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# CAPACITY INTERACTIVE

## CI TO EYE WITH EDUARDO VILARO

November 13, 2018



### IN THIS EPISODE

Erik and Eduardo talk about how the company's emphasis on Latinx culture manifests throughout the organization—from what's on stage to the staff and board. They also discuss the politics of being a Latinx dance company in America today.

“THAT’S THE AMAZING THING ABOUT THE ARTS. IT’S THE FLOWER THAT GROWS IN AMONGST THE RUBBLE. AN ARTIST WILL SAY, “I WILL MAKE MY ART. WHETHER IT’S IN THE STREETS, OR IN THE SUBWAY, I WILL KEEP GOING.”

### ABOUT EDUARDO

Eduardo Vilaro is the Artistic Director and CEO of Ballet Hispánico. He's led the organization since 2009 but first joined the company as a dancer in 1985.

### EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

Erik Gensler: Tell me about your history as a dancer.

Eduardo Vilaro: I came to the United States with, my family in 1969 from Cuba and the only thing that connected me to my heritage was music. And so Cuban music, Cuban dancing. So there was a lot of connecting to community dances, traditional festivities, all that good stuff. And so I was always hooked on movement and music. First of all as a Cuban male dancing was not an option. So that was the start of my Billy Elliot years. Hiding it from the family, I would take this Capoeira class, which is a Brazilian martial arts, and next door at the Sigma Sound Studios on 50-something Street, there was Boom ballet class. So I started taking ballet class. So that happened and then I just started getting really good. Got a scholarship to the Ailey School, started dancing at the Martha Graham school also. And finally auditioned for a program at Adelphi University that was a very well known. A dance program started by Ruth St. Denis, a modern dance pioneer. And got in, free ride. So then I was like hey mom and dad- guess who's going to college for free? And my mom was fine with it. My dad was another story.

Erik Gensler: Let's talk about Ballet Hispánico, the company's mission, your role and the company's evolution.

Eduardo Vilaro: The company was founded in 1970 by Tina Ramirez and she wanted to give voice to the Latino artist. And when I talk about this it's so funny because I always say, she wanted to give voice at a time where we were just given roles of the maid, the crook, and I'm like wait a minute. That's still happening. Sorry. She started to build this company out of the necessity, to shine a light on diversity and the need for Latino and Latina artists who have their own, rightful place in any kind of arts field. She started with about a handful of young ladies. They were not trained. She trained them. She was a Flamingo dancer so she used that first as a jumping off point for training the company. They got so good, they began dancing in festivals, in street fairs, in the theaters, and boom. Ballet Hispánico was born. So I like to always say that Ballet Hispánico was born a company and an education organization at the same time. She was giving that access to those young ladies these were kids that were from marginalized neighborhoods. I mean you hear them, how this took them out of drug-infested. I mean at that time, New York City was a very different place. When I was growing up it was still a different place and she gave a lot to these young ladies. The company, I am the second generation, like in terms of decades. So '70s to the '80s, I came in around 1985. the second generation, by the time we were there, it was a company that was already doing works that were beyond the genre Flamingo. We were a neoclassical company. Neoclassical ballet company. And we were doing works by esteemed choreographers and we were one of the first companies at the Joyce Theater. We started touring. I was there at the heyday of the glory of the touring years for dance companies, which was the '80s and the '90s and the '70s. It started petering at the end of the early '90s but still we were doing it. So the company grew and then in '95 I left. I was very interested in going back to school so I went to Chicago, and did a master's program there. And then when I finished I realized there was a hole in that community. There was no Latino organization of note. In Chicago. So I started my own organization called Luna Negra Dance Theater, which was like Ballet Hispánico but reflecting today's Latino- what it meant to be Latino in a contemporary context. Ballet Hispánico stayed on the same track and there was a lot of movement. In our world and our social side. So I started creating works that were much more contemporary, and reflected a lot of what I thought was necessary for my generation and also the future generation, what was going on. It was exciting. It was a young organization. It built quickly to prominence. We started touring international and national and then Tina decided to step down and I got a call. And then I got here in 2009.