PILLOWNOTES by Brian Schaefer
The PillowNotes series compiles essays commissioned from our Scholars-in-Residence to provide audiences with a broader context for viewing dance.

No country as geographically close to the United States feels as far away as Cuba. Despite, or maybe because of, this simultaneous proximity and distance, the two countries have spent the past century in an ever-shifting, co-dependent, antagonistic relationship. Under our last president, we went in one direction; under this president, we’re headed in another. So how does an American begin to better understand our mysterious Communist neighbor to the south? Well, here at Jacob’s Pillow, our lens is dance and we have three distinctive snapshots.

The first is the image of the company of the state. In 1948, the Havana-born prima ballerina Alicia Alonso—who trained at the School of American Ballet, danced with American Ballet Theatre, and performed at the Pillow in 1955—co-founded a ballet company, which became the National Ballet of Cuba after Fidel Castro’s revolution. It has since become the primary ambassador of Cuban dance to the United States. (As a young dance student in San Diego, I observed at close range as a wide-eyed superfan when that company came to town with Don Quixote.)

The second snapshot is a modern upstart that visited the Pillow four years ago—Malpaso Dance Company, a contemporary dance troupe founded in 2012. Its dancers, many trained at the national ballet school, draw from modern and classical idioms, use jazz, pop, and Afro-Cuban music (among other sonic backdrops), and perform work from a roster of hometown choreographers. (Here, they brought a new work by Troy McIntyre, co-commissioned by the Pillow.) Malpaso represented a newly outwardly-looking Cuba at a moment of great possibility, and continues to showcase its growth and evolution with frequent visits to New York.

And third is our returning guest this year: Compañía Irene Rodríguez, another young company that provides a very different look at contemporary Cuban culture, one that nods to its colonial past, but that also speaks to the mixing of styles and music that has resulted in a vibrant cultural exchange. Rodriguez’s work is an extension of the island’s influences, and, too, was founded in 2012 by a young, talented, and determined dancer who is the company’s founder, director, star, and namesake. Rodriguez and her company made their Pillow debuts in 2017.

As a child, Rodriguez started off in ballet classes at the Anadian Cultural Center of Havana, but then wound down the hall to the flamenco section. When she was just 11 years old, she was invited by Rafael Herrera, the director of the Spanish Ballet of Cuba, to take lessons with the company. Five years later, she was a member of that troupe’s corps de ballet. She then rose through the ranks and ultimately established her own company to present her brand of theatrical flamenco. She then rose through the ranks and ultimately established her own company to present her brand of theatrical flamenco. She then rose through the ranks and ultimately established her own company to present her brand of theatrical flamenco.

“I am focused on creating new trends that make the Spanish genre evolve, fusing it with everything that will extend the standard flamenco choreography. I mix contemporary flamenco art, arts, current time, current trends, national rhythms, and everything that will challenge the form. I use both the Spanish in modern and contemporary exterior and interior in a way that will challenge our audience. And, like the writing of the great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca—and incorporating other dance styles and theatrical elements to offer a kind of modern flamenco-theater that we have never done before. You should see our dancers in some high-tech, high-sound, high-energy choreography.”

So what does this mean for the Pillow this year? It means that the Pillow debuts in 2017.

* Former Trustees, staff, faculty, interns, The School’s dancers, or artists-in-residence

** Deceased

** DIRECTOR, PRINCIPAL DANCER & CHOREOGRAPHER

** MUSICAL DIRECTION

** LIGHTING & SOUND DESIGNER

** COSTUME DESIGNER

** MANAGEMENT, COORDINATOR & PRODUCER

** MANAGER, COSTUMES & PRODUCER

** DANCERS

** COMPAÑÍA IRENE RODRIGUEZ

** TED SHAW TELL

** June 26, 2019

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** JACOB’S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL

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** JACOB’S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
PROGRAM

EL MITO

CHOREOGRAPHY
Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC
Noel Gutiérrez

PERFORMERS
Irene Rodríguez and Company


Homenaje a José Greco

PERFORMER & LYRICS
Andrés Correa

MUSIC
David Acosta

Homenaje a José Greco is tribute to legendary flamenco choreographer and dancer José Greco, who is known for popularizing Spanish dance on the stage and screen in 1950s and ’60s America. In 2018, people around the world celebrated the centennial of his birth and we extend that honor here, with deep admiration to him and his legacy.

- INTERMISSION -

EL GRITO (World Premiere)

CHOREOGRAPHY
Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC
Reynier Llorente and David Acosta

LYRICS
Andrés Correa

PERFORMERS
Irene Rodríguez and Company

Inspired by El Grito by Edward Munch. Commissioned by Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival 2019.

