

Broad Street Review



Quijada (in air): Skewering machismo.

Rubberbandance Group

BY: Lewis Whittington 03.03.2007

Don't be turned off by its gimmicky name. Rubberband's dancers, some of them classically trained, are upping the ante in terms of what people expect from hip-hop.

Rubberbandance Group. February 27, 2007 at Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, 3680 Walnut St. (215) 898-3900 or www.pennpresents.org

Pretzel logic

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It's easy to resist a dance company with a gimmicky name like Rubberbandance Group, but that was company director choreographer Victor Quijada nickname when he was a curb dancer in Los Angeles a decade ago. Since then, Quijada studied formally with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal and Eliot Feld, and was chosen by Twyla Tharp to tour in her show *Tharp!*

Now Quijada choreographs for his own troupe (three men, two women, some classically trained). Rubberbandance knows how to stay ahead of the hip-hop fusion curve. At the recent Annenberg concert sampling of his work I noticed many children with parents, as well as club kids. Quijada uses classical music, for one, to up the theatrical ante in terms of what people expect from hip-hop.

Quijada introduces his movement themes in a six-part sampler called Elastic Perspective. In *Secret Service*, set to Serge Prokofiev's music from *Romeo and Juliet*, Quijada turns the ballet's lurching processional into a turf war scene d'action. Show-off summersaults, flips, inversions are tamped down, but this excerpt looked too front loaded and rote.

Quijada's humorous vernacular skewers machismo and proscribed b-boy roles, but evokes straight male camaraderie in his duet *Before Back Then*, powerfully danced by Joe Danny Aurelien and Jayko Eloi. The movement meditation *Exercise in Wholeness and Awareness* displays the choreographer's bare-bones virtuosity without looking like a mere studio exercise put onstage. Hip-hop tango and flash male-female romance scenarios are potently drawn; and in *The Traviatta*, the trills from Verdi's *La Traviata* propel Anne Plamondon and Aurelien into witty clutches.

Mi Verano, an ensemble piece scored to Vivaldi, worked much better with a quick catalogue of hip-hop lexicon. Tight unison work by the dancers, with breakouts solos, shows the rhythmic versatility of baroque music. The interplay between dancers and music was much more organic than what Savion Glover has tried to do with classical tap, for instance. What sets Quijada apart are his use of classical music and his development of critical transitional steps between the acrobatic fireworks of hip-hop.

The quartet *Hasta La Proxima*, with a subversive rap and techno mix streaming, that takes up the program's second half. This expansive work—the basis for an award-winning British short film—is fragmented and ponderous but frames a powerful central duet, set to diabolical sound tide and executed with hypnotic clarity by Quijada and Plamondon. *Proxima* moves deep in the marrow of hip-hop's contradance idioms.