

International

Raymonda

Ballet de Santiago, Teatro Municipal, Santiago – March 21-22, 2019

Hats off!

Chilean National Ballet, Teatro Universidad de Chile, Santiago – April 27, 2019

THE BALLET DE SANTIAGO opened its 2019 season with *Raymonda* in a version by Luis Ortigoza, for which he won the Best Choreographer Award of the Chilean Critics' Circle in 2017. The revival proved the merits of both Ortigoza's vision and the quality of the dancers. The two ballerinas who shared the title role – Romina Contreras and Katherine Rodríguez – both displayed technique and virtuosity, and excelled in the nuances of their dancing.

Raymonda narrates a confrontation between Christians and Muslims through a love story. In the plot, Raymonda is engaged to the knight Jean de Brienne, who leaves to join the Crusades. The exotic Saracen, Abderakhman, who then appears on the scene, represents the temptation of the forbidden. The ballet covers various dance styles, with no shortage of Spanish and Hungarian character dances.

Ortigoza masterfully gives new life to Marius Petipa's original choreography. Without betraying it, he cuts it with intelligence, achieving an agile production that never wanes in its rhythm. Moreover, he adds choreographic segments that highlight the male dancers.

As *Raymonda*, a role that keeps the ballerina long on stage, and whose variations are of great difficulty, Contreras once again proved

her extraordinary talent: virtuous and confident in every movement, she had elegant feet and arms and an imposing stage presence. She was very well accompanied by the virtuosity and precision of Emmanuel Vázquez as Jean, and with Rodrigo Guzmán's intensely theatrical Abderakhman; both impeccable in their roles.

In the second cast, Rodríguez displayed her great proficiency (beautiful jumps, high legs) and, interestingly, a playful, sparkling reading of the character very different from Contreras'. Her Raymonda conveyed the joy of youthful infatuation, and she was paired with José Manuel Ghiso's sexy Abderakhman.

Such fine dancing took place in splendid scenery by Pablo Núñez that recreated the atmosphere of an oppressive castle with no daylight, and also with golden-toned pageantry in beautiful lighting by José Luis Fiorruccio; it was, at times, overwhelming.

AT THE END OF April, Ballet Nacional Chileno (BANCH) presented a new, high-calibre production. *Hats off!* brought together the diversity of the dancing of Mathieu Guilhaumon, the company's artistic director, and Power Peralta, an eminent company on Chile's urban dance scene recently recruited by Cirque du Soleil for its tribute to Michael Jackson. It is, without doubt, a daring proposal that points towards imaginative showmanship crossed with an existentialist subject.

Guilhaumon has an intention to work in a range of disciplines. He did so at the Ballet de Santiago and, with actress Millaray Lobos, he was responsible

for the libretto of an award-winning production of *Giselle* in 2018. *Hats off!* offers a journey through the world of varieties guided by a spectral harlequin, where we find quotes from musicals, cabaret, circus, jazz and cinema. There are evocations of Charlie Chaplin, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, and of cabinets of curiosities.

The tour takes place on a small, dark stage populated by sepia-toned characters who roam from one side to the other, grouping, dancing and letting us see glimpses of their peculiarities. There is a permanent sense that a bomb could go off at any moment, or that the characters inhabit a fragile, helpless world.

The soundscape, created by the internationally-recognised DJ Bitman, accompanies the show with the voices of Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr, among others, which are transformed and distorted so that at times they shatter the action. It is very sombre and, every so often, songs sound like scratched records.

The Peraltas dance with their female counterparts in ways that are suggestive of a number of themes, but the show demonstrates the solidity of the interpreters, both in its urban version

– stylised in the hands of BANCH – and in Guilhaumon's dance vocabulary. It is a fine group work, especially in its combination of hip hop, tap and contemporary dance, and is accompanied by music that at times sounds contrary to the style, and in which the performers are precise and to the point.

The dancers who stood out were Gema Contreras as the Bearded Woman, Nicolas Berrueta and Vanessa Turelli as Astaire and Rogers; Valentín Keller as Chaplin, Marine García and Ignacia Peralta as the tied-up "twins" and, of course, Power Peralta. These identical brothers have put their art to the service of the work. They are not placed in the foreground, as might be expected, and their dancing, especially in the scene where one dances with the other, as if he were his shadow, is elegant and suggestive. Their style works well with music very far from hip hop, proving the brothers have taken a risk from which they have emerged gracefully.

MARIETTA SANTI

Below: Romina Contreras and Emmanuel Vázquez in Ballet de Santiago's production of *Raymonda*.

