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Roses and Thorns

Ballet Hispanico at American Dance Festival

Event Information

Durham -- (*Fri., Jun. 20, 2014 - Sat., Jun. 21, 2014*) [American Dance Festival: Ballet Hispanico](#)

\$51.50-\$13.50 -- Durham Performing Arts Center , (919) 684-6402; tondu@americandancefestival.org ,
<http://www.americandancefestival.org/>

By [Kate Dobbs Ariail](#)

June 20, 2014 - Durham, NC:

With its first appearance at the [American Dance Festival](#), [Ballet Hispanico](#) presented a flamboyant four-dance program full of dark delights.

Opening with the jaunty, entertaining six-man *Sombrerisimo* (2013) by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, the company immediately impressed with its casual athletic prowess. Dressed in simple trousers, bright shirts and bowler hats, the men cavort with each other and their hats under noir-ish lighting (Joshua Preston) enhanced by clouds of theatrical smoke. It's a lark, though you could interpret it as an exploration of identity, as the program calls it. The dancers toss their hats, treat them like Frisbees, exchange them with each other, and so forth, all the while forming different dancer combinations and performing some glorious partnering. Toward the end an extra set of hats is introduced, and the dancers juggle their way to a flashy finish.

The program's second work was a mind-blower. Choreographed by [Cayetano Soto](#), the duet *Sortijas* (2013) takes place in a velvety dark layered with shadow and stabbed with hard light (Joshua Preston), and is set to a melancholic, questing song by the late [Lhasa de Sela](#) from her album *Lhasa*.

What kind of heart

What kind of heart/ would a blind man choose/ would a blind man choose

What's better to wear/ in the dark for love/ in the dark for love

Than a wooden glove/ tied behind your back/ tied behind your back

Where its fingers clack/ where its fingers clack

What kind of heart/ would a blind man choose/ would a blind man choose

On the 20th it was danced by Lauren Alzamora (UNC School of the Arts, 2001) and Jamal Rashann Callender, who were shiveringly intense in the extreme positions of this dance that smolders with sexuality, rage and longing while it searches for a balance of control and acceptance. Its beauty is not pretty, but severe and sometimes grotesque.

After intermission came the greatly anticipated the new work by Rosie Herrera, *Show.Girl* (2014). A joint commission by the ADF and the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami, Herrera's home, *Show.Girl* is the first of her major works to be performed by a large established dance company. They seem to have grasped Herrera's attitude, as well as her finely shaded social commentary. I have enjoyed seeing Herrera's work performed by students or set on her own pick-up company, but seeing it done by a dozen powerful Ballet Hispanico dancers was thrilling. Herrera has been essentially operatic in her approach, and that hasn't changed here, but with these dancers she's piled on the choreographic detail, and made much of tiny gestures as well as madly expansive ones. And don't worry, she has not lost her knack with astonishing images in surreal conjunction. In three acts, she shows us the transformation of pink-sheathed girls into crystal-draped showgirls, with the truly astonishing apotheosis coming in the midst of an unforgettable fan dance. Herrera was awarded a Princess Grace Choreographic Fellowship in 2013 to work on this piece, and its high degree of finish demonstrates once again what a difference adequate funding can make for an artist's growth.

The evening wound up with the frolicsome *Danzón* (2009) by company artistic director Eduardo Vilaro. Set to a series of smoky jazz classics reorchestrated by Alex Brown, *Danzón* involves 15 dancers in smoky purple costumes swirling and sassing through series of encounters. Jamal Rashann Callender and Vanessa Valecillos are very elegant in their pair work, but the piece satisfied overall with its wonderful, ever-changing massing of the many against the one or two, and its contrast of the frisky with the solemn in matters of seduction.

The program repeats June 21. See sidebar for details.

Note: heavy theatrical smoke used in the first two pieces.