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Stylish expressions Ballet Hispanico

by [Ryan Finch](#) — August 19, 2019

New York-based Ballet Hispanico, founded almost 50 years ago, returned to Israel with its first full evening ballet: *Carmen.maquia*, set to the favorite music of Georges Bizet.

Choreographer Gustav Ramirez Sansano tried to capture the spirit of Prosper Merimee's story about Carmen, an attractive, spirited Gypsy. This story of passion, death and defying conventions, caught the imagination of many and knew countless previous renditions. Sansano's interpretation tried to take that melodrama, often portrayed in colorful and rustic setting of bygone times and contrasted it stylistically, in austere, sterile-white and sophisticated set design that matched to perfection the elegant white formal costumes. Though those stylistic choices were a pleasure to the eyes, it was counterproductive to the steaming hot ambiance and specific earlier era's social norms that are needed to understand the way the narrative had developed, if one insists on sticking to the script, as Sansano did.

The opening scene features a sole male dancer giving the impression that the initial creative intentions are leading to progressive contemporary perception of dance in the 21st century. However, it often adopted the more conservative modes of narrative ballets along with other disciplines, such as Jazz and Latino with their distinct way of handling the body. As a result, one was exposed to a lot of intense corporal activities and a too little focused intents on most group scenes. Sansano did much better on duet interactions.

A cast of 15 able-bodied dancers presented a vibrant company that managed the large scenes, often depicting moods and transitions between the smaller formats which concentrated on the leading roles of Carmen, her lover Don Jose, Michela, Jose's fiancé and Escamillo, the saucy matador. Both male leaders were passionate and lively. Escamillo's entrance to the stage brought some sensual sparks that were missing up to it in Jose's role.

In fact, Carmen, danced by Shelby Colona, carried the evening on her petite frame. She is marvelously strong, portraying the complex role of a passionate, flirtatious woman with softer and sensitive layers, and a depicted her emotional contrasts and a fickle approach to survival in a captivating way.

Ballet Hispanico's *Carmen.maquia* is a reference to *tauromaquia*, bull fights. It is an entertaining and highly aesthetic ballet production, though it remained within the bounds of safe artistic exploration. Yet, it seemed to appeal to large audiences. Additional performances are scheduled for July 23 at the Jerusalem Theater and July 24 at the Haifa Auditorium.

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