



## BALLET HISPANICO

April 3, 2019 – Jonathan Matthews



**BALLET HISPANICO**  
April 3, 2019 Ballet Hispanico's Joyce season presents a response to the international moment that avoids the two most common traps of "timely performance" – self-obsolting specificity and one-note rage. The program's two premieres concern themselves with the diasporas of Latinx and Asian populations in a way that maintains a way in for

spectators unfamiliar or unaware of issues that, in driving the process, ultimately craft pieces of contemporary ballet that harness virtuosity in the service of an identifiably human sort of expression. Edward Liang, a Taiwanese choreographer who has passed through New York City Ballet and Netherlands Dans Theater, based *El Viaje* on Chinese emigration. Innocuously titled "the trip" in Spanish, the work uses the changeable simplicity of costuming to evoke the permanent difference one feels when they leave their homeland, or, perhaps even more so, the distance one feels from their roots when raised in a different culture. A dancer in red faces off in a variety of perspectives with an ensemble in blueish grays. Never contentious, they approach each other as though through a screen, maintaining connection via gently weighted spinal undulations. The soloist aims to make herself anything but, allowing herself to be enveloped by the group, and even displacing ensemble members into soloists themselves as she partners various members of the group in an effort to integrate. Still, they move on without her, not out of rejection, but out of a lack of recognition. Undifferentiated in vocabulary, Liang suggests an

inherent sameness, muddled by the two parties' mutual exoticization of each other. While quick to identify himself as Filipino-American, Bennyroyce Royon instead offers a broader look at Latinx and Asian values of communal unity; when he identifies this theme with the Filipino word of "bayanihan," Homebound/Alaala is not so much pigeonholed as Philippine-centric as it asks us to consider our own internalized notions of such oneness. Filipino for "memory," "alaala" speaks to the structuring of this nonlinear assemblage of talismans. Boxes populate the stage, either as containers of sentiment or as building blocks of dividing walls. Sometimes these walls provide privacy for a bit of gay affection behind a more central (and hetero) dance break; elsewhere they are more detrimental in their separation. Royon's throughline of this odd couple out reminds us both of marginalized ethnic groups' unfortunate queerphobic tendencies, and the escape from which contributing to migratory intentions. Other motifs – rows of flip-flops lining the lip of the stage and large plastic eating utensils – are used less consistently and, at best, vaguely connote advanced economies' outsourcing of mass production to developing ones. Sandwiching an all-female recasting of Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Sombrerísimo*, Ballet Hispanico is not so much chastising our failures as much as it encourages our potentials to supersede limitations. EYE ON THE ARTS, NY -- Jonathan Matthews

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