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"Saturday En Familia" with Ballet Hispanico at the Apollo Theater

November 25, 2015

Celebrating 45 Years of Dance



My son (age seven) and my daughter (age four) have never been to the ballet. As a former dancer, I have wanted to find the right time to introduce them. Too soon and I would risk turning them off to the art form; too late and I'd miss opportunities to share something that was once a very important part of my life. So when I was given the chance to attend a special family performance of [Ballet Hispanico](#) last Saturday, I immediately said yes!

The show was held at the world-famous Apollo Theater, and before the show the audience was full of chatter. Children of all ages, parents, grandparents, college students, and dancers were in attendance. As the lights came down, [Eduardo Vilaro](#), the company's

Artistic Director, and [Anamaria Correa](#), the Director of Education & Outreach, came and gave the show a lively introduction, complete with advice on which Spanish phrases to shout if you wanted to show appreciation. They continued to appear between each dance piece, giving bits of information about the music choices, as well as about the choreographers and what had inspired them.

The performance was ideal for all ages. The company performed excerpts from six of their repertory pieces -- just long enough to engage a young audience member's attention. The works ranged from colorful and playful in [Asuka](#) to exquisite and moving in *Bury Me Standing*. I was initially impressed by the technical strengths of the dancers, but they did much more than execute beautiful steps. They were also accomplished actors, telling a different story or conveying a spectrum of emotions in each dance.

Everyone in my family had a different "favorite." My daughter loved [El Beso](#), a piece of intricate, moving tableaux that took the audience on a journey through the many ways a kiss is used in our culture. Set to zarzuela music (Spanish opera), the dancers addressed each musical beat with their bodies as they greeted each other, courted, fell in love, and explored the complex gesture of a kiss. My son's favorite was [Sombrerísimo](#) (with a title that comes from two Spanish words: sombrero/hat and muchísimo/many). The piece featured six male dancers wearing bowler hats inspired by Magritte, who jumped and leaped across the stage with athleticism and great coordination. [Club Havana](#) -- my husband's favorite -- captured a moment in time when the introduction of the mambo and cha-cha created dance fever all over New York City (late 1940s and early 1950s). Male dancers spun their female partners through the air, bringing gasps from the audience. And as for me? I enjoyed watching my children dance in their seats with huge smiles on their faces.

I hope that the huge success of Ballet Hispanico's family-oriented performance last weekend will inspire them to do more. (Because of generous underwriting from Univision, the company was able to offer very affordable seats of \$15.) If they do, I know that I will be in the audience with my family.

Ballet Hispanico was founded in 1970 by Tina Ramirez to give young Latino people in New York a voice. Celebrating 45 years of repertory that reflects the ever-changing diversity of Latino cultures, the company is the new expression of American contemporary dance. Led by award-winning Artistic Director Eduardo Vilaro, Ballet Hispanico has performed for audiences totaling over three million, throughout 11 countries, and on three continents.

I was given four complimentary tickets for the purpose of this review. I was not, however, compensated in any other manner, and all of the opinions expressed in this article are my own.