

Posted on Wednesday, 01.09.13

DANCE

Miami choreographer breaks into big time with New York debut

Miami choreographer's dance troupe makes its New York debut this week

BY JORDAN LEVIN

JLEVIN@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Miami choreographer Rosie Herrera has never felt luckier.

This week, the 29-year-old Hialeah native's troupe makes its New York debut at the Joyce Theater, one of the city's top dance venues, at a prestigious showcase for international arts presenters. And in April, the Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre will perform at the Big Apple's Baryshnikov Arts Center — at the invitation of its famous artistic director, Mikhail Baryshnikov, who has become a fan.

No Miami choreographer has had this kind of platform in the nation's dance capital.

"I always feel like someone's about to pull the carpet out from under me and say, 'We're tricking you!'" Herrera says over quiche at a Design District café. "How can one girl be so lucky?"

More important than luck, of course, is Herrera's talent, and the support it has attracted. For three years, one of the biggest and best-known dance events in the country, the American Dance Festival in Durham, N.C., has commissioned and presented her dreamlike, emotionally freighted dance-theater pieces. And the Adrienne Arsht Center has co-commissioned and presented them in Miami.

"It's such an amazing thing to feel like you have these two organizations behind you who really believe in your vision," Herrera says. "The greatest honor is that so many people are connecting to my work."

Festival director Jodee Nimerichter picked Herrera for the Joyce showcase, part of an Association of Performing Arts Presenters conference that draws hundreds of arts presenters shopping for work. Most groups perform short excerpts in bare-bones studios, but Herrera will get a full production of her *Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret* Thursday and Saturday. The Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre will share the Joyce series with five established New York-area troupes, some of which she has admired for years.

"It feels like the biggest show of my life," says Herrera, a New World School of the Arts graduate. "I'm on the same program with Eiko and Koma! And Doug Varone!"

Nimerichter believes Herrera is ready for the high-profile venue. "I wanted to give her a platform to show her work because I firmly believe it is great work," she said. "It is an extraordinary opportunity for her work to get seen by presenters from across the U.S. and the world who could find themselves enlightened by something new and original."

Nimerichter also brought Herrera to Baryshnikov's attention, including her work in DVDs she sent to him for programming consideration. Herrera's was the only one the Russian dance star selected. The two met in March, when Baryshnikov came to Miami for a show of his photographs at the Gary Nader Gallery, while Herrera was rehearsing her latest piece, *Dining Alone*, for a show at the Arsht.

Herrera, whose eclectic résumé includes dancing in rap videos and Little Havana cabarets, says she was initially more excited to see a famous '80's hip-hop dancer at the Nader gallery. "My dancers were all freaking out that Baryshnikov was coming to rehearsal," she says. "I was like, 'Oh my God! It's pop master Fabel Pabon!'"

But finding out that her work moved the dance legend turned out to be far more gratifying. "He said he laughed really hard, and then he would be ashamed that he laughed," Herrera says.

Baryshnikov said he was attracted to the "theatricality and emotional content" of Herrera's work and her distinctly Miami style.

"She mixes up different mediums in unexpected and quirky ways that set her apart," Baryshnikov wrote in an email. "She is a woman of ideas who draws from cultures, experiences and training not necessarily commonly represented in New York.

"While Miami is so rich culturally, we see little contemporary dance emerging from that city or that region in general. It is nice to provide an opportunity for New Yorkers to connect with a young and adventurous artist from that part of the country."

The Arsht Center and the American Dance Festival are co-producing Herrera's April 18-19 shows at the Baryshnikov Arts Center and even paying for a reception.

"To have a Miami artist come through the Miami Made program and be seen not only by Miami but ADF and now even larger audiences in New York is a fulfillment of the center's mission," says Scott Schiller, the Arsht's executive vice president.

"We feel lucky to be a part of what Rosie is doing and really proud to have her continuing to work in Miami with her company and extremely proud she's done so much work on Arsht stages."

Herrera is trying to focus not on how critical New York audiences will judge her but on the vision that has brought her this far.

"Yes, people [in New York] have seen a lot," she says. "But I hope to give them a completely different feeling. We're from Miami, we live in the light, by the water. I want to do the best possible job of being who we are. And I hope that people in New York connect with that."

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/09/v-fullstory/3172624/miami-choreographer-breaks-into.html#storylink=cpy>