



A Miami-taken "Various Stages of Drowning" moment, courtesy of the Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre. (Adam Reign photo)

## Rosie Herrera brings transcendental dining and drowning to the Annenberg

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There's something about Rosie Herrera that I picked up even over the phone on Friday: Her sincerity, warmth and the way that she approaches performance with open-hearted creativity. The Rosie Herrera Dance Theatre company descends upon the Annenberg Center in University City for three nights this week, and she brings nine co-conspirators with her from Miami. The Cuban-American's specialties, as well as the artistic allegiances she's built within her company, are vastly varied—there's bits of cabaret, opera, urban contemporary dance, ballet and, perhaps most surprisingly, drag.

"That's everybody's favorite part," she says with a giggle. Drag is certainly an endearing performance community in the Florida culture capital that she loves, and if it's important to Miami, it's important to Herrera. "I was always committed to my community in Miami. It's a really beautiful and interesting place to live. I'm inspired there more than anywhere else in the world, and I knew it was where I would be making my home."

She says Miami's experiencing quite a cultural boom, not unlike Philly. Herrera's a New World School of the Arts graduate (she's got a B.F.A. in dance) who has bopped around different styles of performance for years, from cabaret dancing in Little Havana to exploring a lifelong love of opera and classical music.

"I have a really diverse background as a performer, and because of that, my circle of creators and movers is also very diverse," she explains—and one of those circles is drag. Herrera says she's been involved with the drag community since high school. Namely, she's tight with Gerardo Pilatti, better known around South Beach as Geraldine. "He's a founding company member. He's one of my muses. He's a really incredible actor, and one of the things he does is drag," she says, underscoring the laid-back and natural diversity of RHDT. "I like people that look like people, so [diversity is] important to me." Herrera and her peers represent over a half-dozen nationalities, but their common connectivity is their willingness to make slightly adventurous work. "I just like cool people, and I'm lucky that they're all beautiful and

different-looking, and they're kickass at what they do. They're great risk-takers and very kind and very smart. That's the common language that we share."

They'll execute two numbers at the Annenberg: "Dining Alone," then "Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret." The former is born out of Herrera's childhood and the experiences she culled from hanging around her father's restaurant. "I was always intrigued by my strange, empathetic instinct to watching people eat alone," she explains, adding that this piece came from deconstructing that instinct. It calls on RHDT's cultural attitudes toward food and aging. "I would watch people dine alone, particularly if they were older," and it would pain her, she went on, because of her Cuban heritage, where "dining is always a social interaction. It's meant to be shared." Appropriate and fitting, then, that Herrera says, "I always try to deal with subject matter that gets me in the gut—in the gut versus the heart or the head."

"Drowning," it seems, goes for a little bit more of the fantastic and avant garde. It employs an underwater film, and Herrera says she went right for gender ambiguity to make a point. In recreating dreamscapes, she says, "part of what's important to that is this idea of blended sexuality. It's also a conscious decision of mine that when I'm talking about power plays, love, romance, sex, that everything that is a part of my life is included in that. I would be false if I told just the story of a man and a woman. It's not part of my life because I see so much more than that." That's straight-up inspiring.

One of RHDT's star company members is Rudi Goblen, who is damn near an international B-boy superstar. Herrera says he gets recognized wherever they go, and to put him in a dance-company context makes one crook their neck and sit up straight. That's another way Herrera likes to toy with expectations and representations. She saw herself in any movie or stage production where there was often one—and only one—brown girl. "That's me!" she says she thought when she saw the one Latina girl in *Annie*. "The way that I connected to that and the visibility for my skin tone on-stage, that made me feel like I can be a part of it."

Herrera's pumped to bring these works to Philadelphia—and we are, too, to have her. "I'm really excited for Philly because I've always wanted to perform there. The audiences there are so diverse and generous, and I've been really hungry to get that feedback." We're pretty certain it'll be warm and loving, not unlike her tropical soul.