

Review: The Classical Repertory Dance Theatre and DC Contemporary Dance Theatre/El Teatro De Danza Contemporanea: Entre Dos Mundos/Between Two Worlds

Review: The Classical Repertory Dance Theatre and DC Contemporary Dance Theatre/El Teatro De Danza Contemporanea: Entre Dos Mundos/Between Two Worlds

The evening was spent dancing “Between Two Worlds” as mix of performances by both the Classical Repertory Dance Theatre (CRDT) and DC Contemporary Dance Theatre/El Teatro De Danza Contemporanea (DCCDT) took the stage at The Washington School of Ballet’s Joseph C. Coleman Studios on Sunday, July 9th. Both groups performed under the direction of Miya Hisaka Silva.

The Joseph C. Coleman Studios offered an intimate performance space. Rows of chairs transformed the space from a dance studio to a designated stage. The space was without theatrical lighting, curtains or wings. Even when the dancers were “off stage,” they were still very much visible. First on the program were excerpts from *The Sleeping Beauty*, performed by CRDT 2017 summer program participants. These adult dancers ranged from advanced beginners to professionals. It seemed all had previous dance experience. Hisaka Silva explained during her pre-show talk that she chose excerpts from *Sleeping Beauty* for two reasons: the work provided opportunities for performers of all levels, and her mentor (Gloria Contreras of the Taller Coreografico de la UNAM), upon her passing, willed Hisaka Silva many of her ballets including the Grand Pas de Deux from *Sleeping Beauty* in hopes that it be performed in the United States.

Guest artists Fidel Garcia (formerly of Dance Theatre of Harlem and the Washington Ballet) and Giovanna Montoya (formerly of Orlando Ballet) began the dancing with the Grand Pas de deux. Montoya lay sleeping across a bench, in the middle of the stage, while Garcia waited off stage for his music cue. When he entered, it was clear he was the Prince looking for Aurora. His eyes were alight with concern, his walks graceful and determined. Upon finding his sleeping beauty, it was obvious her heart danced for him as well. The two were beautifully and convincingly captivated by each other throughout the entire grand pas. The pair’s lifts were well-rehearsed and rock solid. Her assisted turns into a devloppé went smoothly. In such an intimate space, any and all mistakes in weight-sharing or partner placement would be apparent. But the duet went off without a hitch and would set a standard for the remainder of the program.

The Grand Pas de Deux was followed by The Garland Waltz, the Lilac Fairy variation, the Prince Variation, Precious Stones Opening/Jewels, Jewels Variation 1, Jewels Variation 2, and the Finale. The repertoire was classical, with traditional ballet vocabulary.

The Garland Waltz stood out from the evening as it was a large group work, with women dressed in light blue leotards and full white romantic tutus and a man wearing a gray top and blue tights. The dancers worked well together, keeping in sync throughout the corps work. It reminded me that the joy of performing never ceases. The adult dancers radiated smiles every time they crossed the stage.

The variations that proceeded were quick demonstrations of the work the dancers had done over the course of 10 weeks. I was surprised that many of the adults (seemingly willingly) danced en pointe. Except for a few loose positions of the feet, their dancing and footwork were admirable. Their dedication to producing a quality program was clear and captivating. And in a rush of tulle, it was complete.

The first act flew by as the adult dancers whirled through excerpts at an energetic pace. It was clear that the adult dancers were technically trained, either through the 10-week summer program or through their own endeavors. I was impressed and pleased with their abilities to connect with each other throughout the performance. I've watched semi and professional dancers perform with great presence only to not engage with their fellow members on stage.

The second half was performed by DCCDT. The first work, *Excerpts from Y Ahora La Esperanza (And Now the Hope)*, was originally choreographed in 1994 by Hisaka Silva and Juan Carlos Rincones. According to the program notes, this ballet was about El Salvador before, during, and after the civil war and was created shortly after the signing of the Peace Accords. Originally an evening length work, only a few sections were performed. Because we were prefaced with the dance being a story of before, during, and after, I would have liked to see the whole work in order to complete the vision.

Three women were dressed in white, off-the-shoulder tops with cool-colored skirts and wide, black corset-like belts. Three men were similarly dressed in white shirts and black pants. The movement in this piece was fluid and luxurious. The group stood in the center of the stage and swung their hips side to side in time with the music. The dancers lavished in what I imagine was the representation of the "before" the civil war. From a crouched position, the dancers opened their arms to the side, like wings on a bird, that slowly brought them to standing. They transitioned easily from smooth to sharp. Though the movement wasn't overly complex in nature or structure, the dancers flowed through it seamlessly and quickly. While the overall mood the piece was joyous, I would have liked to have seen the dancers connect more with each other. They were celebrating the pride of the moment, but as individuals and not as a cohesive unit.

The group gave way to a duet, which I interpreted as the "during" section of the work. The man and woman pleaded to each other, arms outstretched, but never touched. It seemed that the small space they were apart was representational of families and loved ones being miles apart throughout the civil war. The duet was filled with turns and pirouettes. What the male dancer lacked in flexibility, he made up for in his emoting. Overall, the piece was beautifully choreographed, but I wanted more from the dancers. I wanted to be convinced of their heartbreak and desperation for each other. In such a close space, the audience can see everything. Acting is crucial on small stages, particularly those as intimate as this studio. Hisaka Silva had shared that the evening's excerpts would total eight minutes. It was over in no time at all and I wanted more.

Without the possibility of a traditional blackout, a musical interlude played while company members changed into the final work on the program, *Songs Without Words*, choreographed by Lloyd Whitmore with music by J.S. Bach. Five women dressed in purple leotards and white skirts danced with two men, each wearing only blue pants. It was a contemporary ballet, with moments of flexed feet, swaying arms, and quick weight-shifts. Whitmore's movement had the dancers frequently crossing the stage in solos, trios, and large groups. The dancers were in constant transition, creating a breeze as they jumped and leapt from stage left to stage right and back again. The movement was quick, feeling as if you might miss it if you blinked. Though the movement was brisk, the dancers never appeared out of breath. They were true performers – never once showing the effort behind their art.

The group cleared and a trio emerged – two women and one man. The male dancer, with a well-built physique, was as delicate as he was strong. The women posed in arabesque, using him for balance. The women found their places on either side of him as all three dancers made a gesture of drawing a curtain down using both hands before sitting down. The male dancer stood up, and after he caressed the face of each of his partners, they fell on their sides. He then began to search. When this phrase repeated later, I would wonder if maybe the women were figments of his imagination?

Throughout the remainder of the piece, the women seemed to look right past him, which would support my thoughts.

I'm uncertain of whether the lack of visual acknowledgement between dancers was intentional or choreographed. If it was intended, it worked well. Otherwise, I found the disconnect distracting. The beginning and end of the piece were dramatically different in tone, moving from lively to contemplative. Due to the setting of an atypical theater space, watching the two sections in the same work wasn't initially a jarring experience, however, I would enjoy watching them as separate entities because the connection wasn't immediately clear.

The evening was meant to be one spent "between two worlds," and it was successful. We delved into the classical side of ballet before embracing the modern, contemporary side. The dancing was lively, which kept the program moving at a brisk and welcome pace. Even with a mixed program of amateur adult dancers and professionals, the dancing was high-quality and inspiring.