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Ballet Hispanico, Joyce Theatre, New York – review

Three works by Spanish choreographers take in love of the land, romantic alienation and Eighties clubbing hedonism

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Heritage has always been a guiding force in Ballet Hispanico's choice of repertory, but if the first programme in the two-week home season is any measure, corny mythologising is no longer the dominant strain.

At first, Nacho Duato's 1983 *Jardí Tancat* seems meant to satisfy that nostalgic itch. The earthy style that the Spanish choreographer would later throw over for a boatful of tics, and the allusions to planting, foisting bushels and dashing across the Spanish plain with a lover in one's arms clearly celebrate the ever-abiding salt of the earth. But complicating the picture are the authored "folk" songs to which the dance is set, a genre that emerged in the 1960s as the fascist hold on Spain softened and artists stood up for the country's patchwork nature. Maria del Mar Bonet sings in Catalan. Duato is not looking so far back after all.

Cayetano Soto's duet *Sortijas* briefly interrupts the historical accounting. The Spaniard honed his craft in western Europe. Hence the male dancer's extreme manipulations of the woman's limbs. But with Soto, a sweetness inevitably creeps in. This alienated love duet is less about cruelty than about the obstacles we hamstringed creatures put in our way.

The troupe's boldest move was to commission a work from the experimental Valencian team Inma García and Meritxell Barberá. Plenty of choreographers have made dances about clubbing – they choreograph what they know – but few bring the experience home. Such incommunicability is the premise of *A vueltas con los ochenta* (Back to the 80s). This nightclub is at a double remove – first, for the usual reason, that the audience watches rather than partakes, and, second, because the make-believe club dates back to *La Movida*, the breakout era of hedonistic Spanish nights when the choreographers were only tots. They begin at a distance too.

Back to the 80s opens with the 11 dancers, in a 2013 version of punk studs and leather, bopping to their own private soundtrack on headphones. The dance alternates between drama and a numbing of time, like a night out that lasts until dawn, though at some point you are not sure why you have not gone home yet. García and Barberá make you feel the hypnotic pull of a club and an epoch just beyond your reach.



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