

events

reviews

classes



“Si Se Puede” Illuminates an American Icon:
Talento Bilingüe de Houston presents new work from the
Sandra Organ Dance Company

by Michele Brangwen
Talento Bilingüe de Houston
4/3/2007

On the eve of the anniversary of activist and labor leader Cesar Chavez' birthday, Talento Bilingüe de Houston presented the premiere of the Sandra Organ Dance Company in *Si Se Puede*. A work in progress that explores the life of the man who gave birth to the United Farm Workers organization, *Si Se Puede's* well-chosen title translates as “it can be done.” Reminiscent of Susan B. Anthony's mantra “failure is impossible,” it poetically sums up the slender thread of hope that can thicken into significant change for the better in the lives of many people.

Chavez is often compared to Martin Luther King, Jr. in his ability to galvanize support for civil rights and his allegiance to non-violent means of protest. His hunger strikes – one lasting an amazing 36 days – as a response to the use of pesticides that caused cancer in farm workers also harkens back to the radical suffragettes. They, like Chavez, pledged their own human suffering as a means of communicating the importance of the issue at hand. Born in Arizona on March 31 1927, Cesar Chavez is the embodiment of the American heroic icon, and yet not as much a household name as one would hope.

How better to illuminate that which is more than just the sum of one life, then with a work of art. *Si Se Puede*, with choreography by Sandra Organ Solis, was an eloquently crafted and successful inroad into the life

of Cesar Chavez. Although only two sections of a larger work to come, the evening's offerings carried ample weight on their own.

Tata Dios, a duet superbly danced by Sandra Organ Solis and Richard Hubscher, was set to Valariano Trejo's song of the same title, sung by Linda Ronstadt. Ronstadt's father, Gilbert, was a close friend of Chicano music legend Lalo Guerrero, who was both inspired by and a close friend of Cesar Chavez. Ronstadt remembers as a child being serenaded by Guerrero, the man who gave Chavez' movement its theme music. Her rendition of a song about a woman whose love for the verdant farmland is surpassed by weariness was a succinct musical choice for the dance.

Solis' choreography seamlessly linked fluid passages of movement with shapes and gestures that while abstract, evoked a language of meaning all their own. Arms and torsos yielded the unseen weight of memory and attachment as they arced one into the other. This is in many ways the essence of contemporary dance; it isn't literal but we know what it means intuitively when we perceive it.

The duet was also performed during the company's Black History Month concerts in February, and while well-danced by other company members, the pathos and chemistry of Hubscher and Solis' dancing in Friday's performance created an emotional undercurrent that heightened the impact of the work.

Solis is a dancer who turns as if sustained by a current of air, effortlessly revolving in space. Her finely honed technique coupled with her nuanced stage presence were a delight to watch. Hubscher had a good intensity to his partnering. The two seemed connected even when their bodies were not in contact with each other. Their simpatico focus and smoothness makes one hope they will continue to dance together.

The second section, a solo danced by Gumaro Armando Silva, was set to a spoken word score by Diego Davalos that included Chavez' own words. Solis' choreography didn't give way to pantomiming the text, but rather illuminated the myriad spectrum of feelings in the words. Silva, a guest artist from Dallas Black Dance Theater, excelled in both the buoyant and athletic parts of the dance as well as the sustained and introspective components. His appealing lines combined with a viable dramatic presence, keeping the character with us through to the work's final moment. Silva, as Chavez, exits the stage directly into us, as if carrying his message into our hearts, uttering the words "si se si puede."

The subject matter, in addition to being historical, possesses a certain timely relevance. Leaders like Chavez seem to be rare and poignantly missing from our present culture. In Solis' capable artistic hands, the longer version will no doubt be a work for Houston audiences not to miss.