



Ballet Hispánico: Carmen – Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

March 7, 2018 – Dominic Corr



Priding itself with a connection to its roots, the Ballet Hispánico company stitches the grandeur of ballet with the accessibility of Latin movement. Exploring Latino culture, seeking to educate whilst also entertain, Ballet Hispánico talents lie not just in dance, but in identity and awareness.

From the beginning, there is little question in the companies' talent. Divided over two sets, Carmen and a shorter first act performing an original piece Linea Recta, Ballet Hispánico

plants its flag early.

To start Linea Recta, draped in the signature Flamenco scarlet explores communication between the sexes. It's a quick piece, high-octane and rich in physical language. Linear movements, limbs entwined and outstretched to demonstrate the paradox of the lack of physical contact between dancers, despite the intensity of the piece. It is here too where we get a taste of Danielle Truss' simple, but effective and clean-cut wardrobe design. Not distracting, each extra brings a small piece of the puzzle rather than detracting.

Those unfamiliar with Carmen, one of the world's most-lauded operas, will at least find some familiar ground in the material. The arias Toreador and Habanera are among the most recognisable in opera, and are complemented exquisitely by the dancers. It is within these more recognisable pieces the audience connects more. Though to hear the company paired with a live orchestra would have elevated the experience.

Carmen (Shelby Colona) is an untameable spirit who stands by the philosophies that love and passion are free to be shared and enjoyed. Her intense connection with guard Don José (Chris Bloom) incite zeal, violence and ultimately her downfall. Colona is rightfully the lead for

Carmen, and whilst every member of the company is exceptionally skilled, Colona commands the theatre with a single step.

With a heavy emphasis on street movements, we see aspects of dance completely outside the realms of the usual plié. A turf war, where an amalgamated display of movement is at the centre of, effectively, a dance-off. Heavily comedic interpretations of bulls, gypsies and soldiers balance the desired Latino sense of spirit with the storytelling of ballet.

CEO and lead choreographer Eduardo Vilaro proves a genius at splicing movement pieces together. Overall Carmen provides a narrative whilst allowing for experimentation, tense when required but also awkward. On occasion an allegro step ending in an inventive, though unnecessary street movement throws off the intended result.

Besides the obvious physical influences, there is one thing truly unique aspect to the added Latin flair; personality. There's a rich humour from tonight's performers in their delivery: a completely different variety of comedic tones than those occasionally found in ballet. The way the dancers interact with another, jovial in nature, serious when called for really drives a camaraderie amongst them.

Nothing can warm the still frozen streets of Scotland better than South American moves. Blazing passion both in movement and vision, Ballet Hispánico seeks to bring cultural identity to the world. Seeking not just to entertain, but to inspire, injecting Latin sparks into other art forms. Runs until 10 March 2018 | Image: Contributed