

fringe reviews

★★★★ Outstanding •••• Recommended •••• Worth a try •• Disappointing • Poor

It's the rhythm of life

An extravaganza of dance and passion makes for probably the most exciting history lesson you'll ever experience

DANCE & PHYSICAL THEATRE
VENEZUELA VIVA: A FLAMENCO FANTASY
 ★★★★★
 PLEASANCE COURTYARD
 (VENUE 33)

WHILE many Fringe shows are struggling to find an audience, *Venezuela Viva* is playing to packed houses and standing ovations night after night, and no wonder. Charting the history of Venezuela, from the 15th century to the present day, this magnificent dance show can't fail to entertain. Performed by Las Lizarraga, the first Venezuelan company to visit the Fringe, the show blends a host of cultures, colours and styles to create a truly memorable experience.

On a purely superficial level, the dancers look amazing. Twelve beautiful women with identical slicked-back hair, who switch from one stunning costume to the next. Crucially, they all have the talent and passion necessary to carry a show of this size. Every stamp of the foot and twist of the hand is performed with gusto, the raw emotion etched on their faces. The dancers, trained at the Lizarraga Flamenco Academy, perform a brand of flamenco largely unseen on these shores. Yes, the Spanish influence is most certainly there, as it was one of the dominant cultures that settled in Venezuela in the 1500s. The land was already home to an indigenous people, though – and a century after the Spanish arrived, so did African slaves. Put the three together and you've got a recipe for conflict, first in Venezuela, now on the dancefloor.

As time passes, the three cultures learn to live in harmony with Venezuela's

extraordinary landscape – also represented through movement. A video screen carries images of the country's vast table-top mountains, giant waterfalls and the destructive beauty of the Orinoco river. Meanwhile, the dancers become an embodiment of the natural world. Their long white dresses rise and fall like water, leaf-shaped appliqué dresses depict the fertile plains.

We finish in modern-day Caracas, a vibrant city which finds the dancers dressed in Panama hats and white trouser suits. Throughout the show, the superb ten-piece band plays one intoxicating rhythm after another. The video screens and overhead voice may not suit every taste, but the information they impart gives context to the movement and an insight into this fascinating country.

KELLY APTER

Until 28 August. Today 5.00pm



Fantasy in motion: dancers on stage in *Venezuela Viva*

Picture: Colin Hattersley