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runthru online

[news](#)
[features](#)
[reviews](#)
[Curtain Call](#)
[column: critical steps by Basilio](#)
[Esteban Villaruz](#)
[column: leaps by vanini belarmino](#)
[runthru in print](#)

latest news

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Tribute to Vella Damian on Saturday, October 5

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latest features

The Fabulous Tony Fabs: In Tribute 1/3

The Fabulous Tony Fabs: In Tribute 2/3

The Fabulous Tony Fabs: In Tribute 3/3

Rosas ng Maynila: In celebration of 30 years of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's Rosas danst Rosas

Arco Renz's Philippine Project: On Verticality and Horizontality

latest reviews and post-performance notes

Stars of Philippine Ballet

Celebrating IDD - The Contemporary Dance Map Gala 2013

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On Airdance's Installment and UP Dance Company's Sa Kamalig

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[runthru online](#) > [features](#) >

Novy Bereber Takes Dance to Abra de Ilog

by Joelle Jacinto

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Independent initiative goes a long, long way. Abra de Ilog is a small, very quaint town in Occidental Mindoro. Last year, under the town's cultural program, dancer/choreographer **Novy** Bereber was able to teach dance to the youth of the town, which was greatly appreciated by the townfolk, young and old alike. Eventually, it occurred to them that these townfolk have not seen a professional dance performance before. And so **Novy**, with the help of Elmar Ingles, put together Bailar, featuring nine new original choreographies, to bring to Abra de Ilog.

The programme started off with a hip-hop inspired number, that had incorporated a lot of balletic movement, to set it apart from dances you would normally see on TV. This is, of course, strategic - the youth of Abra de Ilog are quite fond of the dances they see on TV. As Elmar says, much of the works are energetic and have pop culture elements to cater to the interests of the audience. One such example is a tango en pointe to the theme from Marimar, which is the right amount of funny and flamboyant and makes just the right turns away from kabaduyan.

These fun snippets find themselves in between serious pieces, some equally short, others more developed. All works are athletic, with unusual flips and lifts all happening so quick that you dare not blink. The pieces also tend towards flamboyance and might be acrobatic if the structure of each piece were not well thought out.

Of course, the pieces are also energetic because this is **Novy's** default creative persona. He choreographed all nine pieces in three days, the only time **Novy** could get all dancers together. For this tour, he asked his old Ballet Philippines friend Christine Crame-Santillan to dance for

him, as well as Elena Laniog, Richard Yadao, and Airdance members Ava Villanueva, Marielle Alonso, Jethro Pioquinto, John Phillip Martir, Rhosam Prudenciado and Jed Amihan.

He does acknowledge how lucky he is that he was able to get all these strong dancers together. How he was able to complete nine dances in three days? Those who know **Novy** best don't even find it very strange. "When **Novy** choreographs, tuloy tuloy lang," says another BP friend Carissa Adea. "Napakabilis, and he can do several parts at a time. Kunwari, sa akin muna tapos, yung next dancer naman, tapos next naman. Ganoon kabilis." As the show is out of town, Carissa wasn't able to join the small impromptu company, though she wanted to. Other dancers expressed similar feelings about not being able to dance for **Novy** in this show.

Of course, the works could still be developed more, if time permitted. The most complete of the pieces was the evening's finale, which starts with the dancers downstage, their backs to the audience, walking away towards the upper stage, some looking back slowly. "Tayo yan, yung mga Pinoy na aalis ng bansa, kasi we're looking for something better for us," **Novy** intimates. "Pero lilingon-lingon ka parin, kasi doon ka nakatira. Babalik at babalik ka rin."

Novy has been in that situation himself. During the past year, he has been dancing with the Asian tour of the King and I. Touring was great, but now that he's back home, he's not very enthusiastic about joining the next leg of the tour next year.

Of course, that doesn't mean he's going to keep still, either. It just means he's going to shift his priorities a bit. "Nakakabobo yung ganoon, yun lang yung sinasayaw mo for months?" he shares. His creative impulses were put on hiatus, and it got so bad that he injured himself. "Alam mo yung lumang injury na palaging bumabalik hanggang wala ka nang choice, tatanggalin nalang yung tuhod mo?" he asks, making me cringe.

He was operated on in Korea, and was told it may take months before he could walk again. He managed to walk after 8 days, and danced after two weeks. A remarkable achievement, yes, but he had incentive. "They were going to send me home!" he exclaimed. "Kaya, ayan. Walk!"

This determination and energy of **Novy's** is what's currently driving the dance program in Abra de Ilog and it's what is going to take him other places. Despite **Novy's** thoughts of leaving home, he's willing to go away again, but to learn, not to dance in a show that goes on forever. It seems, however, that he can't leave as soon as possible, as future stagings of his pieces are on the horizon.

Bailar was a success in Abra de Ilog, and producers are planning to take the show to other provinces and regions in the Philippines, as well as stage it in a larger performance venue in Manila, perhaps in the CCP. Details will follow soon.

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Photo from Novy Bereber

[Runthru Issue 1](#)

April 2008

[Back to Current Issue in Print](#)

[Back to home](#)

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