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Laura Kamila Rójas Sánchez

My name is Laura Kamila Rójas Sánchez. I'm 19. I'm a classical ballet dancer and I dance in the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. My first memory of dance - I think I was born with this gift since I was in my mother's womb. I come from a family of artists. My mother is a dancer and teacher. My father is a company director (Ban Rarrá) and master teacher. I was raised in theaters. From a young age I danced in shows with my dad's company. I danced rumba, a changüi. Truth is I don't know how I learned, but I think it was from observing my world. Later I began in the National School of Ballet. There I fell in love with classical training. I had an understanding of art but at this school I found my path. Among those memories I find all the challenges I faced because it wasn't easy. Every day the demands of my teachers made me grow. Every national contest was a goal that I had to meet and surpass. I left with two silver medals and excelled in all my classes. Now I am a member of the National Ballet of Cuba where I have truly been able to put to practice the knowledge I acquired at my National School of Ballet.

I'm from La Habana, the neighborhood of Jesús María and of course it nourishes me as an artist! Here you hear a lot of drumming because of the many religious ceremonies. All of this influences me. In our neighborhood we also have a local comparsa called La Jardinera. I've loved this comparsa since I was little. I've been told that whenever I heard this comparsa I would become full of energy and this influences me because my culture allows me - when I dance a classical ballet - maybe it comes more easily because I can lean on my traditions. It is in my blood

and I am truly grateful to be who I am and to come from where I do. I want to transmit to my audience my desire and the great sentiments I feel toward dance. When I dance I feel I am flying, floating, it's incredible! Believe it or not, whenever I am on stage I feel the drums and the *clave* that accompany me. These are my roots - even if I am dancing classical ballet, they will always be in my blood. That's what I want to transmit! My culture - but in a different way. My experience as an artist, specifically a dancer during this pandemic - it has been very difficult for everyone. But it has not stopped me from continuing my training. I have been taking advantage of this time to do abdominal exercises, back strengthening, exercises for my feet and legs and others.

I just want to say - never stop doing what you love. Because at least for me, dancing makes me feel unique, it makes me forget everything else, it is something grand for me, it is my everything. And really, color doesn't matter, cultural background doesn't matter, nothing like that matters, what is important is to do what you do with love and I am so thankful for my parents, my family and my teachers.

Diosleydis Hardisson Creixell

My name is Diosleydis Hardisson Creixell and I'm a first dancer with the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba. I was born here in Cuba where I now live. My first experience as a dancer was when I was 5 in a little group filled with a lot of love. We danced in theaters, we took folklore, Cuban modern technique, and acting.

Here, our methodology and our discipline is unique. Though we are a folklore company we take modern technique, ballet. Many might say - a folklore company taking ballet? Yes. That's unique, that here folklore companies train ballet. And the dedication and love with which practice our art. **Do you feel your environment nourishes you as an artist?** Yes. Because here in Cuba our roots are in the air we breath. And that's what we do - folkloric projections of our roots. And wherever you go you live this, in the theater seeing another group, in our own family which is religious - and the revolution has helped with all this. Yes, it definitely nourishes me.

Harold Ferrán Molina

My name is Harold Ferrán Molina and I'm a first dancer with the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba. I live in La Habana. My first experience of dance was in fourth grade in my native city. A small town called Rancho Veloz in Villa Clara. A little company that was formed in my native city and we danced in the Cultural Community Center - a mambo. I'll never forget that.

Yasaralays Herrera Sánchez

My first memory of dance was when I was 8 and I did an audition for a local project, Dulce Caribe. That's where I took my first steps. **What is unique about your training?** What is unique is that when I arrive to my rehearsal, or to a stage, it is with Cuban music. Cuban music transports me, I feel relaxed, I pick up choreography more quickly, it takes me to another planet.

Do you feel that your environment nourishes you? Yes, yes, completely. As everyone knows, Matanzas is the root of the guaguancó, of the Matanzas style rumba. And that completely inspires me. More so with the Muñequitos de Matanzas as I have the privilege of taking class with them, associating with them, making videos with them. As though they were my family. They are a world-renowned group. **What message do you want to transmit?** I want the whole world to know the roots of Cuban dance.

I don't want Cuban flavor to be lost, so people do not forget the danzón, rumba, mambo, cha cha chá. For younger generations to understand what we Cubans enjoy here in Cuba. **What has been your experience during this pandemic?** My experience has been beautiful because I've spent more time with my family. I have taken them to salsa and folklore classes so they would not be sedentary. This way we move and enjoy ourselves and always with our Cuban roots.

