

YOUNG AND ARTISTS: Dancing, as if dance were another dimension

By: Yuris Nórido / CubaSi
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Mario and Victor Varela are brothers and work partners. For some years now, both have been members of the cast of the Cuban Contemporary Dance Company — undisputable reference of Cuba's modern dance —, and stand out for their performing skills. We interviewed both for our series of young art creators in Cuba.

CUBASÍ: How is it that two brothers dedicate themselves to art, the same art? A family tradition?

VICTOR: Art was very natural, an everyday thing for us since we were just kids. Our mother is theater producer at the Cienfuegos Dramatic Theater. Therefore, the stage is quite familiar to us since forever.

MARIO: In fact, we grew up running around and playing by the halls of the Dramatic Center...I think it was natural we leaned toward art, theater, dance...And nothing was predetermined beforehand, everything just came to us naturally. One day, I tried out dance and I passed. I began studying it. Afterwards, when I was about to change the level for intermediate school, I was encouraged to try out theater and I passed as well...And then I began studying theater. I became an actor...I never quit to my love for dancing, though.

C: Victor has only studied dance, right?

V: Yes, since the very beginning at the elementary school. And then I passed and went to the intermediate school in Santa Clara, firstly, and then Havana.

C: But before, when you were just little kids. Did you dream about being dancers?

M: Not at all, we just wanted to play around. Although we did love to go partying and birthdays celebrations to dance. And we did it well. That is why we pass the tryouts almost effortless and then we were ready to enroll in the school.

C: And how did you end up in the Cuban Contemporary Dance Company?

V: I came to Havana to finish my studies. I did my social service time in the company and I stayed...Mario came afterwards, a year later.

M: When he enrolled in Danza... I was still an actor in Cienfuegos. I will not tell you the whole story because it would take too long. I will only tell you that I had to assume a character who had to dance on stage, I was substituting another actor who had come to Havana due to an emergency and I embraced the challenge so the play was not canceled. I only tell you: I fell in love with dance. I called my brother and I told him: "I am in love with dancing." And I waited for my chance...

"One day, early in the morning, my brother called me. The company was looking for a male dancer here in Havana. I went home. I packed my bags, I left a message for mom, and I came here to Havana. The job opportunity did not involve the Cuban Contemporary Dance Company. I did not think I could dance here one day. It was for *Los hijos del director*, the group of George Céspedes (who was dancer and still is *Danza's* choreographer); but stars lined up favorably and all of a sudden, I was taking class in the company.

"Obviously, I had to train hard. I had to leave several projects behind in Cienfuegos. It was not an easy call...But hey, I am here talking to you."

V: Mario is a lucky man!

C: I am sure you have had to answer this question more than once: what does dance mean to you?

M: Well, I think I already answered that: I did a radical change in my life with the sole purpose of dancing. And I do not regret it at all.

V: Look, I will only tell you it cheers me up, and holds me standing. I am tired sometimes, exhausted by the exercises...but I think this is the best way to dance better in the future and I am ok with it. When I am on the stage, dancing, I am so happy that clouds in my mind vanish: I was born to be a dancer. And being in the classroom taking classes or in the staging processes is my utmost pleasure.

C: More than being on stage?

V: I swear it. Even though some may think I am crazy. I prefer the dance hall. I am too focused on the audience and on doing my part right while on stage. In the dance hall, I dance for me. I feel spiritually fulfilled.

C: How do you deal with the fact you are brothers and work partners at the same time?

M: Actually, quite natural. Outside, we are brothers. But we are dancers and work partners within the company. He does his part and I do mine. Of course, if there is any problem, if he twists his ankle, if he is injured...the overprotective big brother gen surfaces...But meanwhile, we take our own road until our paths converge due to work. But we are different dancers. I am sometimes penalized for things he is celebrated for...

V: And vice versa, we have been together our whole life and it has never been a problem.

C: You are quite alike. Some people, when watching at you on stage, believe you are twins. I guess some choreographers have taken advantages on it...

V: More than once, yes...

M: In fact, my first choreography with *Danza* we did a scene we one was the reflection of the other in a mirror.

C: Do you feel any special connection when you dance together on stage?

V: Yes, we always feel it. I cannot explain it greatly. But I know how he will react under certain circumstances, how he will solve any sudden problem...I just need to look at him.

M: I tell you, when he is by my side, I feel safer. I feel relaxed.

C: What's the best time for a dancer? When are you happier?

V: Some will tell you when the curtains of the theater fall and everything goes right and you hear the round of

applauses. Not to me, I feel happier when I am mentally focused on dancing and nothing else exists, as if I were in another place, total freedom...

C: Yes, it happens every day. But when it happens, it feels great. And most of the time the audience does not realize it!

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSi Translation Staff