



High Powered One Two Punch with Ballet Hispanico and Dreams of Nature at Sarasota Ballet

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Once a season for the past several years, Sarasota Ballet Artistic Director Iain Webb gives his hard-working dancers a chance to rest and settle into their seats to watch a guest ballet company perform. This is an equally pleasant opportunity for Sarasota audiences to check out a traveling company as a unique part of their season subscription.

Sure, our community has Sarasota Contemporary Dance making a splash on the arts scene as well as a few companies occasionally visiting at the

Van Wezel; but as far as ballet is concerned our resident company has the corner on the market. That's why it is a bold artistic choice for Webb to bring in other companies such as Paul Taylor, Smuin Dance, and now Ballet Hispanico to expand the palette of our local balletomanes.

And Ballet Hispanico did not disappoint. Headquartered in New York City, Ballet Hispanico is the premiere Latino dance company in the country. The company of 15 dancers performs the work of Latino choreographers, and, in particular, women choreographed all three pieces performed in Sarasota. The work reflected the complexity of Latino culture.

In *Línea Recta*, choreographed by Annabelle Lopez-Ochoa, the dancers explored the traditional flamenco style of dance. Ablaze in red, the dancers quick, deft movements were stylized and yet

authentic and fresh. I particularly loved the costuming, especially a snake-like red skirt that became almost another dance partner for Shelby Colona. Colona gave a fiery, spirited performance as she ably partnered with each of the dancers with whom she shared the stage.



Con Brazos Abiertos, choreographed by Michelle Manzanales, was the highlight of the evening playing off of and undercutting stereotypes about Mexican people. This was uncomfortable but entirely relevant at a time when a large portion of our country wants to build a wall to separate us from our closest neighbor to the south. The dancers used their movement to show the conflict between desiring to be included in the culture of the United States while at the same time retaining the traditions of their heritage. Melissa Fernandez simply owned the stage in her riveting performance complemented by an incredible cast of dancers. At the end of their incredible performance, the dancers collapsed to the ground to these words from “Selena,” “we gotta be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time. It’s exhausting. Damn. Nobody knows how tough it is to be a Mexican American.”

Finally, Catorce Dieciséis by Tania Pérez-Salas was an electric work set to the music of Vivaldi, which gave the dancers the opportunity to display their precise muscularity. Pérez-Salas was inspired by the number Pi, and honors what Fernandez calls the “unendingness and circularity of life.” This show-stopping number is one for the ages, and something I hope to see again in future productions of Ballet Hispanico, which tours regularly and also completes residencies at the Joyce Theater in New York.

Up next, Sarasota Ballet has perhaps its most ambitious programming of the season “Dreams of Nature” which features guest artist Friedemann Vogel, principal dancer of Stuttgart Ballet. Webb’s willingness and enthusiasm to have both cede and share the stage with other great masters is truly a gift for the Sarasota community. I am already fascinated with the sneak peeks of stunning costumes and an airborne Vogel and can’t wait to see what Sarasota Ballet has in store.

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