

THE MOUNTAIN VIEW BALLET COMPANY & SCHOOL  
**WESTERN BALLET**  
ALEXI ZUBIRÍA ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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**PRESS KIT for WESTERN BALLET COMPANY's "DANZÓN!"**

**Alexi Zubiría, Artistic Director of Western Ballet Company.** Born in Venezuela and spending his earliest years in Colombia, Alexi Zubiría discovered ballet at 16 years of age, while attending high school in Bogotá. Five years later, in 1982, while dancing with International Ballet of Caracas (principal dancer) and Ballet Nuevo Mundo (principal dancer), he won a silver medal at the second International Ballet Competition in Jackson, Mississippi, an event that launched his international career. Zubiría danced subsequently with Deutsche Oper Berlin (soloist), Roland Petit's Ballet National de Marseille (principal dancer) and San Francisco Ballet (soloist). His eight-year career with San Francisco Ballet (1986 - 1994) included roles as the male lead in Balanchine's *Theme and Variations*, the Pas de Deux from *Le Corsaire* and the Cavalier in Christensen/Tomasson's *The Nutcracker*. He also danced leading roles in Lew Christensen's *Divertissement d'Auber* and Tomasson's *Bizet Pas de Deux*. After retiring from San Francisco Ballet, Zubiría graduated with a degree in biology and now has a career in bioinformatics in the biotechnology industry. [Listen to an interview of Alexi Zubiría.](#) [Watch Zubiría perform at the second International Ballet Competition in 1982.](#) [Read about Zubiría in the Marin Independent Journal.](#)<sup>1</sup>

Early in his career, Zubiría obtained mentoring from Nina Novak, who danced with the Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo and in 1964 founded a company and school in Caracas after a seven-year marriage to a Venezuelan. Nearly two decades later, the 21-year-old Zubiría trained for three months with Novak prior to the competition in Jackson, Mississippi, where he won a silver medal in the senior division. Novak played a critical role, therefore, in establishing Zubiría's international career.

During the three months in Caracas, Novak taught Zubiría, among other techniques, the use of the human back to dance ballet reproducibly. Zubiría became known to his future colleagues for executing high jumps, multiple (8+) pirouettes and other technically difficult movements with extreme reliability. During his professional career, Zubiría further enhanced the ideas from Novak into an understanding of ballet for which the mechanics of the upper body constitute the structural foundation of movements of the lower body. Zubiría also developed an intellectual framework for another important, related principle of dance: the *fluidity* that originates from the coordinated use of the human back, trajectories of the arms, and legwork of ballet. These concepts Zubiría brought to Western Ballet in 2007, when he assumed the position of Artistic Director.

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<sup>1</sup>Christa Palmer. "From ballet to biology and back." *Marin Independent Journal*. May 28, 2006.

As a mission that derives from his poverty as a youth, Alexi Zubiría, the artistic director of Western Ballet will begin this fall a program of full scholarships for young children who possess an exceptional potential for ballet and a low socioeconomic status in the San Francisco Bay Area. Modeled upon national programs in Europe, Asia and Latin America, which have produced internationally renowned artists such as Jose Carreño of Cuba (formerly a principal dancer of the American Ballet Theatre) and Gustavo Dudamel of Venezuela (the current music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic), Western Ballet's program will identify young children who display physical, intellectual and artistic traits conducive to ballet. Beginning with an audition on Saturday, August 28, 2010 at 1-3 PM, the scholarships will help Western Ballet to produce dancers of the highest caliber in the world.

**Alexi Zubiría on the Program of "Danzón!"** On Friday, July 23, 2010, at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, Western Ballet Company presents choreography and music by distinguished artists from Latin America. This production inaugurates Western Ballet Company as a home of outstanding works by Latin American choreographers and composers, showcasing the power and passion of classical ballet from Latin America.

"Danzón!" features music by the legendary composers Teresa Carreño of Venezuela, Arturo Marquez of Mexico and Ástor Piazzolla of Argentina, and by the renowned singer La Lupe of Cuba, and highlights the masterwork "Fiebre" ("Fever") by the late Vicente Nebrada of Venezuela. The production includes choreography by Yanis Pikieris, the acclaimed dancer, director and choreographer from Venezuela, and the Venezuelan Alexi Zubiría, Western Ballet Company's accomplished artistic director.