LA PENA NEGRA

CHOREOGRAPHY
Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC
Noel Gutiérrez

PERFORMERS
Irene Rodríguez and Company

Costume Design
Jesus Villalonga and Irene Rodríguez

Inspired by the poem “Romance de la Pena Negra” by Federico García Lorca. Premiered and commissioned by Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival (August 2017).

- INTERMISSION -

MARIANA RAMOS (Dancer) was part of the first group of dancers to graduate from the Professional School of Spanish Dance of Compañía Irene Rodríguez. Ever since, she has been a member of the company. She is also a teacher of the company’s vocational and professional schools.

TERESA ÁLVAREZ (Dancer) had extensive experience in Spanish dance before she decided to pursue a dance education in the Professional School of Spanish Dance of the Compañía Irene Rodríguez. She is now a member of the company and teacher at the vocational school.

MAYRELYS ÁVILA RUIZ (Dancer) has been a Spanish dancer for many years and danced professionally with Habana Compás Dance. She currently performs with the Compañía Irene Rodríguez.

KEYLA RODRÍGUEZ (Dancer) graduated from the Professional School of Spanish Dance of Compañía Irene Rodríguez. Since graduating, she has been performing with the company.

YOHAN GARCÍA (Dancer) graduated as a dancer/teacher of Spanish dances in 2011. He is currently a member of the Compañía Irene Rodríguez and teacher of the company’s vocational and professional schools.

JOSUÉ RONDÓN (Dancer & Percussionist) graduated as a dancer/teacher of Spanish dances. Since its creation, he has been a member of the Compañía Irene Rodríguez as both a dancer and a musician.

ANDRÉS CORREA (Cantaro) is of high regard in the flamenco music community. In his many years of experience, he has worked with the Spanish Ballet of Cuba and the flamenco company Ecos, among other companies recognized in Cuba. He currently performs with the Compañía Irene Rodríguez.

REYNIER LORRENTE (Guitarist and Composer) graduated from Amadeo Roldán Conservatory in Cuba, specializing in Classic Guitar. He has performed with dance companies such as Ballet Español de Cuba, Ecos, Alma Flamenca, A mi aire, De Rocío, and Kiuban Flamenca. He is a founding member of the Compañía Irene Rodríguez and one of its principal composers.

ALEJANDRO TRUFFIN (Percussionist) studied percussion and played professionally for dance companies and groups like Azahares, Alma Flamenca, Habana Concierta, Cuarteto de Voces D’Cappo, and Ballet Español de Cuba. He has been a member of Compañía Irene Rodríguez since its creation.

JOEL RAMÍREZ (Saxophonist) graduated from Amadeo Roldán Conservatory in Cuba, specializing in saxophone and clarinet. He participated in the nouns to Havanan project and performed in the Foundation Preservation Hall. He has also played the annual jazz band competition at Lincoln Center, Essentially Ellington, and played with the National Symphony Orchestra. He currently plays the saxophone with the Compañía Irene Rodríguez.

IRENE LÓPEZ (Manager) studied economics and worked at the National Institute of Technology and Environments at the Cuban Sciences Academy for 39 years. She is the mother of Irene Rodríguez and has been the manager of the Compañía Irene Rodríguez since its creation.

FERNANDO ALONSO (Light & Sound Designer) is a lighting design specialist who has extensive experience with many companies both in Cuba and abroad. He worked with the National Contemporary Dance Company in Cuba and now works with Compañía Irene Rodríguez.

In conjunction with her engagement in the Ted Show Theatre, Irene Rodríguez is the Director of the Flamenco and Spanish Dance Program at The School at Jacob’s Pillow. The Program is supported by the Cultural Office of the Embassy of Spain.

MARIANA RAMOS

EL MITO

Irene Rodríguez

CHOREOGRAPHY

MUSIC

Noel Gutiérrez

PERFORMERS

Irene Rodríguez and Company


Homenaje a José Greco

PERFORMER & LYRICS

Andrés Correa

MUSIC

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CHOREOGRAPHY

Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC

Reynier Llorente and David Acosta

LYRICS

Andrés Correa

PERFORMERS

Irene Rodríguez and Company

Inspired by El Grito by Edward Munch. Commissioned by Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival 2019.

