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[Translated by Michael Moskowitz]

Carmen and other works...

Year after year, we watch as the Cleveland Ballet is transforming from a modest choreographic ensemble into a brilliant All-American ballet troupe and as its skill and prosperity grow. Of course, under prosperity I do not mean the level of artists' salaries (although this, too, is important), but rather how it is acquiring mighty muscles right before our eyes: workshops for producing the luxurious costumes and stylish decorations, rehearsal halls and gyms, all kinds of auxiliary facilities, and medical equipment. But the most valuable acquisitions of the Cleveland Ballet are its young dancers, raised within its own Cleveland School of Ballet, invited prodigies with amazing international background, with beauty and intricate mastery, and its own Orchestra led by the matchless conductor Caleb Young of Berlin. And, of course, the world-class choreographers invited by the company to stage performances, rehearse with the dancers, perfect their technique, turning them into jewels of the highest standard.

The way the Cleveland Ballet opened its latest season in one of the world's largest theaters, the Connor Palace, serves as an emphatic confirmation of these complimentary lines, which it undoubtedly deserved.

The performance, which consisted of three compositions in seemingly different genres, was in fact a parade of the company's achievements.

"Dazzling" – it is difficult to find another word to describe the divertissement ***Pas de Dix*** from the ballet ***Raymonda*** by Russian composer Alexander Glazunov. Then again, it couldn't have been any other way: this choreographic masterpiece arose from the talent of three ballet giants.

Let's start with the fact that *Raymonda* is the last ballet of the imperial choreographer Marius Petipa, the epitome of his creative pathway. The full power of the classical Russian ballet school is revealed in the *Raymonda* suites. The laconic *Pas de Dix* - a dance for ten with its five variations appeared before the audience as a grandiose show with stunning jumps (here, we must mention Narek Martirosyan's sky-high flights), incredibly complex lifts, stunning arabesques, sensual adagios. Perhaps this is exactly how they danced on the stage of the Imperial Mariinsky Theater in 1898. Gladisa Guadalupe, the Cleveland Ballet artistic director deserves credit for the delicate reconstruction of the great choreography of Marius Petipa. And if we add to this the honing of the dancers' skills by the famous Valentina Kozlova, specially invited from New York (you just had to see how she worked with the ballerinas' hands), the outcome is not at all surprising - Cleveland's *Raymonda*, based on the mastery of Petipa, Guadalupe, and Kozlova, enhanced by the luxurious sound of the Cleveland Ballet Orchestra under the direction of Caleb Young became one of the highest achievements of our ballet company.

The ***Nocturne*** suite, created by Gladisa Guadalupe to the music of Frederic Chopin became another "breakthrough" in modern choreography.

It is curious that the famous *Chopiniana* by the Russian choreographer Michel Fokine was staged back in 1907 using Chopin's piano compositions (arranged by the same Alexander Glazunov). In 1972, Alexandra Danilova, an American ballerina and choreographer of Russian origin at the New York City Ballet conducted another interesting experiment: in her interpretation of Fokine's ballet, she used Chopin's pure piano music rather than symphonic accompaniment. Gladisa Guadalupe went even further. Having abandoned Fokine's canonical ballet with its creeping, soaring dances, she appeared as an innovative choreographer masterfully conquering the intricacies of ballet technique. Her *Nocturne* is not just a

dream world, but rather the music of a brilliant composer that has come to life and become visible. All six episodes, including three nocturnes, two waltzes, and an impromptu Fantasia seem to flow into one another; their enchanting beauty fascinates, although the audience subconsciously feels how difficult this choreography is to perform. The refined technique of the dancers (especially impressive was the *Waltz in A minor*, brilliantly performed by Marla Aleyda and Bruno Palheta) is dedicated to one thing only - His Majesty The Mood reigns supreme. At the same time, having abandoned the canons of *Chopiniana*, Guadalupe went for another experiment. The outstanding Cleveland pianist and teacher Gerardo Teissonniere with a magnificent Steinway and Sons grand piano became the focal point in the center of the stage. His virtuoso interpretation of Chopin's pieces once again confirmed that piano music, initially not at all intended for choreography, harmoniously merges with ballet when performed with talent.

The main thing in theater is not to understand, but to feel - to open your heart and catch the vibrations coming from the stage. I thought about this while trying to understand why another work by Gladisa Guadalupe, the one-act ballet *Carmen*, had such a strong impact on the viewer. After all, it is even difficult to imagine such a mixture of genres and music on the theme of the famous story by Prosper Merimee. Nevertheless, the choreographer went for an unthinkable experiment. And now the super-popular opera music of the Frenchman Georges Bizet is combined with the march from the Spanish opera *El Gato Montès* by Manuel Penella about the rivalry between the bandit Juanillo and the bullfighter Rafael over the love of the gypsy Solea (similar plot, isn't it?), a march that is still heard at every bullfight.

By the will of Guadalupe, an almost pagan choir of ballerinas (!) bursts into the fabric of *Carmen*, penetrating to the very core, performing a folk song in purely street-style to the sound of their own palms pounding on the table. It sounds wild but is absolutely organic and natural! And, most importantly, it causes an incredible dramatic impact.

If we add to the list of experiments the introduction of a live guitarist Daniel Rodriguez with music that seems to tremble in his fingers, and two absolutely amazing (again, singing live) vocalists Zoya Gramagin and James Binion, then it becomes clear: no genre-based and canonical restrictions apply to the artistic director of the Cleveland Ballet. She simply enjoys the game of the Incompatible at first glance, powerfully pushing the boundaries of centuries-old traditions. Or maybe the secret of Gladisa's playfulness in *Carmen* is in her character - a rebellious, romantic woman who has retained in herself the mischief, unyielding freedom of feelings, and her life's truth, inherent in true Puerto Rican women. And I believe that Gladisa managed to convey all her deepest feelings to the leading performer Albina Ghazaryan. In turn, the fatefully beautiful Albina, with her skill and sensual beauty, with her powerful sexual energy and seductiveness, managed to absorb Guadalupe's choreography, making it her own. Albina-Carmen radiates natural eroticism, she doesn't need to perform IT. THIS is the innate, natural, unfettered gift of her feminine nature. And she dances with great desire and freedom.

The creative symbiosis produced amazing results. In the stream of successes that accompany *Carmen's* eternal plot in theater and film history, it is difficult to say something new, to find something that has not yet been said. Gladisa Guadalupe succeeded.

Unfortunately, the newspaper format limits our ability to talk in detail about all the metamorphoses and creative discoveries in the new performance. All we can do is to briefly list the brilliant work of the troupe, the magnificent new costumes, the subtle, laconic decorations, the super sound of the orchestra.

A holiday of the soul, a holiday of color, a holiday of joy.

Thank you, Cleveland Ballet, thank you Dr. Mikhail Krasnyansky, bravo to the outstanding master of the stage Gladisa Guadalupe!