

Film Review: 'Horizons'



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A Swiss helmer travels to Cuba to explore what ballet means to the national character.

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An almost spiritual celebration of classical ballet, as practiced by three generations of Cuban terps, [Eileen Hofer](http://variety.com/t/eileen-hofer/)'s "[Horizons](http://variety.com/t/horizons/)" pays tribute to the discipline and dedication it takes to dance, while offering a glimpse at contempo life in a country that still remains largely shielded to American eyes. Hofer's central attraction here is her access to ballet legend and local hero [Alicia Alonso](http://variety.com/t/alicia-alonso/), now 93, who refused to abandon her calling despite vision problems that left her nearly blind. Alonso founded the National Ballet of Cuba, for which Viengsay Valdes now dances, while young Amanda de Jesus Perez Duarte, who aspires to join the company, rounds out the trio. Together, their interwoven stories give arthouse auds an enchanting glimpse of ballet talent, past, present and future.

Rather than looking for dramatic arcs or narrative challenges in each of the three dancers' lives, rising Swiss helmer Eileen Hofer has taken a looser, less

in Havana, she looks for visual matches within the footage that allow her to transition among the three characters — and move even deeper into the past — as seen in a 90-second opening montage, when archival footage of a spinning Alonso cuts to Valdes doing fouettes centerscreen, followed by the less experienced Amanda practicing pirouettes in the same position.

Hofer appears to have discovered many of these homologues in editing, yielding an after-the-fact fluidity that poses an intriguing contrast with the rigid formalism of ballet itself. In dance, the performers push themselves toward perfection, attempting to master a sequence of moves dictated in advance, whereas Hofer collects her footage and only later assembles it into a free-flowing and hypnotic experience.

The discipline of dance also speaks to another of the film's themes, which concerns the link between ballet and Cuban communism. In many ways, ballet is an ideal metaphor for such a system, representing the apotheosis of artistic conformity, self-sacrifice and obedience, and it comes as little surprise to see Alonso held up as a national hero, feted by Fidel Castro himself: "Ballet is the foundation of our revolution," the people chant.

Hofer tags along as Amanda visits the National Ballet, whose halls function as a shrine to Alonso's greatness, and where a mischievous kitten seems oblivious to the significance. There, a tour guide offers insight into Alonso's personality (she allegedly still carries her slippers everywhere she goes), while the grande dame herself continues to give lessons.

At one point, we even witness a ceremony in which the nonagenarian dances a few steps. Once a swan, the woman now looks more like an old pterodactyl — such is the tragedy of age, yet another theme evoked by this intergenerational comparison. Music, from Swiss chanteuse Heidi Happy and of the lower-key instrumental sort, ties everything together beautifully, encouraging free-associative reactions from the film's mesmerized audience.

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Reviewed at Visions du Reel (Regard Neuf), Nyon, Switzerland, April 20, 2015. Running time: **71 MIN.** (Original title: "Horizontes")

Production

(Documentary — Switzerland) An Intermezzo Films presentation, with the participation of RTS Radiotelevision Suisse, with the support of Cineforum and Loterie Romande, Office

Federal de la Culture (DFC), Fondation IBS pour la culture, Union Bancaire Privée, Variety.com/2015/film/festivals/horizons-review-horizon...
Horizons Review: Urban Ballet follows a Cuban dance troupe. Produced by Aline Schmid, Eileen Hofer.

Crew

Directed by Eileen Hofer. Camera (<http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/>) (color), Gregory Bindschedler; editors (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/editors/>), Damian Plandolit, Valentin Rotelli; music, Julien Painot, Ladislav Agabekov; sound, Michel Caballero Acosta, Raynier Hinojosa, Adrian Garcia, Yulisander Mallese, Damian Rubiera Hernandez; supervising sound editor/re-recording mixer, Benjamin Benoit; assistant director, Elena Lopez Riera.

With

Alicia Alonso, Viengsay Valdes, Amanda de Jesus Perez Duarte. (Spanish, English dialogue)

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