

Carmen

Ballet de Santiago,
Teatro Municipal, Santiago
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IT'S BEEN NINE YEARS

since the Ballet de Santiago presented *Carmen* in the version by Marcia Haydée – the eternal muse of John Cranko – who created the ballet in 2004 when she was director of the Chilean company. Despite the time that has passed, the production continues to be attractive. Its originality resides not only in some small modifications to the plot, but also in the rearrangement of musical passages in Bizet's score for the opera, and the inclusion of fragments from other works by the same composer. The choreography unites passion and sensuality with movements of a contemporary trait.

Ballet versions of *Carmen* date back as far as 1949, with Zizi Jeanmaire in the title role and Roland Petit – its choreographer – as Don José. Since then, different creators have set their eyes on the drama, making adaptations that highlight various aspects of the story. The approach adopted by Haydée is direct and theatrical in order to embrace the feelings of the characters: Carmen's fickleness, Micaela's sadness, Don José's unrequited passion. She combines classical ballet with contemporary movements, such as feet that are flexed or placed in parallel position, and lifts that arise unannounced and end with true acrobatics. In particular, the scene of carnal encounter between the protagonists provides a perfect fusion of pointe work and modern dance.

Haydée's treatment of *Carmen* is profound, going beyond the frontiers



of classical technique to explore her character in a performance that also requires great acting. One notices her strong personality from the first scene, as well as her frantic search for love and pleasure. In addition, the choreographer highlights the gypsy's vindication of her freedom, a path in which she does not accept any limitation and is capable of harming – without remorse – the men to whom she is attracted. Her feminine self appears to be deeply repressed. She dislikes being a woman, as well as belonging to a social group that is poor and a pariah to society. She therefore takes revenge on the man who she ruthlessly seduces, stripping him of his power.

Don José is torn between the pure love that Micaela, his girlfriend, offers, and the ardent passion that the gypsy arouses within him. Carmen captivates Don José despite her contempt and rejection. The physical relationship between the two is one of the great choreographic successes of this version because it delves into the contemporary to reveal the torment of the

man and the manipulation of the woman. Finally, and after being sure of having Don José in hand, Carmen abandons him for the famous matador Escamillo – arrogant and haughty, he regards himself as a seducer and thinks of himself as a trophy for the women he entices.

In its new run at Santiago's Teatro Municipal, *Carmen* features protagonists from a new generation of dancers, as the former acclaimed performers (Luis Ortigoza, Andreza Randisek, Marcela Goicochea, Maite Ramírez, Natalia Berríos and Lidia Olmos, among others) have retired from the stage. Young dancers with great interpretive strength bring a renewed energy to the work. Katherine Rodríguez and Romina Contreras alternated in the role of Carmen. Both possess a magnificent technique, but differ in the nuances of their interpretation, as was also the case in the company's recent performances of *Raymonda*. The role of Don José was taken by Emmanuel Vásquez and Gustavo Echevarría, virtuoso dancers who deliver insightful

Above: Ballet de Santiago's Katherine Rodríguez and Emmanuel Vásquez in Marcia Haydée's production of *Carmen*.

interpretations of the macho, jealous and selfish soldier who is unable to control his fury at Carmen's rejection.

The corps de ballet deliver power and beauty in the ensemble scenes where, as gypsies, bar-tenders and passers-by, the choreography alternates between solos, duets, trios and groups and is ingrained with drama. The dancers were very fine. The costumes and scenery, designed by Pablo Núñez, symbolically predict the fall of the protagonist. The colour red, intended to suggest passion, love, anger, revenge and death, abounds in the costumes, sets and lighting.

The Ballet de Santiago, directed by former principal dancer Luis Ortigoza, commenced its 2022 season with this proven title. It continues with productions as demanding as *Giselle* and *Swan Lake*, which will test the capabilities of the new cohort of dancers. ■

MARIETTA SANTI