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DANCE REVIEW | BALLET HISPÁNICO

September 27th, 2017 – By Rachel Hellwig



Photo by Paula Lobo

On Friday night, the [Alys Stephen Center](#)'s dance series got off to an enthusiastic start with a visit from New York-based [Ballet Hispánico](#). The program highlighted works by Latina choreographers Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Michelle Manzanales and Tania Pérez-Salas.

Ochoa's "Linea Recta" (2016) is a fiery blend of Flamenco and contemporary — alternately red hot and slow burn. The company's prominent base of classical training is likewise evident in the work. Dancers, costumed in red, combine Flamenco-inspired arms and movement accents with

contemporary extension, freedom of the torso and partnering. Flamenco's percussive footwork isn't used since the performers wear flat shoes, but, in one striking moment, they echo those distinctive sounds as they lie on their backs and tap the floor with their hands while a haunting whistling melody drifts across the stage. The recorded music also features classical Spanish guitar music and vocals.



Photo by Paula Lobo.

“Con Brazos Abiertos” (2017) is an autobiographical, abstract exploration of Manzanales’s feelings of being suspended between Mexican and American cultures while growing up in Houston. Passages alternate between serious reflection and humor, incorporating spoken word at times. Contemporary movement conveys the more somber emotions while a combination of styles express the lighter moments. Swirling skirts, sombreros and a cover of Radiohead are all in the mix. An ensemble episode that evokes the feeling of an old-fashioned courtship dance is particularly poignant in its melding of influences and understated passion.

Pérez-Salas’s “Catorce Dieciséis” (2002) shows a different side of the company. More prominently contemporary than a mixture of styles, the work pairs an assortment of instrumental and vocal Baroque pieces with the theme of the cyclical nature of life and, implicitly, destiny. The abandon and vehement movement inflections suggest that fate is an aggressive machine. Both earth and air, it’s a memorable conclusion to the program.