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Review: Ballet Hispanico Performs Works by Ramón Oller, Gustavo Ramírez Sansano, and Pedro Ruiz

This Event ended Apr 10th, 2016



Flabbergast. Photo credit: Paula Lobo

Forty five has never looked better.

Tina Ramirez founded NYC-based Ballet Hispanico in 1970 with a mission to bring Latino dance and culture to the community. Now under the directorship of former company member Eduardo Vilaro, Ballet Hispanico hasn't aged one bit. It has since expanded to an international platform, but its vitality and passion are as prominent as ever.

Tuesday night's performance at the overflowing Joyce Theater was no exception. The touring company brought the place to life, boasting precision, expression, and execution, like that of a well-oiled machine. All three selections of repertory incorporated the Latin American dance style in varying amounts.



Bury Me Standing. Photo credit: Paula Lobo

Ramón Oller's inspiration for *Bury Me Standing* transcended his Spanish heritage to depict the Gypsy lifestyle, organically fusing together rhythms, songs, and dance styles of the distinctive cultures. Oller's deliberate choreographic decisions, such as lighting, costumes, transitions, and themes, came together to tell the story of a perseverant group of people who thrive on individualistic togetherness regardless of where or how they go.

The revival stagnated at times, particularly in the musical changeovers, but included several powerful passages, most notably: an a cappella group section of meticulous clapping, snapping, slapping, and stomping; a tender duet consisting of a man moving and lifting a woman across the floor with only his legs and feet; and a rambunctious procession of dancers scampering around on their knees.

Flabbergast opened the program and proved to be most compelling and eye-catching. Gustavo Ramírez Sansano's New York premiere used humor and exaggeration to examine the stereotypes and actions involved with new experiences. From an awkward flirtation to a group seduction and joyful, spontaneous encounters, Ramírez Sansano's social interpretation with Juan Garcia Esquivel's high-spirited music created an original animated, charismatic fanfare.



Club Havana. Photo credit: Paula Lobo

Ballet Hispanico's signature work *Club Havana* transported the intimate venue into smokey, sultry, showy 1950s Cuba. Native Pedro Ruiz employed authentic, big bang scores with thrilling accents set to deft lifts. Much of the choreography though appeared rather rudimentary, often evoking a disco ball-crowned amateur Latin dance competition rather than a golden nightclub.

The Cha Cha Cha, though dynamic, wouldn't have met *Dancing With the Stars'* Len Goodman's standards as there were very few of the style's namesake element to be found. Nonetheless, the dance ensemble, decked out in vibrant satin dresses and slick suits, demonstrated accuracy and generated contagious excitement. Plus, who doesn't like confetti!



Laura Vernaci

Professional ballerina turned writer, living in New York.