LA PENA NEGRA

CHOREOGRAPHY

Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC

Noel Gutiérrez

PERFORMERS

Irene Rodríguez and Company

Costume Design

Jesus Villalonga and Irene Rodríguez

Inspired by the poem “Romance de la Pena Negra” by Federico García Lorca. Premiered and commissioned by Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival (August 2017).
**ENCIERRO** (U.S. Premiere)

CHOREOGRAPHY  Irene Rodríguez  
MUSIC  David Acosta and Reynier Llorente  
LYRICS  Andrés Correa

PERFORMERS  
TORERO  Yohan García  
BRAVE BULL  Irene Rodríguez  
BULLS  
Mariana Ramos  
Mayrelis Ávila  
Teresa Álvarez  
Keyla Rodríguez

*Inspired by the Encierros de Navarra and bullfighting in Spain.*

The Encierro is an annual event in the festival of San Fermín in the city of Pamplona, Navarra, Spain. The event is a bull run that brings bulls from outside the city to the urban bull ring. Bulls are released from their corrals and travel through the city streets in chase of runners who lead them to a bull ring. Once the bulls have charged into the bull ring, the bulls are raffled to be fought by toreros, or bullfighters.

As the bull and torero face one another, a shadow of death covers the arena. The dangerous art of bullfighting is an active debate between two life forces: the man and the bull.

Ay... la muerte...  
Se enfrentan en el ruedo dos corazones valientes:  
one lucha por su vida  
y el otro por dar la muerte.

Ay...ay...  
Está la plaza repleta.  
Está ya la suerte echada.  
Está la muerte esperando a que venga la cornada.

**CAMINOS** (World Premiere)

MUSIC  Reynier Llorente  
LYRICS  Andrés Correa  
PERFORMERS  Musicians of Compañía Irene Rodríguez

**ENTRE ESPINAS, ROSAS**

CHOREOGRAPHY  Irene Rodríguez  
MUSIC  Musicians of Compañía Irene Rodríguez  
PERFORMERS  Mariana Ramos  
Mayrelis Ávila  
Teresa Álvarez  
Keyla Rodríguez
A CONTRA TIEMPO (World Premiere)

CHOREOGRAPHY    Irene Rodríguez and Yohan García

MUSIC           Reynier Llorente

PERFORMERS      Yohan García
                 Josué Rondón

AMARANTO

CHOREOGRAPHY    Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC           Noel Gutiérrez, based on "Soleá de Aida" by Juan Parrilla

LYRICS          Andrés Correa

PERFORMER       Irene Rodríguez

COMPANY

ABOUT IRENE RODRÍGUEZ

Director, Prima Ballerina, and Choreographer, Irene Rodríguez is the leading figure of Spanish dance in Cuba. A member of the International Dance Council (UNESCO), she earned a Bachelor of Theater Arts Degree (Acting) from the National University of Arts (Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba), receiving the “Diploma de Oro” in theater arts, an honor bestowed for her numerous roles as an actor. She also received a Master’s Degree in Theoretical Studies of Dance from the same university.

Born in Havana, she graduated in 1999 as a professional performer of Spanish dances. After graduating, she immediately joined the Ballet Español de Cuba, where she became Prima ballerina in 2007, as well as the Choreographer and Specialized Professor and Regisseur of First Level. For several years, she has worked as a Professor of the Cuban National Ballet School and a choreography consultant of the Cuban National Ballet, specifically for Prima Ballerina Assoluta Alicia Alonso’s Spanish works. On several occasions, she has performed as a guest dancer with the Cuban National Ballet.

She has performed as Prima Ballerina in the most prestigious theaters in Barcelona, Granada, Andorra, Colombia, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, and Mexico, where she has shared the stage with world-renowned artists.

In January 2012, she founded her own company, Compañía Irene Rodríguez, receiving rave reviews since the Company’s debut. As a dance professor, she plays a role in training many of the professional Spanish dancers in Cuba. She has given master classes and conferences both nationally and internationally, and has created several works for distinguished companies. In 2014, she created her own dance school, the Irene Rodríguez Spanish Dance Academy.

Rodríguez has received numerous awards, including the First Prize in the VIII “Alicia Alonso Ibero-American Choreography Competition” (CIC’ 2012); an award from the Author’s Foundation of the Spanish General Society of Authors and Editors (SGAE) for her work El crimen fue en Granada; the Choreography Award in 2006 from the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba for best female artistic interpretation 2006-07; the Ramiro Guerra award for the best interpretation in 2011; the Excellence Choreography Award in 2016 for the best choreography work at the International Ballet Schools Competition; the Ibero-American Medal given for the Honoris Causa Foundation from the Guadalajara’s University in Mexico; and the Audience and UNEAC Award in the North Atlantic Choreography Contest “Vladimir Malakhov." Among many accolades, Rodríguez was recently awarded the Order Isabel la Católica, the highest recognition given from Spain’s King.

