gladu's barely there outfits, were put through their paces, one piece of fast-then-slow music after the other. Shoulders shimmied and bodies bent over only to straighten up as a leg was jabbed into the air. The dancers carried large, brightly colored pieces of cloth, waving them, wrapping them about themselves and allowing themselves to be dragged while lying on them. The floor was used as much as the air. The sly allusion of the title to circles wasn't particularly evident in the staging, but there was definitely a continuous swirl of movement, illuminated by Bob Franklin's shadowy lighting.

The company is in great shape. It's a difficult task to combine ethnic themes with ballet and modern dance, but somehow Eduardo Vilaro has been succeeding terrifically. His troupe entertains, titillates and even educates (if that isn't a dirty word).



Ballet Hispanico (April 18-23, 2017)  
Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, in Manhattan  
For tickets, call 212-242-0800 or visit <http://www.Joyce.org>  
For more information, visit <http://www.ballethispanico.org>  
Running time: one hour and 40 minutes including two intermissions

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