

Thea Gray
9-14-05

GLOBAL NOTE/QUERY:
spelled Feijoo by sister Lorna's
dance company and Feijoo
(no accent) by SF Ballet.
House style has been without accent.

Suggested title?

AQ: Janet
or Jeanette?

By Jeanette Knowles

Lorena Feijoo has just departed the stage at the War Memorial Opera House, ~~and, back hidden among the curtains and cables, her veins pulse with blood and new oxygen like a mare in the winner circle.~~ The

the prima ballerina has just finished ^{following} a rapturous, vigorous performance in ^{San Francisco Ballet's production of}

ital / cap

Lamborena and as she really starts to sweat and greets a small gathering of well wishers, you have to wonder: is this sinewy empress of the air the city's best kept secret?

foggy?

Sure, everybody's heard about our wintry, cloudy summers and that pretty bridge. But only in the rarefied world of dance is San Francisco known as the home of ^{one of} ~~perhaps the~~ the most compelling ballerina ^s of

our?

all time, ^a the dark-eyed daughter of a dancing ^{er} family from Cuba, who, like her ~~mother and~~ sister Lorna (now a principle dancer with the Boston Ballet) ^{and mother Lupe Calzadilla,} learned her art from the legendary Alicia Alonzo.

"Sultry, passionate, take-no-prisoners," is how ^{the} Los Angeles Times ^{ital} dance critic Lewis Segal describes Feijoo. "She's one of the best dancers in America. Fiery and intense when she wants to be, technical when she wants to be. And there are very few dancers who are just as strong at both."

Still, Feijoo is not satisfied with being a principle dancer at one of the premier ballet companies in America. At 34, she has plenty of plie left in her sinewy, robust legs, but at this moment she's about to burst onto a much bigger stage. This fall, Feijoo debuts in her very first acting role in The Lost City, directed by and starring Andy Garcia, along with Dustin Hoffman and Bill Murray. In the movie, which is set at that pivotal moment in history when ^{Fidel} Castro ascended and the Caribbean island playground became so much more... complicated, Feijoo plays the straw ^{that} the stirs the drink, literally. That is, ^{Feijoo} as she plays the iconic dancer ^{at Havana's} famed Tropicana, ^{whose} Feijoo's image is carved on a stirrer ^{that} Garcia's character gives her while they flirt in Feijoo's her dressing room.

Slightly odd combo

ital

took power? life in?

that

Here's how it all came about. At a post-performance gathering at Tosca, in a late-night conversation with the famous North Beach ^{cafe} tavern's well-connected owner, Jeannette Etheridge, Feijoo mentioned her interest in acting.

"I didn't take it too seriously," Feijoo ^{told} me over ^{politans} Cosmos and ^{le} Gnocchi at the boisterous Jardiniere. In a slinky, sleeveless dress and worn, beaten-up brown boots, ^{she} Feijoo is affable and warm ^{on stage,} her eyes ^{on that stage} are like smudges of charcoal with sharp, glittering diamonds in the middle, ^{but} tonight, in the softer light of this Hayes Valley ^{restaurant} ^{cafe,} ^{and they} take on a lighter hue, an almost milky vagueness. One thinks, for some reason, of a magnificent snake about to shed its skin.

le

restaurant

necessary? recommend delete.

global change to header:

Knowles

O'Brien/Fejoo/Page 3

Nearly a year after the ^{circ} Tosca encounter, Etheredge showed up at a ballet rehearsal and dragged Fejoo, still in her point shoes, across the street to the movie set of the 2004 thriller, ^{at} Twisted, to meet fellow Cuban expatriate, Andy Garcia. The dancer and the drop-dead-^{of} handsome actor bonded easily over their their love and longing for Havana. Garcia had departed with his parents at the age of 10; Fejoo left alone, at 19.

"My main concern was my family," she says now. "How I would miss them. It was my roots, my grandma, my mother, my sister. I was leaving everything behind."

"Everything" included a certain broad fame that ballet dancers ^{can} ~~somehow manage to~~ achieve in Cuba. Fejoo was just beginning to dance principle roles, but ^{cal} she nonetheless already had a following in Havana. "I remember a group of people who would write down the dates I'd premiered things. That's how they follow you. And they really have a knowledge. They know when you're not feeling well and when you change a step."

But there were ~~so~~ many fabulous dancers in Havana, and Fejoo knew her greatest—and most exciting ^Mopportunities lay elsewhere. After ^{with the Ballet of r in} stints in Monterey, Mexico, in Belgium with the Royal Ballet of Flanders, and ^{with} the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago, Fejoo landed in our fair city, where she ^{it seems} and has been stirring audiences happily since 1999. Still, ~~one senses~~ that something of great import is missing. "In

necessary?

Cuba," says Feijoo, "ballet is a big, big deal, like baseball. It's seen as a sport, and people understand it." Here, though, ballet fans are warm and loyal, but they come in smaller numbers and narrower demographics. Perhaps that's why Feijoo is attracted to the movies.

And that's where Andy Garcia comes in. A year after their impromptu meeting in ~~San Francisco~~, Garcia came to see Feijoo dance what might be her signature role, the ~~jealous tavern-keeper~~ ^{sought-after} Kitri in Don Quixote. This magazine's dance critic, Paul Parrish, described Feijoo's Don Q entrance ~~to me like this~~ ^{in this way}: "She just came in with this unbelievable, over-the-top energy. It's a little like Calamity Jane. Or as if Shirley Temple grew up into a woman with passion."

(Hal)
(Hal)

(ital)

in The Lost City
(ital)

Garcia says he knew right away that Feijoo was right for the role. And he's ^{been} more than pleased with his decision. "Her instincts as an actress are right on the money," he says. "She could handle a much larger part than I had to offer."

(rom)

Feijoo's happy, too, if for no reason other than ^{to have} the luxury of a second chance that film affords a performer. "On stage, if you don't do it correctly, that's it, it's gone. But in film, if you don't like it, you can go back."

So, is this the beginning of something new, or just a delicious digression in a thoroughly demanding career? "I'd love to do more acting," the diva says, but luckily, she has no immediate plans to cut

usually refers to singers; also can have a pejorative connotation

for us

back on her dancing. Still, given the seductive power of her stage presence, it's easy to imagine Fejoo making a full-time transition to film some day.

Indeed, I'd felt ^{its} the draw even before we met for ^{our interview} dinner, ~~even before we'd met at all~~

Two days earlier, we'd made eye contact across a crowded room and I'd been certain she was flirting with me. She'd smiled, ~~probably~~ possibly winked. I couldn't imagine what she saw in me, but I was moved, intrigued, flattered, ^I was just beginning to consider the possibilities when the curtain fell, the performance ended, and I shuffled up the aisle with all the ^{other} ~~coupees and blue hairs, all the terminally bored grandkids and thrilled~~ ballet aficionados at a Saturday matinee. We were all abuzz, ^g all suddenly full of hope, each of us ^g feeling ~~flirted with~~ ^{that} the power of ^g by those bright ^g blue, sparkling eyes ~~meeting ours~~.

her eyes are brown

magnetism?

It's the Lorena Fejoo experience, coming soon, ~~one way or another,~~ to a theater near you.

Janet or Jeannette?

Janet Knowles is a Bay Area-based freelance writer.