

The Herald-Sun

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Latin heritage, North Carolina choreographers don't disappoint

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The American Dance Festival's second week brings Latin-influenced and homegrown dances to town.

BALLET HISPANICO

Ballet Hispanico's American Dance Festival debut offers a double treat. First, in their program June 20 and June 21 at Durham Performing Arts Center, this talented company delivers with a program of work informed by Latin heritage and other influences. Secondly, the program includes

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the ADF premiere of "Show.Girl," by Rosie Herrera.

In "Show.Girl," Herrera explores female identity through the prism of Cuban cabaret and other Latino contemporary culture. Yet, all women can relate to it as laughter in the audience proves when a female performer, tired of her subservient role, says, "Can I get you anything?"

The dance opens in silence as women embrace their femininity. It soon takes a disquieting turn when they move to pop music as racing spotlights, like searchlights during a prison break, sweep over them.

Enter five men with large, white, feather fans, which draws audience laughter because fans are associated with show girls. A woman emerges from a screen of fans, held by the men, but the mood turns dark as she repeatedly tries to break free, only to be trapped again. She relaxes as the men fan her but panics when they start beating her with the fans.

The dance ends with women in skimpy, sparkly costumes standing still as a deluge of glitter engulfs them.

In Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's "Sombresismo," six men dance to music by the Italian folk group Banda Ionica. Instead of sombreros, they wear bowlers, a nod to Belgian artist Rene Magritte's paintings of men with bowler hats. Dancers don't just wear these hats, they do things like catch a hat on one foot then toss it. Weighted down by wearing all six hats, a dancer collapses.

Cayetano Soto's "Sortijas," performed on June 20 by Lauren Alzamora and Jamal Rashann Callender (from Fayetteville), expresses a dark side of relationships. Alzamora seems irresistibly pulled back into the arms of Callender, who repeatedly covers her face with one hand and carries her like a bag of groceries, her legs apart and held at awkward angles.

Eduardo Vilaro's exuberant "Danzon," embraces a variety of dance and musical styles to celebrate the joy of dancing. Music includes Latin jazz and "Danzon," by Cuban-born Paquito D'Rivera. Danzon refers to both the name of the music and Cuban national dance. The danzon section of this work proves the most romantic, especially at the end. As the woman walks away, the man touches her shoulder and she turns. In his arms again, they dance, face-to-face, in a style that never grows old.

NORTH CAROLINA DANCES

For the second year in a row, Here and Now: NC Dances impresses as four Durham-based choreographers make ADF debuts on June 18 at Reynolds Industries Theater. All create memorable, emotionally engaging work performed by accomplished dancers.

In "Annatations," Haitian-born Gaspard Louis draws on ideas of an afterlife following the 2010

earthquake that devastated Haiti. A large cast sweeps the stage with lush, interesting movement. Other moments suggest souls in limbo striving to reach heaven such as when a dancer walks up a staircase of dancers' backs, reaches up, only to fall backward. Steven Silverleaf's angel forms hover above the stage while Joshua Starmer's live performance on amplified cello produces low, haunting sounds that connect on a visceral level.

The other three dances suggest trying to cope in a world that increasingly can't be counted on for stability and a sense of normalcy.

In Leah Wilks' solo, "Mess," which she performs, she shakes, trembles, struggles to find balance and move forward despite being constantly bombarded by outside forces. The increased effects of climate change, most recently manifested in last winter, comes to mind.

Renay Aumillers' "Acquiring Dawn," inspired by the bleak, post-apocalyptic world of Cormac McCarthy's "The Road," begins as performers scoop up snow and slowly release it to form rows. As snow falls, they drop, one-by-one, rise and fall again.

When birdsong indicates spring, they revive but seem tentative as though leery of what this new season will bring.

Diego Carrasco Schoch's "A Place Apart," performed by Justin Dominic and Wesley McIntyre, depicts a romantic relationship that literally and figuratively offers shelter from a violent, ethnically divisive world. At one point, a dancer bends forward and his partner slips into that sheltering space. Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" contributes to this sense of peace while newscasts of current and past ethnic strife underscore the need for such shelters.