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BWW Reviews: BALLET HISPANICO at The Joyce Is a Celebration of Dance

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Ballet Hispanico was founded in 1970 by [Tina Ramirez](#) in order to "explore, preserve, and celebrate Latino cultures through dance." Through its repertory of over 100 works, [Ballet Hispanico](#) attempts to represent the diversity of Latino culture. This range was fully evident during their Saturday matinee performance at the Joyce Theater.

Ballet Hispanico began with *Jardi Tancat*, originally choreographed in 1983 by [Nacho Duato](#) for [Nederlands Dans Theater](#); it tells the story of six farmers who dance for rain. Although rain dances are found in many cultures, *Jardi Tancat* (which translates to Closed Garden) is perfectly able to capture the farmer's desperation and melancholy over the drought. Duato mixed movements reminiscent of farming (for example, dragging their hands as metaphorical plows) with classical steps set to [Maria de Mar Bonet](#)'s folk songs. The repeated use of patterns reveals the farmer's existential hopelessness. Dancers repeated phrases, reversed them, and performed them in rounds. While this piece was not originally set for [Ballet Hispanico](#), they prove to be an excellent vessel by capturing the required gloom and Catalan flair.

The second work, *Sombrerísimo* by [Annabelle Lopez Ochoa](#), is-according to the program notes-inspired by the paintings of René Magritte. Many of his paintings riff on a man wearing a business suit and bowler hat. Ochoa attempted to recreate this

Surrealist anonymity with six men in street clothes and bowler hats. The dancers moved as an amoeba and rotated and against an empty, black stage. They moved playfully as a group: lifting each other up, and performing acrobatics as they traveled across the space. At one point they even performed the Worm! Ochoa also referenced [Bob Fosse](#), another bowler hat aficionado, through many repeated small hip movements in a plié demi-relevée. The dancers' motions were accompanied by a mixture of industrial noises, guitar, and rhythmic thigh slapping. This light-hearted piece thoroughly entertained the audience.

The finale, Asuka by Ballet Hispanico's Artistic Director Eduardo Vilaro, celebrates Celia Cruz, the Cuban salsa singer, and her impact on a generation of immigrants. Vilaro used dancers standing in line and radio broadcasts to evoke a Cuban setting. Cruz was portrayed by Jessica Alejandra Wyatt, whose performance began the piece establishing her artistic struggle and ended the piece to establish her triumph. In between her solos, dancers performed in pairs and large groups to convey similarities between the individual and shared cultural experience with an artist. The overall mood of the work is joyful.

This performance by Ballet Hispanico serves a perfect entry point into dance. The works presented in the program are neither abstract nor shallow. The company mixes classical moves with modern in order to create something both beautiful and interesting. Further, it was clear that the company moved its audience. Strangers discussed dances and previous performances during intermissions and children danced in the aisle. Ballet Hispanico serves as a strong ambassador of not just Latino culture but of dance itself.