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The showgirl must go on

Ballet Hispanico brings Latino dance to Arsht Center

By Rod Stafford Hagwood

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Latino machismo meets drag queen.

In a way, that was the inspiration for Miami-based choreographer **Rosie Herrera's** **"Show.Girl,"** a piece that will get its world premiere this Friday and Saturday, when the New York Latino dance organization Ballet Hispanico performs at the [Adrienne Arsht Center](#).

“When I was young, I worked at this Cuban cabaret show, and it was traditional to have a very macho dancer,” recalls Herrera, who was born in Hialeah. “And we did have this barrel-chested and strong guy doing lot of lifts. This was in the time before Facebook, so I went away to college and lost contact. So one day, I’m in South Beach, and this big drag queen picked me up and started kissing me. And I’m thinking, ‘Who is this?’ I mean, I know a lot of drag queens.”

Later on, another drag queen friend told Herrera that the drag queen in question, now known as **Shania Bright**, was indeed that macho dancer from the cabaret shows they performed at the **Fontainebleau Hotel**, the now-closed **Les Violins** nightclub and **Teatro de Bellas Artes** in Little Havana.

“His training was from Colombia, where a man is a man and a woman is a woman,” Herrera says. “His role models were showgirls. So when he became a drag queen, he became a showgirl, which is a specific feminine identity. His actual body could not be further from that of a showgirl. It was like I was looking at it for the first time.”

Herrera’s Ballet Hispanico piece concerns how the showgirl is the vehicle for the costume — “there’s something interesting with that being the frame for something rather than the actual picture of it,” she says — and how that makes women feel. It also addresses how showgirls are always close to the spotlight, but never singled out.

“I started thinking about these constructions of masculinity and femininity in contemporary society, Latino and Latina,” says Herrera, who started as untrained club dancer and is also a classical vocalist. “But when you really dissect it on an emotional and intellectual level, it echoes these ideas about community that I really connected with.”

Under the artistic leadership of Cuban-American **Eduardo Vilaro**, the program also will include works by Colombian-Belgian **Annabelle Lopez Ochoa** and Spanish native **Cayetano Soto**, and live music by the Paquito D’Rivera Ensemble.

Ballet Hispanico will perform “Show.Girl” 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, 1300 Biscayne Blvd., in Miami. Tickets cost from \$30 to \$90. Call 305-949-6722 or go to ArshtCenter.org.