Sergio Alay Hechavarría Ríos

Good day Sergio. We want to ask some questions about your art. What is your first memory of dance? It was unforgettable. It was in 2008 on the 50th anniversary of the Ballet Folklórico Cutumba, I was only 8 and I danced a *columbia*. **What is unique about your training?** Ordinarily I train by taking Cuban modern technique classes, folklore classes, physical conditioning and now during quarantine I train at home. **What message do you want to transmit?** Now during these difficult times in the whole world - we're under quarantine. I want to transmit many things with my art. For my family I want to transmit energy, peace, tranquility, the strength to move forward, for me, my family and the whole world. Transmit what I feel, no matter the genre, I always transmit what I feel, always with harmony and with a positive mindset. **What has been your experience during this pandemic?** Well my experience is - as a Cuban... I have never lived through something like this. And I am only 18, I am very young and this has showed me that whatever is happening the artist always has to have an objective and continue to move forward. Always. A passion, a creation, keep working from home.

Lía Rodríguez

My first memories. I'm great at remembering choreography and horrible remembering anything else. But one distant memory is that when I was little and they put on cartoons I would change the channel to watch Rebecca Martínez with her exercises, songs and dance - I think that was my first influence. Training - especially for professional dancers - is pretty personal and everyone forges her own path. But personally, I love sports. As a girl I studied gymnastics. I love to run and I'm training to do the half marathon. So I maintain myself with that type of training, cardio, crossfit, etc. Everything influences your evolution, training, balance. I am from La Habana, and we all know that La Habana has its *sandunga* (flavor). Many people come here to leave their art. Many artists from around the country come here. Events are constantly occurring and of course all of this nourishes me and this also where I can contribute. What we have been living has just been incredible. For me it seems like a story, I still can't believe it. But it's happening and it's going to continue to affect us. And we just have to deal with it head on. It's helped me to create new

projects and it makes me a little stronger every day. The message I have for you is one of peace, love. Live life in full color! Do what you feel, be honest, share what you have, because you only live once!

José Osmani Bolívar Pérez

Hi my people. My name is José Osmani Bolívar Pérez and I'm a dancer with Ballet Folklórico Cutumba in Santiago. My initiation into the world of the arts was through the amateur company Adiro Omode directed by the master teacher Danys Pérez Prades and continued by Silvia Vilma Pérez Prades. This company was the foundation for all that I am and I have to give thanks to my teachers, such as Jesús la Rosa and Alexander la Rosa among others, who shared their art and knowledge with me. During these difficult times that we are experiencing with Covid-19 I have tried to use my art to bring some joy to the Santiago audience as they shelter-in. And I have taken it as a time to prepare myself as a dancer and I have the hope and faith that one day, when this is over we can meet again on the stage. When I dance I want to express passion, strength, suffering, joy.

Evans Ramos Martínez

What has been your experience during this pandemic? My experience has been that I have made my own goals. I am finding myself as a dancer - finding my body. It has helped me to create and also further explore music and percussion. **What message do you want to transmit?** I want to transmit my essence, my identity, my roots. **Do you feel that your environment nourishes you?** I'm from La Habana, Cuba. From Nuevo Vedado, Plaza de la Revolución. Yes. My environment always nourishes me. I was raised in a family of artists on both sides as well as my siblings who danced in the company Raíces Profundas. One of my brothers was a dancer in Havana Nights. My father Juan de Dios Ramos Morejón who was the director and choreographer of the company Raíces Profundas. And here on my mother's side, my aunt who danced in Raíces Profundas for 23 years. And now a cousin of mine, a recent graduate from the ENA (National Arts School) just like me, dances at the Conjunto Folkórico Nacional. **What is your first memory of dance?** My first memory is from preschool at about 3 or 4 years old when I started performing. Then I continued to perform with my father - as many people know - a famous Rumbero - Juan de Dios Ramos Morejón.

Montserrat Martínez Gómez

Hi! How are you? My name is Montserrat Martínez and I am a flamenco bailaora. I live in Cuba, in Centro Habana. My first memory of dance was when I was just 4. I totally remember when my mom brought me to the school and they registered me. And I was a little girl so I was nervous. And as it turns out, after the class the teacher praised me and my mother was very proud and I was happy and every day I would go to the class super excited. As far as my training, what inspires me is the bailaora María Juncal. She's my inspiration. With her I learn technique, she inspires me to keep going. She's my inspiration. I feel that my environment definitely feeds me because Cuban culture is so immense. We are filled with dancers and artists and yes that nourishes me. With my dance I want to transmit that race does not matter when it comes to dance. Especially in flamenco. As long as you feel yourself an artist, as long as you desire to dance, that will motivate you to continue. During this pandemic I have had many experiences, principally in finding myself, being me from home, going deeper into myself. Also, getting to know many people through social media, many artists, many bailaores and bailaoras. Dance has helped me feel alive while staying in, helped me to have faith. A big kiss from Cuba and I hope you enjoyed my video.

José Carlos Leguén Faures

Hi. Good morning! I just woke up and have to go to work but I liked this idea so let's do it. My name is José Carlos Leguén Faures. I'm from Guantánamo province and now live in La Habana but a large part of my career was in the eastern part of the island. I've been dancing since I was 5 years old. I began in the children's group Sirueta, then I danced in Los Cosiá, a *Grupo portador* (dance company which preserves traditional forms), a folkloric treasure in Guantánamo and then in the Ballet Folklórico de Babul. Those were the groups that really formed me but I also danced in the carnivals and the comparsas - in 5 comparsas! I danced rueda de casino. But now I live in La Habana. I dance with Ban Rarrá and Osain del Monte.

