



Ballet Hispánico Gets it So Right in its First Women of Color in the Arts Panel

Diálogos

On Women of Color in the Arts

Panelists



Marisol Alcántara
New York State Senator



Lauren Argentina Zelaya
Assistant Curator,
Public Programs – Brooklyn
Museum



Maria Torres
Director, Choreographer,
Producer



Ayodele Casel
Actress, Tap Dancer,
Choreographer



Tamia Santana
Founder and Director
Brooklyn Dance Festival

Moderator

Are we in a post-racial era? Of course we are not. When Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President of the United States, many hoped and some cultural pundits projected that a post-racial society had arrived. Well, we all know that was not true. Documented police killings are up, racially motivated hate crimes have escalated, and the wealth gap between

whites and people of color, with African Americans disproportionately in the bottom half, has widened. And when you take a glance at the arts, though more diversity has been noted in recent years, there is still much to be done.

Ballet Hispánico, founded in 1970 by Tina Ramirez, is much more than a dance company that promotes and distills Latin culture through a variety of dance forms, Ballet Hispánico is taking on new challenges. Diálogos is Ballet Hispánico's conversation series that explores the interconnections of the arts, social justice, and Latino cultures. Since 2016, Diálogos has given voice to issues that directly affect the Hispanic community, finding the intersectionality between the arts, culture, and politics. On January 10, Diálogos hosted the first panel discussion in its series, Women of Color in the Arts, giving voice to Afro-Latino women in the performing and curative arts experiences and struggles as women of color, available resources, and ways to bring more women of color into arts leadership positions. Hosted by Tamia Santana, founder of Brooklyn Dance Festival, and featuring panelists New York State Senator Marisol Alcántara; Ayodele Casel, Actress, Tap Dancer, Choreographer; Maria Torres, Director, Choreographer, Producer; Lauren Argentina Zelaya, Assistant Curator, Public Programs—

Brooklyn Museum, the panel in the tradition of Ballet Hispanico's passion for truth telling, bravely tackled issues of racial discrimination, sexism, funding, colorism, career stagnation, and isolation. Still, the panel discussion was not limited to the struggles of being an Afro Latina artist. The discussion also included the joys and exhilarations of celebrating the Latin experience through their work. The panelists also detailed about the importance of demonstrating that the Latin voice is not a monolithic voice, but voices that encompass many cultures and expressions. And in this 'Year of the Woman,' the feminine voice is an essential, nuanced voice that is primed to expand and distill Hispanic culture.



Ballet Hispanico Artistic Director Eduardo Vilaro should be commended for assembling these great artists and political leaders. And for launching the series, Women of Color in the Arts. Ballet Hispanico, a role model in and for the Latino community, is inspiring creativity and social awareness in our neighborhoods and across the country by providing access to arts education.—William S. Gooch

