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Ballet-hip-hop mix: Not a stretch

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Rubberbandance's mix of classically trained and hip-hop dancers highlights strengths. All the dancers show a supple bounciness.

"Rubberband" was the name choreographer Victor Quijada earned coming up as an elastic-bodied hip-hop dancer in Los Angeles. After he studied at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, luck and pluck led to professional work with dance giants Twyla Tharp, Eliot Feld, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal.

This exceptional trajectory informs each spectacular moment in the Montreal-based Rubberbandance Group's touring show. Presented at the Annenberg by Dance Celebration, now celebrating its own 25th anniversary, the show was a delicious birthday treat.

Elastic Perspective, a suite of pieces for six dancers to a music mix from Vivaldi to rap, is an utter crowd-pleaser. Each piece reveals a kind of human encounter, whether competitive group fireworks with unison flips, a tango-inflected duet with surging lifts and spins, or a standout solo highlighting Quijada's own finely calibrated energy. Transitions are a particular strength. The action of one section is allowed to ebb fully before dancing lights up the stage once more.

Quijada is a total original. His unlikely mix of hip-hop with Vivaldi, Prokofiev or even Verdi succeeds because he has fully absorbed Tharp's choreographic craft. He often makes music visual: The dancers hit the height of a lift on the high point of a melodic arc or find a perfect counterpart in shape to the melodic form.

The movement is extreme in its refinement: Quijada knows just when to give it an extra pop, when to have a dancer zoom fast in tiny circles or slow into a lazy slither. He knows the power of gesture, and uses it sparingly, so that when punch lines come, we feel delighted, not manipulated. Even with a zillion tricks up his sleeve, he's unafraid to reset our eyes with a stripped-down simplicity - in a male duet, a slow-motion lift sequence spoke volumes about cooperation and vulnerability.

After intermission, *Hasta la Proxima* read as a meditation on love, violence and loss, with occasional taped text.

With steeply angled shafts of light and saturated color, Yan Lee Chan's lighting was a powerful partner in creating mood.

Rubberbandance's mix of classically trained and hip-hop dancers highlights the strengths of each. Wearing street clothes and sneakers, all the dancers show a supple dynamic bounciness. And where break dancing requires fine isolations and a hunkering compactness for low-to-the-ground spins, ballet emphasizes leverage and length. It's satisfying to see both qualities fuse in one body. Anne Plamondon deserves special mention for her nifty intensity.