

Oberon's Grove

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Ballet Hispanico @ The Joyce 2014



Above: from **Ballet Hispanico's** production of **UMBRAL**, photo by Paula Lobo

Tuesday April 15th, 2014 - Opening night of **Ballet Hispanico's** two-week season at The Joyce. This fantastic Company have quickly made their way to my top echelon of Gotham dance-world favorites: the dancers are sexy and spectacular, the choreography is invariably exciting, the musical range is broad and seductive...what more could one ask?

Tonight's program opened with **UMBRAL**, choreographed by Edgar Zendajes to an original score by Owen Belton. This ballet honors the traditional Mexican celebration of the *Dia de los Muertos* ('Day of the Dead'). Dark and evocative, **UMBRAL** benefits greatly from Joshua Preston's lighting and the sleek costuming by Diana Ruettiger which displays the dancers' lithe figures to maximum effect.



Light smoke drifts across the landscape as Mario Ismael Espinoza (above, in a Paula Lobo photo) appears in a sleek blood-red leotard, with his face painted deathly white, lips sewn shut: a living corpse. Mario, one of New York's most alluring dance personalities, moves thru the community - an unseen spectre. His dancing has a remote beauty and mystique so perfectly suited to this role.

There is a *pas de trois* for Mario, Vanessa Valecillos, and Jamal Rashann Callender and then a solo for Mario danced in silence. This is interrupted by the ringing of a telephone - a message from the other side? - which the boys attempt to shush. In a passionate duet, Min-Tzu Li and Christopher Bloom display lyrical physicality. Then the six women appear, topless but discreet, as Mario moves subtly among them. The ballet ends with a stylized ensemble for the entire Company; as the dancers withdraw, Mario stands in a pool of shining light as if ascending to heaven. A brilliant piece, and a real *tour de force* for Mr. Espinoza.



Above, from **SOMBRERISIMO**, photo by Paula Lobo

Last season's hit, **SOMBRERISIMO**, returned in triumph to The Joyce stage. Choreographer Anabelle Lopez Ochoa, using a collage of music that veers from propulsive to sensuous, evokes Magritte's bowler-hatted men in this vastly pleasing ballet; and again the costumes (Ms. Ruettiger) and lighting (Mr. Preston) show off both the dancers and the dance to perfection.

Six men - Christopher Bloom, Jamal Rashann Callender, Alexander Duval, Mario Ismael Espinoza, Johan Rivera Mendez, and Marcos Rodriguez - move with vibrant authority thru the sexy, witty ensembles which include some sleight-of-hand passing of the hat and a bit of bowler-Frisbee. The men are jaunty, playful and ironic. Last year Christopher Bloom looked like a rising star, and now he's shining brightly in the Big Apple's firmament of dance: a man who moves with a particular energy that keeps our eye on him whenever he's onstage. Both here and in **EL BESO** which followed, Chris served notice that he has *arrived*.

Ballet Hispanico in fact have a particularly strong contingent of male dancers and in **SOMBRERISIMO** each man has a chance to shine; the ballet drew a whooping ovation from the packed house as the boys stepped forward for several bows. And now someone needs to make a new and special piece for **Hispanico's** gorgeous *women!*



Above: **Ballet Hispanico's** Kimberly Van Woesik in **EL BESO**, photo by Paula Lobo

After watching [a studio rehearsal](#) of Gustavo Ramirez Sansano's new ballet **EL BESO** ('The Kiss') I was very curious to see how it would look onstage. In contrast to the dazzling colours and stately rhythms of the music (drawn from the enchanting scores of the [zarzuela](#)), the setting was much darker than I expected. I had imagined costumes of scarlet and canary yellow, with black lace and golden filagree, but instead designer Angel Sanchez has put the dancers in rather utilitarian outfits of black and dark blue. The stage lighting could be just a notch brighter so that the subtle interplay of the dancers and their many kisses becomes clearer. Some of the intimacy of the work has been lost in the move from studio to stage.

Once I adjusted to the unexpected black-and-blue setting, there was much to enjoy in this piece, for the choreography has wit and sparkle. **EL BESO** opens with Johan Rivera Mendez alone onstage, looking a bit shy. He is soon the object of Kimberly Van Woesik's flirtatious affection. The ballet goes on to explore many variations of relationships and many varieties of kissing, including a passionate smooch for two men (Mssers. Bloom and Callender). A big unison ensemble heralds the finale, but at the last moment everyone rushes away leaving Mr. Mendez alone onstage as at the start.

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