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MEXICAN-AMERICAN AMITY IN OAKLAND

📅 November 4, 2017 (<http://www.artssf.com/mexican-american-amity-oakland/>) 👤 Paul Hertelendy
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Four collaborating East Bay troupes furnished a pulse-quickening show in the Oakland Ballet's latest "Dia de (los) Muertos" blowout before a large crowd whopping it up enthusiastically.

The Mexican counterpart to the European Day of the Dead is a joyous feast of color and vivacity despite all the skulls and skeletons dancing about the Paramount stage (as well as others who were ticket-buyers, watching from the prime seats out front, with elaborate face paint). The performance pace was breath-taking, the caliber of dance and music unassailable.

OB Artistic Director Graham Lustig reoriented his antennae by 180 degrees from England to Mexico and went on to choreograph the OB in "Luna Mexicana" to mariachi music (what else?). Though the ballet's contribution made up only half the program, the Latino-leaning audience made no complaints, given the 10 Mariachi Mexicanismo instrumentalists and the stunning Hayward-based ensemble Ballet Folklo'rico Me'xico Danza.

Lustig's "Luna Mexicana" (Mexican Moon), aptly played out on the Nov. 3 night of the full moon, put the 10 dancers through the paces so fluently, you'd have thought they were from Guadalajara or Teotihuacan. This was ballet all right, in toe shoes, but in festive Mexican attire, with long, billowing dresses bursting in color, and men in tuxedos, with all wearing skull masks. Memorable in the cast were Ramona Kelley as the golden Luna, and the tall Calvin Thomas sweeping about the stage recalling the Joffrey Ballet star Christian Holder of much earlier times.

Ultraviolet light playing on unitards brought out skeleton-bone designs, suggesting happy dancing figures raised from the dead.

More serious was the Ballet Folklo'rico Me'xico Danza's "Viva la Vida!" centennial tribute to the great dance director Amalia Hernandez. It recalls the Mexican Revolution, complete with women warriors sporting bandoliers and rifles, sometimes pointed threateningly at the audience, as if giving us their opinion of our proposed Wall. There was also a congenial Devil whose pitchfork morphed into a guitar, plus galloping "mounted" cowboys on dummy steeds.

The Oakland Ballet's remarkable Ramona Kelley executed the solo "Chaconne" created by Jose' Limo'n in New York, 1942. This classic, to an unaccompanied Bach violin, is fluid, moderately paced, and effortlessly filling the Paramount stage, with arms and legs stretched in every direction, yet never pressing.

On any other program, the 10 men of Mariachi Mexicanismo would have stolen the show with their instrumental fireworks, including the song "En mi manera," which you'd recognize as the Sinatra standard "(Doing It) My Way."

PRELUDES, POSTLUDES—The Oakland troupe had presented its "Luna" program before more than 10,000 students in the previous weeks—an exemplary educational thrust...Among the fine "Muertos" touches were gaily decorated altars, both on stage and in the lobby...The audience gasped audibly in the show when youthful performers arose from graves and began to dance.

Oakland Ballet in 'Luna Mexicana' and guest troupes, Paramount Theater, Oakland, Nov. 3. For OB info: Go online (<http://www.oaklandballet.org>).

—OAKLAND

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