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Review: Ballet Hispanico's Oldies but Goodies

By SIOBHAN BURKE APRIL 6, 2016



Christopher Bloom and Diana Winfree of Ballet Hispanico dancing — maybe even writhing — in Ramón Oller's "Bury Me Standing," at the Joyce Theater. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

In recent years, [Ballet Hispanico](#) has been steadily commissioning new work, but for its 45th-anniversary season at the Joyce Theater, the company is focusing on existing repertory. Aside from a family-oriented matinee on Saturday, the Joyce season includes just one program, consisting of three tried-and-true pieces: Ramón Oller's "Bury Me Standing" (1998); Pedro Ruiz's "Club Havana" (1990); and Gustavo Ramírez Sansano's "Flabbergast," new to the troupe this year but created for the Luna Negra Dance Theater in Chicago in 2001.

All three deliver the vibrant and refined dancing we've come to expect from this company, which seems to grow more cohesive each year under Eduardo Vilaro, the artistic director since 2009. Most affecting on Tuesday, opening night, was "Bury Me Standing," a celebration of Roma culture set to traditional Gypsy melodies and flamenco music by the singer-guitarist duo Lole y Manuel.

Last performed at the Joyce in 2006, the work opens on the tall and bearded Christopher Hernandez, walking slowly out of one wing, trailed by a swarm of crouching, crawling dancers, a teeming shadow. They could be his ancestors, or perhaps his children.

Mr. Oller evokes the dark and yearning spirit of flamenco, a form passed down within families, through distillations of some of the steps — flowering wrists and pounding feet — entwined with his own more balletic vocabulary. As Mr. Hernandez continues his searching solo, the ensemble splits into two stamping lines that wind around the stage, its energy mounting into a rowdy chant.

There are romantic passages — a duet for Christopher Bloom and Diana Winfree, in which he remains at her feet, catching her languid falls — and satirical ones, as when pairs of women scurry in on their knees, chattering like town gossips. The work wears its heart on its sleeve, but the sentiment feels genuine.



Members of Ballet Hispanico performing in "Flabbergast," at the Joyce Theater on Tuesday. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

["Flabbergast"](#) is frothier fare: more lighthearted, less structurally sound. Inspired by his experience as a newcomer in America, the Spanish-born Mr. Sansano conjures chaotic scenes with a group of lost-looking, suitcase-toting dancers. Perhaps the audience is meant to feel a little lost, too.

The return of "[Club Havana](#)" coincides with the warming relations between the United States and Cuba, though this steamy suite, steeped in Latin social dances, has always been popular. It may be time for a new work contending with the Cuba of today, as opposed to the nostalgic one presented in this picture-perfect dance.

Ballet Hispanico continues performances through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, Manhattan; 212-242-0800, joyce.org.

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