



# Dancer/choreographer Rosie Herrera lets her body and work do the talking

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**STORY WRITTEN BY TARA LYNN JOHNSON**

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Rosie Herrera is a high-pitched pint-sized powerhouse of creativity. She stands only five feet tall and sounds a lot younger than she is, but that's OK — she lets her dancing and choreography do her talking.

The Cuban-Puerto Rican makes her home and works from Miami. She hopes the weather isn't too cold in Philadelphia in January when she visits with her company. Even if it is, she'll still have a great time. "I'm really excited to perform there," she said. "Philadelphia has an incredibly diverse audience and community. I'm excited to see how people connect with the work."

The Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre, in four shows at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, will feature two of her signature pieces: "Dining Alone" and "Various Stages of Drowning." Her company features performers from various backgrounds: a drag queen from cabaret; a world-famous break-dancer; an opera singer; a classically-trained Julliard ballerina; and more, she said. They have different body types and are from diverse backgrounds. There are different entry points inviting everyone in to the experience, she said. The group shares a similar technique, the energy of Miami, and a love of storytelling through movement.

"Dining Alone" is "near and dear to my heart," she said. Herrera grew up in her father's Spanish restaurant and, in her community, food was the center of social gatherings. It's meant to be shared, she said. Also, older generations are revered, and yet those were often the people eating by themselves. "I saw a lot of people dining alone and had an empathetic reaction to watching people," she said. "I wanted to deconstruct what that revealed about my attitudes about food and aging."

"...Drowning" interprets dreams featuring water that Herrera had during a three-year period. Water is a symbol for the unconscious, she said, and she wanted to explore what the role of archetypes in her dreams were and what her dreams were trying to reveal. She also wanted to intellectually look at what it meant to be drowning, "sometimes in someone else's presence, in stress, or literally drowning," she said. Aesthetically, that piece incorporates her long history of working in cabarets and features a lot of symbolism relating to that.

Dancing allows her to explore any topic through movement and theater. What it all means to viewers is ultimately up to them, though. "I like to leave a lot of symbolism and narrative open for the audience to project based on their own experiences," she said.

Herrera said everything about where and how she grew up affects her work, her choice of music, and her use of drama. She joked that you can't watch novellas growing up and not like drama. Miami inspires her, too. "Miami is to South America what New York is to Europe. There's an energy of the just-arriving people and there's a rich history — all of that is important to my work," she said.

When asked why she became a dancer, she replied simply, "I'm Cuban."

She started break-dancing at age 4. She describes herself as having been a shy child, but not on the dance floor. She performed in cabarets during high school. She went to a conservatory to study classical ballet, and modern and jazz dance.

Dancing was also a tradition of her heritage. Growing up, on Sundays, she went dancing with her father. It was a way for her to “talk” with her parents. “That’s always been part of how we express ourselves and our connection and our love for each other,” she said.

For Herrera, dance always has been a spiritual experience. “Dancing is a basic human impulse which resides in the body,” she said. “It can be and is really beautiful and I’m super lucky that this is what I do.”

She hopes those in the Philadelphia region will enjoy the shows and connect with what she’s trying to say. “Dance has the potential to be so impactful. It’s a universal language,” she said. “The body is the greatest communicator. And the body never lies.”