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Campus Commentary 1—*Ballet Hispánico* at Davidson College

Ballet Hispánico at Davidson College was a four-act ballet in Duke Family Performance hall. The organization's mission is to bring people together around experimental forms of ballet that celebrate Latino culture. Clearly, *Ballet Hispánico* at Davidson College was intended to provide entertainment to students, faculty and staff, and community members, as well as to spread the art to those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience it. Because of the intriguing mission, I was hopeful going into the performance, anticipating an engaging experience that was different from anything I had seen before. After the performance, it was clear that I had viewed four love stories, each through a different lens.

The theater was full as I entered, community families and students alike sitting in anticipation of the upcoming performance. Ominous music faded in as the lights dimmed. Two dancers emerged with abrupt bodily movements and black costumes, extremes in both movement and color. The music also verged on the extreme, incorporating hydraulic noises. The dancers spun, becoming closer, accelerating as the noise grew, then moving apart. Finally, the couple converged in the center of the stage and the curtain dropped before the theater lights turned on, interrupting the immersion. The first act felt like a story of young love: adrenaline-inducing and exciting, yet fleeting.

After several minutes, the lights dimmed once again and the curtain was raised to reveal a woman in a long red dress. Her body became an axis as her arms rotated around it in subdued,

flowing movements. The silence and darkness in the theater created an attention vacuum, the illuminated dress the sole magnet. Guitar music played and four men in red entered, trading the female dancer between themselves, tugging on her dress with desire. Suddenly, the men seized her fans and the light became crimson. Then dancers entered in unison with leaps and graceful strides. The pace of the act continued to fluctuate with frequent changes in lighting and music and bodily movements until the dancers fell to the ground. It's over. Their heads fell with the curtain. This story felt like one of grappling with different loves. Undertones of polyamory were present and the relationships felt unstable.

As the curtain rose on the third act, several elements stood out, especially in contrast with the previous act: first, the smoke that engulfed the unwavering bodies on the stage; second, the heavy use of clothing that juxtaposed the lack of it in the previous act. A woman stood center stage while the other dancers surrounded her on the ground. Dancers emerged and replaced her clothing with a nun's robe, and she became a planet as the other dancers were pulled into her orbit. Then she was left alone. Slowly, each dancer entered in colorful costume and orbited the main dancer before falling to the ground and occupying their original positions. She loomed over them. This act felt like a war story between the main dancer and her religion, her family, perhaps her sexuality, and loneliness. While the previous two acts felt lighthearted at points, this act was a tragedy throughout.

The final act was a whirlwind. The curtain rose to reveal a man smoking a cigar while a woman danced in the foreground. Purple light and lively music gave the stage a playful ambiance. The clothing looked similar to that of a traditional club; suitable for dancing and flirting. Couples danced with one another, provoking cries from the audience. For the final minutes of the act, a disco ball dropped from the ceiling, casting reflections about the theater that

brought the audience into the environment already developed on the stage. This act felt like an upbeat and scandalous club scene with multiple couples having fun. It was refreshing after the previous act, and ended the performance on a positive note.

The organizers of the event and the members of *Ballet Hispánico* were undoubtedly successful in their goal of bringing this art form to a group of young humans. I was not handed a program prior to the event so I did not have access to descriptions of the individual acts. I therefore viewed each act as something for me to interpret, to try and decipher the story behind the movements happening on stage. Of course, there are intended stories behind each of these acts, but without knowledge of those, human nature led me to try and interpret what I witnessed. I felt as if I was able to decipher a story from each of the *Ballet Hispánico* acts perfectly, which indicates the Ballet's success. I also enjoyed the storytelling aspect of the performance. *Ballet Hispánico* at Davidson was an enlightening experience that nudged me out of my comfort zone and has encouraged further exploration into both this specific art form and other unfamiliar (to me) performances that Davidson may offer in the future.

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Works Cited

Ballet Hispanico. By Ballet Hispanico, Duke Family Performance Hall at Davidson College, 4

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