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Dance review: Ballet Hispanico offers powerful mix of styles

The company returns to the area with a stunning program of new works.

February 27, 2012 – By Susan L. Pena

Reading Area Community College's Downtown Performing Arts Series has once again proved to be the area's premiere presenter of dance, with the fabulous Ballet Hispanico in the Miller Center for the Arts on Saturday evening.

This company performed memorably at Kutztown University 15 years ago, and it was wonderful to see that they are every bit as good as they were then, now under the artistic direction of one of their former dancers, Eduardo Vilaro.

Mixing ballet and contemporary dance with African, flamenco and Latin American dance forms, these dancers can do literally anything; the women, moreover, are the most powerful I've seen.

In their pas de deux, the female of the couple often dominates, moving with tigerish ferocity. It is breathtaking to watch.

The program, which featured all brand-new works, opened with "Nube Blanco" (white cloud), choreographed by the Colombian-Belgian Annabelle Lopez Ochoa to music by Maria Dolores Pradera.

Beginning with the arresting image of a solo male dancer in black and white with red shoes slowly moving through flamenco-style postures, the ensemble danced to an assortment of songs including the ranchero song "Pa' todo el aé?o."

The sound also came from a mix of sound effects, the dancers' vocalizations, clapping and stamping; Lopez Ochoa demanded a dizzying array of dance styles, with violent images juxtaposed with humorous elements.

The result was an exploration of relationships and communication, ending with the dancers in black bathing suits and one shoe each.

"Espiritu Vivo" was the work of Ronald K. Brown, with songs by Afro-Peruvian singer Susana Baca. Against her haunting voice, the dancers expressed the African diaspora with attitudes of alienation and lamentation.

With the Caetano Veloso song "13 de Mayo," about the date when slavery ended in Brazil in 1888, the mood became gently rhythmic and resilient, with undulating torsos.

The finale, "Asuka," choreographed by Vilaro to songs by the iconic Cuban-American singer Celia Cruz, featured extraordinarily complex and athletic dancing by the entire ensemble.

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