

# The Herald-Sun

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## Ballet Hispanico showcases Cuban-Americans' works

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SPECIAL TO THE HERALD-SUN

Ballet Hispanico makes its American Dance Festival debut with a program that includes two works by Cuban-American choreographers, Rosie Herrera and Eduardo Vilaro.

The company performs today and Saturday at Durham Performing Arts Center.

Vilaro, who is also artistic director of the company, came, with his parents from Cuba to New York when he was 5. Herrera grew up in Miami. Both drew from their Cuban heritages for their dances.

Herrera's "Show.Girl," making its ADF premiere after opening in Miami earlier this month, is informed by the choreographer's own experience as a showgirl in a Cuban folkloric cabaret at Teatro Bellas Artes in Miami's Little Havana. She had initially been attracted by the theater's ad for dancers under 5 feet 5 inches tall. She is 5 feet 2 inches tall. "Showgirls usually have to be 5 feet 8 inches but the director was not even 5 feet so all his showgirls were minis," Herrera said in a

telephone interview.

So, at age 16, Herrera landed a showgirl job in the cabaret. She wore fishnet stockings, heels, a feather headdress. "We became a family. The cast was a surrogate mom to me. My mom was not around much," Herrera said. Over the four years she performed in the cabaret, she also learned more about Cuban culture. And, she developed a respect for the dedication of these showgirls. "The entertainers give themselves so unselfishly to this form," Herrera said.

In "Show.Girl," she draws on this experience to explore Latina female identity. She sees these showgirls' femininity "as a base of empowerment instead of objectification," she added. To emphasize this broader context, she put a dot between the two words in her title. "It's about what it means to be a girl and what it means to put on a show," she said.

"It is a theatrical piece but it captures her personality," Vilaro said, of "Show.Girl" in a telephone interview. "There is a slight feminist bent through-

### WANT TO GO?

**WHAT:** The American Dance Festival presents Ballet Hispanico.

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. today and 8 p.m. and 1 p.m. (Children's Matinee) on Saturday.

**WHERE:** Durham Performing Arts Center.

**TICKETS:** 919-680-2787 or [www.americandancefestival.org](http://www.americandancefestival.org)

out. It is very profound but she sprinkles it with humor. It has this very cinematic look."

This work represents the first time Herrera has been commissioned to do a work for a company other than her own. She had three weeks to work with Ballet Hispanico to put it together — as opposed to the year she takes to create for her own company, she said.

As part of the process of creating the work, she had dancers watch telenovellas, TV mini-series in Spanish, she describes as "soap operas turned up 100 percent." She had danc-

ers choose three or four facial expressions from these shows and then translate the expressions to their hips. "Even though they are doing the expressions with their pelvis, it keeps some of the drama of the facial expressions," Herrera said.

This is her fourth year of presenting work at ADF. She made her festival debut in 2009 with the restaging of her "Various Forms of Drowning: A Cabaret" performed by ADF students and guest artists from her company.

Herrera is the most recent Latino choreographer Vilaro has championed. "I'm very excited to show that Ballet Hispanico is really demonstrating the virtuosity of thought in our Latino artists," he said of his mission since becoming the company's second artistic director in 2009. Tina Ramirez founded the company in 1970. Vilaro also danced with the company from 1985 to 1995.

A dance of another kind informed his childhood in New York and years later, he would name his own work "Danzon" after that dance. "Danzon" will be performed on the company's

ADF program. "It's known as the Cuban national dance," Vilaro said. He has seen his parents and other people do this dance. The form, a fusion of European and African influences, dates to the late 19th century in Cuba. In it, dancers carried flower-covered arches and held the ends of colored ribbons that created patterns as they danced.

Vilaro's "Danzon" reinvents this form in a way that retains its social, celebratory spirit but without the flowers, ribbons and folkloric nature. "It's a celebration of two people coming together or a group of people coming together to dance," he added. The choreographer collaborated with Cuban clarinetist/saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera, who infused danzon music with jazz rhythms for Valero's dance and performed it live for the Miami world premier. The music will not be performed live at ADF.

"We had an amazing reception in Miami," Vilaro said. And, he's hoping for the same response from ADF audiences. "I'm ecstatic to be at the festival for the first time," he added.