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Carmen.maquia by Ballet Hispánico

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As the frosty aftermath of ‘the beast from the east’ takes Edinburgh, an escape to watch Ballet Hispánico’s performance of Carmen.maquia with its Latino heat is a much welcome treat. The performance brings the UK debut of Ballet Hispánico to Edinburgh Festival theatre, with a contemporary twist on Bizet’s classic opera and the flamenco inspired opener Linea Recta.

Ballet Hispánico is a pioneering American Latino dance company whose mission statement seeks to bring individuals and communities together in a celebration of Latino culture through

dance. Their work aims to promote a vision of social equality in the arts. It is both refreshing and inspiring to see such a diverse cast moving seamlessly together.

The women dominate the performance, as exemplified in the opening dance sequence. Annabelle Lopez Ochoa’s dynamic choreography examines the theme of communication between the sexes through a merging of contemporary ballet and flamenco dance. It’s an impeccably choreographed piece as the dancer utilises the long red train of her dress as an extension of her body, gliding across the stage, her movements akin to that of a graceful yet dangerous scorpion. As an audience member, one cannot help but be seduced by the beautiful, strong forms illuminated by powerfully evocative lighting sequences.

Carmen.maquia tells the tragic tale of factory-girl turned smuggler Carmen, who is fully characterised by Shelby Colona; through a juxtaposition of sharp and graceful movement we see both her vulnerable and sensual sides. The chemistry between Carmen and San Jose is convincing, and the staging and execution is emotionally charged and draws the audience into the tale of their fraught love. The corps de ballet bring moments of light relief to an otherwise intense performance, as they humorously strut across the stage, plotting against Carmen. For

what is a relatively small cast there is certainly no lack of energy on stage. At times however, this detracts from key moments of the narrative.

Production designer Luis Crespo's striking minimalist, monochromatic set design and the corresponding costumes by David Delfin, ensure focus is on the dancer's storytelling and heighten the dramatic sensations as the story unfolds. Picasso was supposedly the inspiration for such performance design, the only visual indication of such origins are evident in the cubist like paintings hung from the ceiling. Whilst demonstrating a celebratory nod to wider Hispanic arts, it is questionable how much this adds to the piece as the link to Picasso is not clearly explored any further.

After receiving such high acclaim the other side of the Atlantic, Ballet Hispánico had a lot to live up to, and they do not fail to impress. This electrifying performance leaves us questioning standards of gender and diversity in contemporary dance and in wider culture. For a performance with a monochromatic set and costume, it exudes a sense of colour and warmth and is well worth a watch.

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