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Latina Loves: Meet the Dancers Behind Ballet Hispanico's CARMEN.maquia

By [Kelli Acciaro](#) • December 1, 2014 • 8:47pm



You may know the story of the gypsy "Carmen," based on the famous opera, but you may not have seen it reimagined as a [ballet](#), choreographed by the brilliant Gustavo Ramírez Sansano, for a one night only show at The Apollo in New York City. THAT experience is unlike any other in the Latin dance space we've seen in quite some time. [Ballet Hispanico](#) has been celebrating Latino culture through dance for over 44 years and their most recent production, [CARMEN.maquia](#), continues to haunt us in the most beautiful way. Here, two of its lead Latinas discuss their worlds, including the women who inspire them and the ballets they dream of performing in.

What do you find yourself thinking about while you dance?

Kimberly Van Woesik (Carmen): Because Carmen is such a passionate character, it was easy to get carried away by emotions and let myself simply become a sort of channel for the movement to flow through.

Who inspires you in the ballet world?

Kimberly Van Woesik: When I was younger, Paloma Herrera was the epitome of grace and power (and still is to me). As I got older, I became more attracted to elements of dance that were more raw and human; less ethereal and other-worldly. As a member of Ballet Hispanico, I find great inspiration in the dancers I work with. I also find inspiration watching YouTube videos of people dancing in different countries.

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: My number one inspiration has always been my mother, Elena Carter, who was a principal dancer with Dance Theater of Harlem and Ballet Nacional de Danza in Mexico. She was the ultimate ballerina and the greatest compliment I can receive is to embody who she was as an artist.

Your strength is incredible — what's a typical day like for you meal wise?

Kimberly Van Woesik: I usually start each day out by making a protein smoothie with some mix of bananas, berries, mango, or pineapple. This holds me over till our lunch break at 2:30pm where I'll have some sort of protein/vegetable. For dinner, it's usually a protein, vegetable, and some sort of carb. I'm a sucker for sweets so my go to weekday dessert fix is Trader Joe's chocolate Powerberries in yogurt. On the weekends, I usually let myself have whatever I'm feeling like whether it's pizza or Shake Shack — a cheat day is necessary and sometimes you just need a burger!

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: I was blessed with the Latina AND Caribbean body, which is more curvaceous than the traditional stereotypical ballerina. Because of this, I'm careful with what I eat as far as carbohydrates, fats, and sugars, but still I LOVE food and do not deprive myself of much. The secret is in balancing diet with exercise and this is something I constantly work on.

What's your favorite movie, book, or show about [ballet](#)?

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: I've always loved the movie *The Red Shoes*. The concept of how dance and ballet was in its earlier years has always intrigued me.



How did you get your start in this industry?

Kimberly Van Woesik: My mom put me in dance when I was 3 years old, so I guess you could say she was the one who got this dream started for me. After years of training, during my senior year at SMU where I furthered my dance education, I auditioned for Ballet Hispanico in NYC and Mr. Vilaro was the one who gave me my first "yes."

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: Both of my parents were principal ballet dancers with Dance Theater of Harlem, Ballet Nacional de Danza in Mexico, and Oregon Ballet Theater. I grew up in the studio and playing in my mother's tutus. I was never pressured to dance but after being introduced to it, I fell in love just as my parents did.

What's been the hardest thing about making it?

Kimberly Van Woesik: I guess the hardest thing about making it is feeling like you've never made it. There is so much competition in the dance world, there's always going to be dancers who are biting at your heels for a spot to also live the dream. While it's hard, it's also a blessing because it pushes you to become the best dancer you can be.

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: I would say the rejection and injuries. Audition processes are brutal and definitely take a toll on your self confidence.

What's one thing you didn't expect to be so difficult?

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: How quickly your career and youthfulness leave you. I am 31 and have been dancing professionally for 12 years. My body doesn't allow me to do the things I was able to do at 22.

What do you love about this opera?

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: The story is amazing, but for me the musical score is divine. Every piece of music of this opera is to die for and for a dancer, there is no greater high than to move to music that beautiful.

What was it like performing at the Apollo?

Kimberly Van Woesik: Performing at the Apollo was an unforgettable experience. Running out on stage for that final bow was one of the happiest moments of my life. To receive a standing ovation and bouquet of flowers, like I had always only seen other ballerinas do, truly felt like I was dreaming. I'm extremely humbled at the opportunity that was given to us to dance a masterpiece in the place where "Stars are born and legends are made."

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: Very special! Not only because of the theater's history, but it is also the only theater I have had the opportunity to perform in, on which both my parents have graced the stage.

Was it tricky to dance in floor-length costumes with those fluid skirts?

Kimberly Van Woesik: When I put on the skirt for the first time, there were very few movements that I had to make sure to maneuver the skirt in a way so that it wouldn't get caught, but other than that it had a wonderful eb-and-flow with the movement that didn't make it distracting or troublesome.

What's your dream ballet to perform in?

Kimberly Van Woesik: I would love to dance a contemporary version of Don Quixote! Kitri's variations and character has been a favorite of mine since my ballet summer intensive days.

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: I very much admire the work of choreographers such as Nacho Duato, Jiri Kylian, and Ohad Naharin.

Which iconic Latinas do you look up to?

Kimberly Van Woesik: As a child, my first encounters with Latina icons were Selena and Jennifer Lopez. Not only were they beautiful, talented women, who took the world by storm, but the influence they had on the women I so looked up to as a young latin girl, my mother and aunts, couldn't have been a better way for me to see Latin women in the most beautiful light. I have such fond memories of my mom and aunts in the living room turning on some of my favorites like "Bidi-bidi-bom-bom" and just dancing away from day into night.

What's your advice to Latinas wanted to make it in this industry?

Kimberly Van Woesik: Remember that it's because you're Latina that you already have what it takes: passion, grace, humility, respect, and determination are in all of us. Never let anyone tell you that you can't make it, the most important voice is the one in your heart, listen and follow it.

Jessica Alejandra Wyatt: My advice would be to work hard, take each and every opportunity to dance, and always push, but listen and take care of your body. If you want it bad enough, you will find a way to make it happen.