



A Universal Vision: Eduardo Vilaro Interview

May 20, 2017 – Juan Michael Porter II



“Nothing happens in a vacuum; nothing happens without some thought or planning.”

-Eduardo Vilaro

On the heels of Ballet Hispánico’s successful week at the Joyce, Eduardo Vilaro spoke with me about the new direction in which the company is heading.

It’s a different kind of audience and I’m happy for that. More of New York City is getting to see us. That’s certainly a goal that I’ve had for the organization: to be more inclusive of its community and not just the “dance audience”.

During our conversation, Eduardo points out that in order to “serve and to sustain an audience you have to go beyond yourself.” Cultural engagement that speaks to people where they are, while inviting them to go somewhere new- no matter how uncomfortable.

When you talk about culture, you have to understand that there is the culture that each individual person expects because of the set of situations they grew up looking at. So every single person has an ideal- they have an expectation. A woman after a performance told me, “Sometimes you go off to this very contemporary place that has nothing to do with Spanish culture.” And my answer to her was, “Is that what you’re needing from Spanish culture or what I’m needing?” She probably would have loved last year’s 45th Anniversary concert (which I chastised as being too vanilla).

You can’t deny either. Because both of them have a right to ask for it, but I have to demand that they look at what I’m trying to do. You never saw, “If Walls Could Speak”. I had people walk out at The Apollo. They were angry. And you have to deal with that kind of thing and say, “Yeah. It’s okay. You might not want this.” But then I had other people say, “I totally got this;

this is totally me.” So that is the tricky thing of cultural representation. For me, culture and the cultural dialogue is about inclusion. I want to make everyone feel that they can come in and be a little Latino.



A former star dancer, an acclaimed choreographer, founder of his own dance company, a father, a husband, a gay man, and the second artistic director of the leading ambassador of Latino culture; Eduardo wears many hats. Yet, even as he juggles all of those roles, there is one thing that is never far from his heart:

Ultimately my goal is to expose my community to the variety, and the diversity, and the intersectionality of this diaspora.

Is this where you thought you would be when you became Artistic Director?

This question gives him pause.

I am an immigrant. I came here with my family and I had to go and keep going. You don't turn back; you just keep going. I'm driven in a certain way of moving forward when I put something in my mind, so this has always been the vision for me. And it just continues to go. Sometimes I don't know how I'm getting there-.

Because you're too busy moving forward.

Yes. Because looking back as immigrants means that there is a fear. And that doesn't allow us to move forward. I'm not talking about looking back culturally- I mean feeling defeated. The meme, "Ain't nobody got time for that" comes to mind.

That line from Hamilton, "Immigrants get the job done", when I first heard that I was like, "YES! Correct."

It's the story of this country. A story that people would do well to remember.

Yeah. You think?

We both laugh.

Looking at the full repertory for the season I kept thinking to myself, "There's a voice here for every part of the Latino experience."

That continues to be part of the vision: What are the voices that are not being heard? Because we are a colonized people; we have the legacy that we were forced under. As we move forward we cannot serve a vision that's had its day. I worked with Tina. It was amazing; I learned so much.

Tina Ramirez is the legendary founder and original Artistic Director of Ballet Hispánico. She gave me back my identity.

Had you not experienced it before? Had it been taken away from you?

I had it at home. But to have it externally, to have it in place where I work; to say: "Yes"; revel in it; celebrate it. Before it was, "assimilate, go to school, get your grades, do good, you're an American now. English." And then all of a sudden- get to school, you're a dancer, you're learning Graham, you're learning this person- there's nothing Latino. So there's all of that in the dance world that we grow up in without seeing a reflection of ourselves. Then I walked in here in 1985 and I saw the reflection, and I haven't let go of it since.

PAULA LOBO

What are you excited about for the future?

I'm excited about our 50th Anniversary. It's coming up in three years. I have a lot of programming that we're building up. We're going to start having performances here at Ballet Hispánico. I'm transforming Studio 10 into a black box.

Wow.

My community needs more access to certain things; we're going to give it. We've got the space. In our community, if there's a plate of food that can feed two, you feed four.

Yes!

Again, exposure- we don't have enough Latino companies from South America and Central America because of whatever. So maybe we can be a place where that can happen on a very small scale. How wonderful it will be for the New York community to get that.

You're making a home. I can't wait to visit.

Ballet Hispánico continues with its performance season, summer intensives, family programming at The United Palace, rehearsing full-length ballets and developing new works from Eduardo Vilaro himself. The company recently held its Carnaval Gala celebrating trailblazing Latina leaders, which raised more than \$1 Million.

For more information about the company, visit: ballethispanico.org

© 2017. TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc.