



Dance: Ballet Hispanico, Festival Theatre, Edinburgh, four stars

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CONFLICTED emotions, visceral passions, inevitable – if unintended – tragedy: as soon as you say 'Carmen', this is what you expect will come centre-stage whether it's Bizet's opera or, as here, a dance response to both his music and Prosper Mérimée's original novel.

New York-based Ballet Hispanico – founded in 1970, but a newcomer to Edinburgh audiences – unleash all of the narrative's intrinsic drama but their CARMEN:maquia (from 2012) has some interesting characteristics of its own.

Luis Crespo's striking set – concertina-pleated, easily reconfigured modules – is, like David Delfin's simple costumes, starkly white. A blank canvas where the black-clad Carmen (Shelby Colona) stands out as something of a self-willed, aberrant force. What lies, pulsing and thrumming, beneath this graphic, monochrome surface arrives in Gustavo Ramirez Sansano's choreography where internal turmoils are writ large in movements that judder and wrench, quiver and fidget and simply shriek of the restless boredom that encourages lust at first sight. As familiar snatches of Bizet's score are accelerated into breakneck rhythms, Sansano's dynamic succeeds in melding lithe sinuosity with sharp-edged staccato lines. Luckily this exceptional Latino company are attuned to every nuance with Chris Bloom (Don José), Mark Gieringer (Escamillo) and Eila Valls (Micaela) all superbly complicit in Carmen's fatal choices.

Linea Recta (2016) is a spot-on curtain-raiser here. Choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa has unstitched elements of traditional flamenco, then woven them into a sizzling contemporary dance piece where time-honoured gender-specific movements are kicked aside as men and women swap leading roles, and bodies mesh together in duets powered by the mood shifts in Eric Vaarzon Morel's thrilling guitar music. Costumes, in blazing red, nod to bare-chested prowess for men and lavish flounces – albeit in abbreviated bustles – for women. Wow!

Ballet Hispanico in CARMEN.maquia at Festival Theatre, Edinburgh picture credit - Paula Lobo

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