In the U.S., she has performed at the Montalvo Art Center, MOLAA, the Moore Theatre, The Joyce Theater, and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., among others. She is featured in the PBS documentary "Weekend in Havana." Since 2012, by special request of the Prima Ballerina Assoluta Alicia Alonso, she holds the post of Artistic Director of the International Festival “La Huella de España,” a very important annual event in Cuba.
Program

Choreography

El Mito

Irene Rodriguez

Music

Noel Gutierrez

Performers

Irene Rodriguez and Company


Homenaje a José Greco

Performer & Lyrics

Andrés Correa

Music

David Acosta

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Irene Rodriguez

La Pena Negra

Choreography

Irene Rodriguez

Music

Noel Gutierrez

Performers

Irene Rodriguez and Company

Costume Design

Jesús Villalonga and Irene Rodriguez

Inspired by the poem “Romance de la Pena Negra” by Federico García Lorca. Premiered and commissioned by Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival (August 2017).

El Grito (World Premiere)

Irene Rodriguez

Music

Reynier Llorente and David Acosta

Lyrics

Andrés Correa

Performers

Irene Rodriguez and Company

Inspired by El Grito by Edward Munch. Commissioned by Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival 2019.

- Intermission -

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Mariana Ramos (Dancer) was part of the first group of dancers to graduate from the Professional School of Spanish Dance of Compañía Irene Rodriguez. Ever since, she has been a member of the company. She is also a teacher of the company’s vocational and professional schools.

Teresa Álvarez (Dancer) had extensive experience in Spanish dance before she decided to pursue a dance education in the Professional School of Spanish Dance of the Compañía Irene Rodriguez. She is now a member of the company and teacher at the vocational school.

Mayreli Ávila Ruiz (Dancer) has been a Spanish dancer for many years and danced professionally with Habana Compás Dance. She currently performs with the Compañía Irene Rodriguez.

Keyla Rodríguez (Dancer) graduated from the Professional School of Spanish Dance of Compañía Irene Rodriguez. Since graduating, she has been working with the company.

Yohan García (Dancer) graduated as a dancer/teacher of Spanish dances in 2011. He is currently a member of the Compañía Irene Rodriguez and teacher of the company’s vocational and professional schools.

Josué Rondón (Dancer & Percussionist) graduated as a dancer/teacher of Spanish dances. Since its creation, he has been a member of the Compañía Irene Rodriguez as both a dancer and a musician.

Andrés Correa (Cantautor) is of high regard in the flamenco music community. In many years of experience, he has worked with the Spanish Ballet of Cuba and the flamenco company Ecos, among other companies recognized in Cuba. He currently performs with the Compañía Irene Rodriguez.

Reynier Llorente (Guitarist and Composer) graduated from Amadeo Roldán Conservatory in Cuba, specializing in Classic Guitar. He has performed with dance companies such as Ballet Español de Cuba, Ecos, Alma Flamenca, A mi aire, De Rocío, and Kiuban Flamenca. He is a founding member of the Compañía Irene Rodriguez and one of its principal composers.

Alejandro Truffin (Percussionist) studied percussion and played professionally for dance companies and groups like Azahezas, Alima Flamenca, Habana Concuerda, Cuarteto de Voces D’Cappo, and Ballet Español de Cuba. He has been a member of Compañía Irene Rodriguez since its creation.

Joel ramírez (Saxophonist) graduated from Amadeo Roldán Conservatory in Cuba, specializing in saxophone and clarinet. He participated in the Morris to Havana project and performed in the Foundation Preservation Hall. He has also played the annual jazz band competition at Lincoln Center, Essentially Ellington, and played with the National Symphony Orchestra. He currently plays the saxophone with the Compañía Irene Rodriguez.

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Irene López (Manager) studied economics and worked at the National Institute of Technology and Environments at the Cuban Sciences Academy for 39 years. She is the mother of Irene Rodriguez and has been the manager of the Compañía Irene Rodriguez since its creation.

Fernando Alonso (Light & Sound Designer) is a lighting design specialist who has extensive experience with many companies both in Cuba and abroad. He worked with the National Contemporary Dance Company in Cuba and now works with Compañía Irene Rodriguez.

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PillowNotes by Brian Schaefer
The PillowNotes series comprises essays commissioned from our Scholars-in-Residence to provide audiences with a broader context for viewing dance.

