



DANCE WITH A LATIN BEAT MANHATTAN

TINA RAMIREZ HAS CREATED
A SPANISH DANCE COMPANY
ON MANHATTAN'S UPPER WEST SIDE.

BY VALERIE GLADSTONE
PHOTOS BY BRUCE LAURANCE



Eight long-limbed dancers undulate across the floor, moving their torsos with the flexibility of cats. Tossing their long, dark hair with abandon, the women throw taunting looks from behind their fans at their suitors, who gently mop sweat from their brows with invisible handkerchiefs. To the romantic rhythms of Cuban songs of the 1950s, and under the direction of distinguished Cuban choreographer Alberto Alonso, the members of Ballet Hispanico are conjuring up Old Havana in a dance created especially for them.

For all those who decry the lack of passion in today's dance, Ballet Hispanico is the answer. The brainchild of Tina Ramirez, this thirteen-member, Manhattan-based company has been strutting its stuff all over the United States and the world for almost twenty-five years. It has danced at the Kennedy Center, Spain's Expo '92, and Jacob's Pillow, in 5,000-seat South American theaters and universities' alternative spaces. The company's com-

bination of balletic lines and the folkloric and movement styles of South and Central America, Spain, and the Caribbean is one of the revelations of dance today. Fortunate New York City audiences can see for themselves when Ballet Hispanico takes to the Joyce Theater stage from November 29 through December 11.

"When we travel to a city for the first time," says Venezuela-born Ramirez, whose mother was Puerto Rican and whose father was a Mexican bullfighter, "the audience doesn't know what to expect—ballet, modern, folklore. Most people have misconceptions about Hispanic culture. After they see our shows, they have a much better understanding."

A small, fine-boned woman, Ramirez has the formidable responsibilities of running both the company, which tours several months a year, and a nine-hundred-student school where mostly minority and disadvantaged children learn classical ballet and traditional Spanish dance. Her mission drives her: "I want my students and company to know the richness of their backgrounds and be proud."

After arriving in the United States at age seven, Ramirez studied with Lola Bravo, the grande dame of Spanish

Ballet Hispanico founder Tina Ramirez (above) and José Costas (opposite) in Susan Marshall's Solo (actually a pas de deux with a bowl of water).