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## Ballet Hispanico's El Beso

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Gustavo Sansano's "El Beso"

Ballet Hispanico's season at the Joyce Theatre clearly demonstrates that the company under the helm of Eduardo Vilario is evolving in a direction that expands beyond the traditional Latin themes that the company had become associated under its founder Tina Ramirez. Some arts pundits may say this is a step in the right direction, while others might champion a return to the tried and true.

The real test of this directional shift is audience reaction. And based on the cheers and bravos on Ballet Hispanico's opening night at the Joyce, Vilario has found a choreographic revitalization that has audience appeal.

Two of the pieces in the mixed bill on the Opening Night program have been reviewed in a previous *Fashion Reverie* review, so the focus of this review will concentrate mostly on Ballet Hispanico's new work, *El Beso*.

In the vein of Twyla Tharp's *Push Comes to Shove*, Gustavo Ramirez Sansano's *El Beso* with costumes by Angel Sanchez, like many choreographers of his ilk, ingeniously combine dance vocabulary from a wide range of dance styles and idioms. There are nods to Graham, Cunningham, Tharp, Horton, lyrical jazz, classical ballet, with a little Forsythe thrown in for good measure.

This hodgepodge of seemingly diverse dance styles requires dancers that have incredible versatility and have the technical dexterity and experience working in this dance hybrid. Ballet Hispanico's current rosters of dancers are definitely up to the challenges of Sansano's choreography.

The overriding motif of *El Beso* is a kiss, and kisses in a various incarnations, forms and gestures. There are air kisses, kisses expected and unexpected, declined, romantic, playful, yet all fitting into Sansano, humorous but at times bombastic, rhythmic *mélange*.

Like Tharp's *Push Comes to Shove*, *El Beso* has that emotion-free, pliable ragdoll quality that requires a very loose torso. Movement can start at your center but pull the dancer in a lot of different directions, sometimes off center, other times athletically spiraling in unexpected directions.

Angel Sanchez's pleated, asymmetrical skirts paired with shorts and a variety of pant-like garments helped facilitate the kind of movement employed by Sansano in *El Beso*. Sanchez's billowing skirts at times seemed to continue and extend movement beyond the steps themselves, giving the Sansano's choreography a buoyant quality that filled the stage.



Annabelle Lopez's Ochoa's "Sombrierisimo"

Annabelle Lopez's Ochoa's *Sombrerísimo* utilizes great partnering for the men in this male *tour de force*. Ochoa also infuses technique from modern dance, ballet, flamenco and lyrical jazz, all while several derby hats are passed back and forth, caught in the air, ricocheted and used as a centerpiece of the choreography. Though *Sombrerísimo* highlights the versatility and technical acumen of Ballet Hispanico's men, the work is not without humor or lyricism.



Edgar Zendejas' "Umbral." Images courtesy of Michelle Tabnick Communications

Edgar Zendejas' *Umbral* is a mostly cerebral work, inspired by the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead. *Umbral* has some good choreography with inventive partnering in *Umbral*. One of the most effective sections was sequence were the Ballet Hispanico women danced topless with their backs to the audience. Zendejas ingeniously devised movement that spoke to the futility of life and the stark bareness of death without being too literal or kitschy.

—William S. Gooch