

New York's Ballet Hispanico in Havana



November 6, 2014

By Irina Echarry (Photos: *Elio Delgado Valdes*)

HAVANA TIMES — Every two years, Havana's International Ballet Festival treats us to several surprises. Cuban audiences – a passionate public that expresses their reaction to what they see sincerely – are not only able to enjoy classical ballet pieces but also performances by several dance companies or soloists from different countries. On this occasion, Havana's *Mella* theater was filled with thunderous applause.

New York's *Ballet Hispanico*, a company created in the 1970s known for its artful fusion of classical ballet, popular traditions and contemporary dance, had its first performance at the festival in Cuba this past weekend.

With the piece *Yemaya*, rendered in the powerful voice of Cuban singer Celia Cruz, the company treated the audience to their first choreography, Cuban-American Eduardo Vilaro's *Azuka*, a creative exploration of Latin American identity. Several pieces by Celia Cruz and her embodiment by one of the dancers, gave the deliciously executed homage to the diva a spicy and tropical feel. The night was enlivened by colors, rhythm and a lot of movement.



Despite its short duration, *Sortijas*, a *pas de deux* by Cayetano Soto, moved the public with its aura of mysterious seduction and Lhasa de Sela's music.

Lovers of Rene Magritte surely remember his famous painting of a transparent man wearing a bowler hat. This piece was the inspiration for choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's *Sombrerismo*, where she recreates the surrealist universe of the Belgian painter while questioning the concept of identity.

Six men on stage unfold harmonious and graceful choreographies through metaphors of the absurd. Are we seeing one person with many hats or many people wearing a single hat? Is the hat a lifeless object or, on the contrary, something light that dances, flies and leaps? Does it actually belong to us? And what about our bodies? Many questions are posed by this suggestive choreography.



Gustavo Ramirez' *El Beso*, the most celebrated performance of the night, humorously and perspicaciously explores some of the mix-ups, situations and pleasurable moments involved in the simple act of kissing. The dance – performed as a kind of Spanish operetta – offers us an opportunity to reflect on the different meanings a kiss can have, depending on the moment it is given (a greeting, farewell or moment of passion) and how close it brings people together.

Rejection, passion, sarcasm, eroticism, irony, torments and tenderness: an explosive combination that New York's *Ballet Hispanico* knows how to detonate expertly. Those of us who had the opportunity to see them dance, feel and enjoy themselves are grateful for having celebrated our cultural values without clichés or stereotypes.