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Ballet Hispánico's 'Bury Me Standing': A moving hymn to Romany life



Ballet Hispánico performs Friday and Saturday (Feb. 5 and 6) at the Kimmel Center. (Paula Lobo)

By Nancy G. Heller, For The Inquirer

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Bury Me Standing, Spanish choreographer Ramón Oller's hymn to Romany (gypsy) life, could easily have been a cliché. Instead, as presented by Ballet Hispánico last Thursday and Friday at the Annenberg Center, the piece was deeply moving - by turns sensuous, serious, and funny.

Of the three short works on the New York-based company's program, *Bury* is the one that still haunts this viewer. Much of its impact came from the powerful performance of lead dancer Christopher Hernández.

Tall and darkly handsome, Hernández is one of those rare artists who can command a stage by simply standing on it.

Bury combines elements from a variety of sources: modern dance, flamenco, Latin social dance. Especially effective were the unconventional use of body percussion and a hysterical send-up of Latina stereotypes, with six women scuttling across the stage, on their knees, while chattering loudly to each other, then crossing themselves at hyper-speed. There is also a marvelous sequence in which the women fling themselves at their partners, leaping through the air with Paul Taylor-esque abandon. But a slow, sustained duet in which a man, lying on his back, explores unexpected ways to lift his female partner with his feet, seemed out of place.

Bury is performed to recordings of what the printed program calls "traditional gypsy melodies," including klezmer music and Balkan folk songs. It is a shame that Oller did not list the specific pieces he chose, or the people who performed them. Most upsetting was his failure to credit Lole y Manuel, an extremely popular Spanish duo whose original music is anything but "traditional."

Also on Ballet Hispánico's bill was *Sombrerismo* by Annabelle López Ochoa. This provided a welcome opportunity to watch six exquisitely trained men explore the many possibilities of dancing with bowler hats.

The evening ended with *Flabbergast*, Gustavo Ramírez Sansano's lively portrait of the immigrant experience.

No additional performances.