



Canada's Dance Magazine

TDC on the Ground

PANAMANIA

***Niágara: A Pan-American Story* by Veronica Tennant**

Watching the theatrical production *Niágara*, I was looking for director Veronica Tennant in the details. Tennant began her career as a ballerina with The National Ballet of Canada, established as a national and international star in the 1970s, and when, after twenty-five years, she moved on to a new career, she found success there too, in film projects and work as a director/producer. In *Niágara*, I found her unique influence in the transitions and moments where text couldn't communicate as well as a simple gesture could.

Niágara is the story of José María Heredia, a poet and revolutionary who was exiled from his native Cuba in 1824. His cathartic poem, *Ode to Niágara*, written on the precipice of Niagara Falls at the age of twenty immortalized him as the first Romantic poet in the Spanish language and the first "Poet of the Americas", according to the program. Cubans cherish this poem, but for Canadians, this fact is hardly known. The work, presented at the Daniels Spectrum theatre in Toronto on July 23-26 as part of the PANAMANIA festival, uses video recordings of waterfalls, African dancing (by Toronto Dance Theatre's Pulga Muchochoma), a corridor, a garden, a star-filled sky, to establish location and memory. Actors René Millán and Paula Rivera tell the story of Heredia's life: Millán as Heredia and Rivera as his mother, first love and wife. Vocalist Brent Carver is the third body onstage, bringing this story, written by Guillermo Verdecchia, to life. But again it was the details: the movement emphasis of the bodies around the stage – an added twirl as a scene changes or a slow head circle indicating time passing – that I caught as I watched this theatrical production. It's the details a dancer knows – how powerfully movement communicates – that tie the story together. ~Brittany Duggan

Niágara was a PANAMANIA commission.