"Pikieris and myself both began our careers with Nebrada at the International Ballet of Caracas," Artistic Director Zubiría said. Blending traditional classical ballet with Spanish and Latin American motives as seen in "Fiebre," Vicente Nebrada influenced and inspired those who followed his artistic leadership.

"Vicente created his choreography well above the realm of classical ballet – in the world of neo-classicism where the lines of the body extend together with the emotions. After having a career in which I experienced many styles of dance, I can say that Nebrada mastered the art of the *pas de deux*, embodying in his choreography deep human emotions such as love, desire, longing and intimacy."

Zubiría added, "Our dancers in Danzón! are therefore challenged to interpret Nebrada's neoclassical works using, as much as their technical abilities, the expressiveness of their movements. With Danzón! we are reshaping classical ballet into a neoclassical form with Latin American undertones, in order to convey the love, desire and intimacy of our lives. We are about telling intimate, human stories that require as much exhibition of feeling as mastery of technique, which sets us apart stylistically."

"Danzón!" has four works by Latin American artists.

- Nebrada's "Fiebre" exemplifies neoclassical ballet from Latin America and its passionate flair, danced to the dramatic singing of **La Lupe**.
- Pikieris' "Not a Tango" portrays the emotional tension of desire and energetic playfulness between a man and a woman, as depicted by music of the great **Ástor Piazzola**.

- As conducted by Gustavo Dudamel of Venezuela, the celebrated music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, **Arturo Marquez's** "Danzón #2" inspired Zúbiría's piece "Danzón," which illustrates the character of strong Latina women and the delicate but passionate interplay between a romantic couple.

- As a tribute to **Teresa Carreño** (1853 - 1917), who remains an icon in her native Venezuela, Zúbiría choreographed "Teresita" as a representation of the multiple sides of the composer's life.

Zúbiría said, "Western Ballet Company is a classical ballet company dedicated to performing and evolving for the ballet world outstanding works by new and established artists from Latin America. Our productions for audiences here on the West Coast will show technical expertise and much more. We are about bringing out what we all feel and share – the emotions that exist in all of us. Regardless of your age, social background, education, or experience with ballet, our dancing will connect with you in a powerful way."

**Vicente Nebrada, Venezuelan Choreographer (1930 - 2002).**<sup>2</sup> Vicente Nebrada was one of the most influential members of Venezuela's first generation of professional ballet dancers. He directed the National Ballet of Caracas from 1984 to 2002 and transformed the company's repertoire with choreography that challenged conventions of classical ballet.

Nebrada's choreography requires dancers "to be very musical, and perform not only technically, but create characters with a life of their own," as he told the newspaper *El Nacional* in Caracas. His works, such as "Danza Para Ti," a tribute to the composer Teresa Carreño, celebrate Venezuela's culture and have a strong theatrical component. His versions of many famous classical ballets contributed to his legacy in Venezuela. Companies around the world have performed his choreography.

Nebrada's career began in Venezuela in 1946 (Ballet Nena Coronil) and moved to Cuba in 1951 (National Ballet of Cuba), Paris in 1955 (with Roland Petit), Chicago (Joffrey Ballet), New York in 1964 (Harkness Youth Ballet, as a principal choreographer), and back to Venezuela in 1975. After his tenure at the National Ballet of Caracas, Nebrada died of leukemia in 2002.

**About Western Ballet Company & School.** Founded in 1976, Western Ballet makes the performing art of classical ballet accessible to the general public, regardless of socioeconomic status. As a non-profit institution, Western Ballet performs regularly in theaters and public venues such as schools, libraries and museums, exposing current and new audiences to classical ballet. Western Ballet's extensive educational offerings include a program for young children and pre-professional teenagers and an adult program with the largest selection of drop-in classes in the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay.

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<sup>2</sup>Source: Times Staff and Wire Reports of the Los Angeles Times. June 11, 2002.