This quarantine is driving me crazy. I can't wait to take a Cuban modern technique class, or ballet or folklore! I can't wait to dance in a theater and feel the audience's applause. I am a second level professional dancer, thank god! I became professional in Guantánamo after already having danced for 15 years. On my block there was a man who did religious parties called *bembés*. And I attended those parties since I was in my mother's womb - always right next to the drums and the singing.

Classes are the foundation of my training- ballet, Cuban modern technique and folklore. Because all of this builds me up as a dancer. I am a dancer that comes from the street, from a rumba at the crossroads, from a *bembé*, a *tambor*. I'm a professional now, but with a lot of sacrifice and I owe a lot to classes. So I can always be in shape...

My inspiration is my mother. She's always been by my side supporting me in everything I do. Because my career as an amateur dancer was longer than that as a professional and the career of an amateur is very difficult - so my mother is my first inspiration. I've been through a lot, I've had clashes, I've suffered and here I am. And when I want something I achieve it because I fight for what I want and I love challenges. Challenges push me to grow immensely. I have to admire that! And I prefer negative critique to positive because positive critique leaves you where you are and negative critique makes you grow. The more negative feedback I get, the more I grow. I shut myself in my house and I just work. I hope you have enjoyed and learned from my video. José Carlos Leguen Faures. 24 years old. From Cuba for you. Remember that I am from Guantánamo, the eastern part of the Island. Lots of love. A Kiss. Ciao.

Roger Cuza Acosta

Hi. I'm Roger Cuza and I wanted to talk to you about my career. My first memory of dance was when I was auditioned and chosen - they gave me three tests and I was accepted. Then I started dancing in theaters. At that time of my life, at 9 or 10 years, was my first memory of dance. What is unique about my training are my teachers.

I hope you enjoyed the photos and the video. Unfortunately I'm not at my 100% because of everything - the quarantine, no dance classes. But I tried, and I hope you enjoy it. From Cuba, Roger Cuza. Thank you!

Dariel Quiala Ramos

Hi all! My name is Roger Dariel Quiala Ramos. I'm 21. I'm a dancer with Danza del Caribe. My first memories of dance are from when I was very little - they would take me anywhere to dance, different competitions, until the Vocational School of Art recruited me and I began my studies to become a professional contemporary dancer. From then on I have tried to really take advantage of every single thing my teacher explains so that I can be my best. I am from the countryside. I'm from San Luis, a municipality of Santiago. This is where I live now, in the house of my partner. My environment as an artist inspires me, fascinates me. It's what I always wanted to do. Dance is in my body. I have always been surrounded by artists and lovers of art. I would like to transmit that art is a vehicle of expression. During this pandemic I've worked to improve in areas in which I have difficulties because I couldn't just waste this time. I used it to grow and maintain myself physically and not allow myself to unravel as an artist. I hope you have understood my message and please protect yourselves and stay at home!

Onaily Rójas Sauchay

Good afternoon. My name is Onaily Rójas Sauchay, better known by my artistic name Doris. I've been a part of Raíces Profundas for 15 years now. My first memory as a dancer was when I was only 5 years old I had the privilege of dancing for Ochún and the singer was the great Cuban folklore voice Lázaro Ros in the emblematic Museo de Los Orishas of Guanabacoa. **What is unique about the dance training?** When I began dancing at 5 years of age I began at the Community Cultural Center of Guanabacoa where I could have had the opportunity to enter an arts school but I was never actually able to enter the arts school because my grade level never coincided with the grade that was being accepted into the school. And I was like that for 14 years during which I travelled to Denmark and then at 18 I did an audition at Raíces Profundas and was accepted and I've been with them ever since. **Do you**

feel that your environment nourishes you? Well, I belong to the province of La Habana, the municipality of Guanabacoa. A municipality that is known as a *pueblo embrujado* (bewitched town) due to the cultural richness of the area.

Bárbaro Ramos Aldazabal

Name. Bárbaro Ramos Aldazabal. **Company where you dance.** Los Muñequitos de Matanzas. **City where you are from.** Matanzas. **What is your first memory of dance?** In the year 1980 in a festival called Adolfo Guzmán was my first performance with Santa Cruz, with the Aspirinas of La Habana. **What is unique about the dance training?** The day to day training as well as Cuban modern technique which allows me to be physically prepared to dance. **Do you feel that your environment nourishes you?** Of course. The *solar* (*housing project*), rum, rumba comes from marginalized peoples. Without *rumba* there is nothing. The style, the physicality comes from the marginal, the *solar*. **What message do you want to transmit?** The sentiment of *manana* (heart), my ancestors, my grandfather, great-grandfather, my grandmother. They are my path to the rumba, as well as the *sentimiento manana* (heart). **What has been your experience during this pandemic?** From my home...to become a transmitter of dance for the world, for Cubans, foreigners, the world. Offering my sentiments from home.