Nancy Valdés in a red, ruffled dress, sure. But you’ll see her dance in black pants, too. Rodríguez is fond of the red, ruffled dress look, but she also enjoys the black pants, which she feels offer a kind of modern flamenco-theater that embraces, but just as often eschews, tradition. You’ll see it in the way the traditional dress and modernity of an international genre to merge with our own very Cuban way of facing it,” Rodríguez has said.

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The PillowNotes series comprises essays commissioned from our Scholars-in-Residence to provide audiences with a broader context for viewing dance.

As a child, Rodríguez started off in ballet classes at the Andalusian Cultural Center of Havana, but then wandered down the path of Spanish dance.

But just as Cuba has started to open up economically in the decade since Raúl Castro took the political reins from his late brother, so too has it begun to evolve artistically.


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Technology and Dance: The Case of Cuba
Brian Schaefer is a New York-based journalist who writes about dance, culture, and politics for a number of publications, including The New York Times.
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MARIANA RAMOS (Dancer) was part of the first group of dancers to graduate from the Professional School of Spanish Dance of Compañía Irene Rodríguez. Ever since, she has been a member of the company. She is also a teacher of the company’s vocational and professional schools.

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EL MITO

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Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC
Noel Gutiérrez

PERFORMERS
Irene Rodríguez and Company


PERFORMER &LYRICS
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Irene Rodríguez

LA PENÁ NEGRA

CHOREOGRAPHY
Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC
Noel Gutiérrez

PERFORMERS
Irene Rodríguez and Company

COSTUME DESIGN
Jesús Villalonga and Irene Rodríguez

Inspired by the poem “Romance de la Pená Negra” by Federico García Lorca. Premiered and commissioned by Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (August 2017).

EL GRITO (World Premiere)

CHOREOGRAPHY
Irene Rodríguez

MUSIC
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The first is the island born prima ballerina of the state. In 1948, the Havana-born Rodríguez graced the Pillow as a five-year-old dancer with the National Ballet of Cuba. She then rose through the ranks and ultimately established her own company to present her brand of theatrical idiom. Her Spanish Ballet of Cuba was only founded in 1987, but there appears to be growing interest in this particular moment in U.S.-Cuban relations. In this case, like a classic Polaroid photo in development (the technology has been around for nearly a century, after all), we have yet to see exactly what this moment means. All we can do is keep collecting impressions, adding to our understanding of Cuba—one dance company at a time. In this case, like a classic Polaroid photo in development (the technology has been around for nearly a century, after all), we have yet to see exactly what this moment means. All we can do is keep collecting impressions, adding to our understanding of Cuba—one dance company at a time.

"I am focused on creating new trends that make the Spanish genre evolve, fusing it with everything that will extend the traditional Spanish form. We have to create a new language, to open up the tradition and modernity of an international genre to merge with our very Cuban way of facing it," Rodríguez has said.

"Spanish dance" is a broad category that is composed largely of flamenco, but that also includes elements of boleto and other regional dances. It is surprising, given that Spain ruled Cuba for over 400 years until the end of the 19th century, that language aside, its cultural feels rather eclectic. The cuisine of Cuba, its cultural features few quintessential Spanish dishes and so too with the dance: The Spanish Ballet of Cuba was only founded in 1897, but there appears to be growing interest in the form. It’s wonderful to have this explosion in our country of little girls and moms—ask when and where Spanish dance lessons are taught," Rodríguez explains. “It is wonderful because you realize that Spanish culture and Spanish dance are in their blood. But that doesn’t mean there’s a lot to choose from.”

And that doesn’t mean that the Spanish dance in Cuba is pure flamenco, either. Rodríguez insists that it is. True flamenco, she says, “is extremely improvised.” Her work is carefully choreographed, responding to dramatic themes—like the writing of the great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca—and incorporating other dance styles and theatrical elements to offer a kind of modern flamenco-theater that embraces but also embraces, tradition. You’ll see that in her show, Périmètre, in New York, May 23.

The return of Compañía Irene Rodríguez to the Pillow is yet another snapshot of the diverse island nation, and, in some ways, of this particular moment in U.S.-Cuba relations. In this case, like a classic Polaroid photo in development (the technology has been around for nearly a century, after all), we have yet to see exactly what this moment means. All we can do is keep collecting impressions, adding to our understanding of Cuba—one dance company at a time.

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Brian Schaefer is a New York-based journalist who writes about dance, culture, and politics for a number of publications, including The New York Times.