

Ballet Hispanico to Visit Santa Barbara

By Elizabeth Schwyzer (Contact)
Thursday, January 3, 2013



(Paula Lobo)

Company to Offer Free Public Performances and Classes

What defines Latin culture? Is it the traditions of Central and South America? What about Cuba and Puerto Rico? Spain and Portugal? According to Ballet Hispanico's artistic director, Eduardo Vilaro, the answer is, "All of the above."

Vilaro heads the New York City-based dance company, which since 1970 has championed traditional and contemporary Latin dance through ambitious touring and education outreach programs. This week, the 12 members of Ballet Hispanico will be in residency in Santa Barbara County thanks to ¡Viva el Arte! The program events will include three family performances and five Latin social dance classes, all of which are free to the public.

Last month, Vilaro spoke over the phone about his all-inclusive view of Latin culture, his interest in blending Latin dance with ballet and modern techniques, and his belief in the cultural significance of dance. "Latin culture is in flux," he explained. "I like to start from the very seed, and that's Spain, and how Spanish culture has interacted and intersected with other cultures." Among the works his dancers will perform in Santa Barbara are a Caribbean dance, Cuban social dances, a tango, and a fusion of contemporary dance with flamenco.

Ballet Hispanico's presentations are designed for audience members of all ages, but Vilaro says "dumbing down" the material isn't the way to appeal to young people. Instead, Vilaro narrates these shows, explaining the context and suggesting specific things to look for. He says dance is a good metaphor for the journey of life and the process of defining a culture.

"I talk a lot about transitions, and traveling through space," Vilaro explained. "I talk about being in one place and moving to another. What do we take, what do we leave behind, and what do we

learn?” Across so many cultures, Vilaro sees one thing as constant: “Dance connects us. It has been a connector since the beginning of time. When we didn’t know anything about languages, we knew physicality, and we came together around the fire to build community, to share stories, and to dance.”

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