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ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT | DANCE

## Ballet Hispanico to capture modern Latino culture through dance



COURTESY OF BALLETT HISPANICO

By combining traditions, the group is able to redefine boundaries and celebrate what it means to be a modern Latino or Latina.

**BY CAUVERI SURESH | SPECTATOR STAFF WRITER | APRIL 16, 2015, 2:44 AM**

In their 2015 season at The Joyce, Ballet Hispanico is once more pushing the boundaries of common conceptions of Latino movement, dance, and culture. Explaining his intent going into this season, Artistic Director Eduardo Vilaro said the company works to “deepen awareness of Latinos and Latino artists with works that reflect the cultures of the artists.”

Program A, running April 14 to 19, is a mix of new works and returning crowd-pleasers, all commenting on “the new millennia of Latino—what is Latino dance, what are Latinos thinking

about,” Vilaro said. “I continuously look to have the art develop a dialogue about not only dance, but Latino culture.”

Vilaro describes the piece, choreographed by Rosie Herrera, as an exploration of the experience of the modern Latina woman. “In ‘Show.Girl.,’ which is a New York premiere, this young Cuban-American choreographer is celebrating a work that speaks to Latina identity and also the struggles Latinas have in a male-dominated world,” he said.

Kimberly Van Woesik, who has been with the company since graduating college four years ago, felt the piece dealt with important aspects of being a woman today. “We’re representing women, how women are portrayed, the things that are demanded of women in our society,” she said. “And then we’re also representing how we feel because those stigmas are placed on women—how do we deal with that, how do we face that, how do we suppress those moments when you just want to scream because you’re expected to do all these things. We are always on, women are always expected to be doing something.”

Company member Christopher Bloom found that he underwent a similar process when working on the world premiere of Miguel Mancillas’ “Conquer.” The piece is an exploration of the animalistic side of humans that we often ignore or repress but which, as Mancillas shows, can teach us more about the way we interact with our world, specifically in understanding the need to conquer other places and peoples.

“The movement came quickly. He would show it to us and that would come. And then it was drawing out things that we don’t acknowledge very much,” Bloom said. “He’s interested in looking at human beings and reducing them to animal instincts dichotomized with our rational thoughts. It was a process of convincing yourself to go to places that were uncomfortable, interpreting very human movements through the instincts of an animal. And again, he was interested in, ‘How genuine can it be? How much can it not be put-on, but how much can it come out?’”

Mancillas worked with the dancers to achieve an emotional vulnerability that allowed them to delve deeper into the idea of approaching the world using instinct and reason in equal measure.

“I feel like we can listen to the body and understand much more about what is around us,” he said. “Sometimes we forget the animalistic side of humans and we don’t listen to instinct. Because of that, we destroy a lot of things because we don’t think we are like animals. The body really understands much more, I think.”

The program finishes with “El Beso,” choreographed by Gustavo Ramírez Sansano, described by Vilaro as a fun, celebratory way of looking at an aspect of Latino culture: the kiss and its many iterations.

Program B, running April 21 to 25, is the Joyce premiere of Ramírez Sansano’s reinvention of “Carmen,” called “CARMEN.maquia”.

“It’s Picasso-themed so the design elements are starker, everything is in black and white like someone was drawing with a pencil,” Vilaro said. “We remove the red, the ruffles, the iconic, and allow the movement and dance vocabulary to develop the characters and develop the story.”

“I’m obsessed with Gustavo’s vision and his creativity and musicality. It’s such a masterpiece and I’m so humbled to be able to perform it,” Van Woesik said.

This premiere, marking Bloom's first time in a leading role, was an opportunity to find his voice in a role that has been played by many. It was also another instance of Ballet Hispanico's commitment to creating genuine movement and emotion.

"It had been done in the past and I could have easily sat there and watched the video, and mimicked the previous Don José, the original Don José," Bloom said. "Gustavo's guidance was, 'No, do this role your way. Take experiences from your life and build it based on who you are and build this character off yourself so it can be most genuine.' His goal is for the emotional aspects of the work to really be generated from inside of us as opposed to deciding on a character and playing that character. He wants it to come from a very authentic place."

*"Ballet Hispanico" runs through April 26 at the Joyce Theater.*