

CRITICAL ZONE: People's Art, Real Art

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Folk dancing for the stage faces a huge challenge in Cuba: to renew itself without betraying its principles.

The great masters, the founding masters of folk dance for the stage went first to the focus, to folk festivals, to the temple houses, to the celebrations and rituals of a tradition. That was, still is, and will be an irreplaceable, huge, strong inheritance; a reference, a source to which creators must always return to.

But those maestros were not satisfied after drinking from those waters and reproducing what they saw on stage. It was (and still is about) recreating that reality (or magnifying it, like so many times have said maestro Manolo Micler, director of the National Folklore Ensemble), to shed light on a new art, with deeply popular roots, alright, but a new art, side by side with the best and most innovative of the world choreographic art.

That is the basic condition of professional dance, inspired in the folklore of the nation: that's not the focus, it can't be: it must be stylization, aesthetic, and integrative expression, involved and intentional recreation of that living heritage.

Starting from that, we can understand which should be (which are, in fact), the goals of professional companies that do folk dance for the stage. Documentary passion should never cloud the artistic calling. And the people has its own art (folklore), but the stage has its codes, demands, needs, responsibilities, rules ... that can't be overlooked. And embracing them does not mean betraying that art of the people.

It may sound very easy, but artists know that it's a complex process. Right now, in Cuba there are circumstances that influence the exercise of artists and companies. Some are domestic, they are related to the creative practices and routines.

We must investigate more, much more ... and we must be aware of the current trends in the professional show. It's time to overcome common schemes and places.

But other dilemmas somehow transcend the creators: in the training system there are difficulties with the teaching staffs, not all dancers have the necessary conditions, and spaces for promotion in the media aren't enough, nor specialized and committed criticism of these expressions of art.

It's necessary to establish a climate that fosters permanent dialogue on this subject, because dance will never be a static art, a museum object.

There is an audience for scenic folk dance, they come, mostly from the very founders (that would be another interesting topic: how scenic practices have influenced popular practices), there are unique approaches to tradition (companies in the provinces are an example), and the teachings are more than valid today.

The paths and challenges posed by folklore must still concern and occupy the creators of the dance. Folk dance for the stage should not be taken as a folkloric stamp: it has to be at the front of national choreographic creation.

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