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Passion with a Genuine Spanish Accent

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For Cubans however, the Spanish dancer can be none other than that described by José Martí in 1891 in his poem “Verse X” of his anthology entitled *Versos Sencillos*, “My soul tremulous and forlorn...The Spanish dancer enters then, Looking so proud and so pale: “From Galicia does she hail?” No, they are wrong: she’s from heaven. She wears the matador’s tricorne and also his crimson cape...”

The motivation to unearth and revisit both poems came after a performance by the Spanish Ballet of Cuba of their new work: *Con Puro Acento Español*, premiered (February 19-20-21) in the impeccably restored Alicia Alonso Grand Theater of Havana’s beautiful García Lorca Hall.

In his poem Martí continues: “There’s a show, let us go see, The Spanish dancer perform.”

And with the same enthusiasm expressed almost a century ago, countless spectators filled the theater – one of the main buildings overlooking Havana’s Prado – knowing full well that the company directed by maestro Eduardo Veitía would present a work true to the purity of styles which characterize its broad repertory, ranging from classical Spanish dance to the most authentic forms of flamenco.

The evening was full of surprises. The performance began on the theater’s grand marble stairway located in the lobby of the building, from where the dancers descended in a kind of parade. An outstanding spectacle. All wore costumes by Cuban designer José Luis, made from a variety of fabrics (chiffon, cotton, linen), in various styles and all produced especially for the occasion. The female performers sported very eye-catching outfits, while still inviting, those worn by the male dancers were more Indian than Spanish in their design. The jewelry on display - original creations from Rosana Vargas – was made of 950 caret silver, semi-precious stones and leather.

Part one of *Puro Acento Español* entitled “Lo Clásico Español en concierto,” featured pieces such as “Sevillana Clásica,” “Antes el Escorial,” with music by Ernesto Lecuona, and “Las bodas de Luis Alonso,” a great selection (all by Eduardo Veitía), as well as those by several Spanish choreo-

graphers who have left their mark on the company: "Sonata en Ré," by Pablo Eguea and "Danza V," by Juan Magriná.

Lead dancer Leslie Ung performed a short piece with four other dancers, accompanied by soprano and special guest María Eugenia Barrios, who together with company singer Andrés Correa, performed none other than "Granada," by Mexico's Agustín Lara.

The Second half saw a spine tingling performance of "Sentir flamenco," and pieces by Veitía: "Mediterráneo," "Guajira flamenca," in need of further development, and A puro compás, which saw the entire company and all the musicians received an ovation; as well as five works by Spanish choreographer Francis Núñez: a flamenco ballad, "Añoranza;" an intense, high-energy piece "Esencia;" "Arte y Tronío," and "Epílogo," featuring popular flamenco music, which as was to be expected, had the entire theater on their feet in rapturous applause, and frequent shouts of "Olé!".

After the performance Maestro Veitía took a moment to speak with Granma International.

### **Comments on the performance?**

Con puro acento español is inspired by different expressions of Spanish dance, the school of bolero, flamenco, stylization, everything, as you have seen, with live music (13 musicians on stage, led by guitar which accompanies the dancers, providing them with the essential rhythms and supported by bass, flute and violin). We took orchestral works by Lecuona, Falla, Granados and brought them to simpler instruments. I think it worked well, the vocals were sung by soprano Maria Eugenia Barrios, and company vocalist Andrés Correa, who can perform all styles of flamenco.

### **You stick to authentic Spanish dance...**

This has always been our objective since Alicia (Alonso) gave us the task of creating a Spanish dance company in 1987, at a time when the style was disappearing. We couldn't let the fundamentals be lost, its Hispanic roots, our traditions.

Have Spanish teachers and choreographers worked with the company?

Teachers have come and done very serious work with the company, like Francis Núñez, who created "Sentires Flamenco," Cristina Hoyos Canales herself, the Spanish National Ballet's lead dancer Pablo Egea put together a piece. All the great figures of Spanish dance that have come to Havana have left their mark. We still need more contributions in order to keep us up-to-date.

### **This is the company's opening season, what more can we look forward to in 2016?**

Next month, in March, we will be back here with Aquel brujo amor (one of the company's classic pieces debuted in 1996 and based on Amor Brujo by Manuel de Falla, in honor of the 120th anniversary of his birth, and 50 years since his death). We will also return in June with Sonata y Fandango (by Veitía, a piece which was awarded second place prize in the First

International Spanish Dance and Flamenco Contest in Madrid) and La Casa Alba (based on Federico García Lorca's La Casa de Bernarda Alba), and round off the year with El Fantasma (a version of The phantom of the opera by Gaston Leroux), this time featuring various artists from the National Circus of Cuba's Havana company, such as acrobats and jugglers etc...

Martí's verses - contemporary, universal, essential - capture, in an almost cinematographic way his admiration for the Spanish dancer (in this case the beautiful Otero): "The lights are dimmed, the music flares, in shawl and gown makes her entrance ... dancing to Andalusian airs. Her head raised in challenge, the cape o'er her shoulders spreads, with her arched arms framing her head. She taps her foot ardently. Her studied taps tear the batten, as if each heel were a blade, and the stage had been inlaid with the broken hearts of men." Meanwhile Rilke returns to fire: "With a fierce glance she sets her hair alight/ Unexpectedly she turns with daring artfulness / The swirling flounces of her dress with this conflagration / Out of which her upheld naked arms, clapping the castanets appear like serpents striking..."

Such is **Puro Acento español** presented by the Spanish Ballet of Cuba, under the attentive eye of maestro Eduardo Veitía, who is already looking ahead to 2017 and his company's 30th anniversary.

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