

# Barcelona's Demons Pay a Searing Visit: Ballet Hispanico finds a ...

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

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Alessandra Corona with other members of Ballet Hispanico in "Good Night Paradise," by the Catalan choreographer Ramón Ollér.

Johan Elburg

## DANCE REVIEW

# Barcelona's Demons Pay a Searing Visit

By ANNA KISSELGOFF

It may look like the usual European dance theater: a man keeps throwing wine out of a glass into the air, and women smack wet shawls against the floor within a space penned on three sides by a carved balustrade.

Nonetheless Ramón Ollér, a young Catalan choreographer, has created one of the most riveting dance pieces of the year and he has a fierce way with movement and a wondrous capacity to surprise. No one interested in experimental work of any kind can afford to miss Mr. Ollér's "Good Night Paradise," which had its premiere on Tuesday night when Ballet Hispanico opened a two-week sea-

son.

The two other new works on this program at the Joyce Theater (175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea) were choreographed to recordings by the pop superstars Gloria Estefan and Willie Colon. As such, they are worlds removed from the dark demons that haunt the avant-garde precincts of Barcelona.

"Sí Señor! Es Mi Son!," a smooth piece to Ms. Estefan's music, signaled the local comeback of the Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso. Mr. Alonso is best known for "Carmen," created at the Bolshoi for Maya Plisetskaya and also danced here by Alicia Alonso, his former sister-in-law. Vicente Nebrada, the artistic director of the National Ballet of Caracas, contributed a less

## Ballet Hispanico finds a place for experimental choreography.

coherent piece, "El Baquiné," to Mr. Colon's salsa music.

Both are suites that draw shrewdly from folk traditions and contemporary social dance. But compared with Mr. Ollér's grim and witty exploration of human relations, they have only a surface polish.

Paradoxically, such hip-swinging dances carry the risk of trading on Latin stereotypes. The rejoinder might be that one man's cliché is another man's truth.

If Mr. Ollér's piece strikes a deeper chord, it is because he reaches into the universal while preserving something distinctive and national. Buñuel did the same with his films. In this sense, the current modern-dance boom that has emerged in Spain, especially in Barcelona, has produced a generation of experimentalists who could be called the children of Buñuel and even of Salvador

Dali.

At the same time, their dance idiom is part of an international style of highly physical partnering, favored also by Americans like Amanda Miller and Susan Marshall. Tina Ramirez, Ballet Hispanico's artistic director, has invited both choreographers to present premieres on the company's second program, beginning tomorrow. If Mr. Ollér's success is a portent, then Ballet Hispanico has turned a corner, complementing its mainstream repertory with a challenging innovative wing that its admirable dancers introduce with stylishness and gusto.

When I saw Mr. Ollér's work at the 1992 Lyons Dance Biennial devoted to Spanish dance, it stood out in its choreographic sophistication and also shared his colleagues' obsession with sexual and religious taboos.

"Good Night Paradise" is typically joyless, and might or might not take place in a symbolic brothel. One has only to recall the young Picasso's images of Barcelona's bordellos to recognize the atmosphere of pleasure made routine. And yet the three couples and odd man out on-stage might also be the residue of a dinner party gone wrong.

Bedspreads are on the floor. A

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woman squeezes water from a sponge above a sleeping man. Wine bottles and glasses on a table evoke earlier refreshment. The women are in ruffled underpants and halters, the men in vests and pants (the costumes are by Mr. Ollér and Susan Ruddle). Macho relationships obtain. Yet even with its local color and Catalan lyrics, sung beautifully on tape by Marina Rossell, the piece conveys a wide and recognizable range of emotions.

For all his theatricality (the set is by Chris Barreca, the magical lighting by Roger Morgan), Mr. Ollér makes his point through movement. The basic athleticism of his style is focused on curved shapes, quick dynamic changes and repetitive motifs that acquire new meaning in different contexts. Early in the piece, the women beat the backs of their wrists against their partners' chests. By the end, the men do the same to the women.

At the end of the piece, the relationships have changed and evolved. At one point the women are left out when two pairs of men yank themselves into unexpected embraces. But later there are repeated runs by the women into the men's arms.

"Paradise" is too long, but one never knows what Mr. Ollér will do next. Even the final desperate and tender embrace has a surprise. The commissioned music by Eduardo Rodríguez, Ms. Rossell and Maurici Villavecchia is a perfect emotional

and rhythmic fit.

The superb cast included Lynne Morrissey, Marc Calamia, Alessandra Corona, Pedro Ruiz, José Costas, Rebecca Jefferson and Eduardo Vilario.

Mr. Nebrada's ballet is a murky

tale about a Puerto Rican wake, with the hero's life seen in flashback.

Mr. Alonso, who now lives in Mexico, has a more interesting take on Ms. Estefan's songs from the album "Mi Tierra." Past and present merge in his prologue with Cuban

carnival figures and romantic encounters. The idiom is a mix of ballet and social dance. Mr. Alonso is never less than a professional and his ballroom episodes are especially elegant. Randy Barcelo designed the striking costumes.

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## It's Not Quite a Reunion, However . . .

The first album of previously unreleased Beatles cuts since 1977 came out yesterday, and Tower Records' customers in London stood ready. "The Beatles Live at the BBC" will be out Tuesday in the United States.

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