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Cuban National Ballet's 'Don Quixote'

Debra Levine · Thursday, June 30th, 2011

Our Cuban brothers and sisters of The Cuban National Ballet cruised into the Los Angeles Music Center last night driving their charmingly ramshackle "Don Quixote," a vehicle purring on high-octane Russian ballet technique that's been passed through generations — similar to the classic cars parading Havana's island coastline.

The ballet was choreographed in 1988 by Alicia Alonso, after Petipa's original dating from 1869.

It was a winsome and nostalgic tour in a ballet time capsule, a demonstration of how it used to be done, a display of clean and unfettered classical technique by the engaging, youthful company. The dancers, brown skinned and with few exceptions homogeneous in their look, burst through the conventions of Minkus's war horse of a three-act ballet, eager to please. The ballet's claptrap narrative about the old geezer, Don Q, with sidekick Sancho Panza, pursuing Dulcinea, the feminine ideal, faded into irrelevance. What remained was a showcase of the beautifully trained dancers' technical prowess.

Remarkable was the purity of the *port de bras*, an art lost, indeed killed, in the U.S.: a clean, highly controlled curvilinear frame for the ladies' pretty heads, and an ergonomic support for the men's bountiful natural leaps powered by exceptional *ballon*, or "ballet bounce."

The most alluring sequence, a gilded variation by six gold-costumed toreadors, trumpeted unabashed *Cubanissimo*. Red capes whipping downward by their sides, the men stepped archly onto high relevé attitude position. Qué machismo!

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