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JAVIER TORRES

SCOTTISH BALLET AT 50

BONNIE LANGFORD

MOVE IT 2019



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developed by Restrepo and Delieuevin in which “sculpting their bodies as artists goes parallel with sculpting the person as a peace activist in society. In class, we talk not only about dance techniques, but techniques in which to live in our society”.

Last July, CCI presented the world premiere of *SacrifiXio, the consecration of peace* in Bogotá, which was also performed in Mexico and can be seen in Paris this May. Restrepo describes his latest creation, *Animal Family*, as “more playful, naïve, although it includes harder aspects as in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*”; it will be performed in Berlin and Hamburg later this month.

A BRIT IN BOGOTÁ

Colombia’s capital, Bogotá, with its Teatro Mayor and other stages where opera and theatre blossom, has never had a ballet company as such. Theatres present international companies, as well as dancers such as Fernando Montaña and Jose Manuel Ghiso, but Ghiso tells me the city is an excellent place to develop a classical company in the future. Asked if he has ever considered coming back, he replies he will think about that “once I finish my career that, for now, will continue in Chile if Marcia Haydée continues as artistic director”.

Unlike ballet, native contemporary dance is more regularly seen. One example is *Alma en Movimiento* (Soul in Movement), set up in 2015 by Maria Teresa Calderón, a former dancer who now works at the Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo. “Alma en Movimiento [AM] started as a scholarship programme for dancers aged between 17 and 25 selected at audition to receive training in classical ballet and contemporary dance whilst being paid monthly expenses, which,” says manager Luz Helena Cano, “is a privilege in Colombia because dancers here need many jobs to survive.

“The idea was to bring up the artistic and technical levels of the dancers, and for many it was their first opportunity to experience dance as a professional,” she continues. “Also, as many international companies perform at Teatro Mayor, our dancers take classes with them, which is a great experience as they get to meet choreographers and see

different styles.”

Last September, AM began its transition from a scholarship programme into a group of professional dancers with the arrival of a new artistic director, the UK-born dancer, choreographer and teacher Sarah Storer. A former dancer with Henri Oguike (and *Dancing Times*’ Dancer of the Month in May 2006), Storer first travelled to Bogotá in 2009 through a five-week commission from the British Council to work with the inclusive dance company ConCuerpos. Storer decided to stay on to teach workshops, joined *L’explose*, a local company directed by Tino Fernandez, and then choreographed a musical. She went on to work for the Teatro Mayor, even teaching class for guest companies.

Storer has given AM a more stable and defined path that, according to Cano, allows the dancers “to find a new way to move”. When I met up with her at Christmas, Storer’s excitement was clear, as this month AM makes its debut on the main stage of Teatro Mayor, which is as big as Sadler’s Wells. The work to be presented is *El sueño de Lilith* (Lilith’s Dream), a full-length piece to a compilation score with music that includes Vivaldi.

“Our day starts with morning class – either ballet or contemporary – and from 11am to 4pm we rehearse the new piece with my assistant, Santiago Mariño. We are giving the dancers the opportunity to create, but we have a couple of other pieces in rehearsal as well,” Storer explains.



Above: Gonzalo Galguera leading Compañía Colombiana de Ballet in class. Below: Alma en Movimiento in *El sueño de Lilith*.

Her idea is “to create a repertoire as diverse as possible, maybe along the lines of Rambert. I’m inviting a choreographer from Bogotá to work with us for six weeks and perform his piece afterwards. Although difficult, I also want to organise a tour and hope to make a short dance film. I’m setting up a creative lab in which two dancers will make a piece on the others, and at some point during my next contract I want to show their talent at international festivals.”

She admits her arrival has been a big jump for AM, and needs to be sensitive when introducing changes, even when everybody is thrilled. She is also thinking of bringing in an international choreographer. “All the dancers have trained in ballet to a pretty high standard,” Storer says, “and moving into a modern area is a dramatic change; their physicality is not used to that kind of movement, but I’m impressed by how open-minded and committed they are in learning new ways of moving. They are amazing, and there are a couple here who are world-class dancers.”

Was it difficult asking them to leave aside their pointe shoes? “If you are going to be in a ballet company, you have to be up there with the best. I told them to look at the bigger picture, even when they are great dancers... and they all agreed, despite some disappointments. I think it’s natural progression and they are very intelligent and mature. I want the dancers to get the most creative and physical experience, and love what they do”. ■

