

# Immortal Prima Ballerina Assoluta Directs Cuban National Ballet in Hamilton

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Prima Ballerina Assoluta Alicia Alonso will live to be 200 years old. She has to. No doubt about it. She has said so time and again and time is definitely on her side. As artistic director of the world renowned Cuban National Ballet, Alicia is as committed to reaching the two century mark as she is to maintaining only the highest standards among her company of dancers. And when Alicia sets goals, her tenacity invariably prevails. For this extraordinary woman who founded and honed the Cuban National Ballet 60 years ago into one the most professional and beloved ensembles in the world nothing is impossible.

It helps that she lives and loves and breathes in Cuba, a paradisiacal island whose citizens so readily reach the 100 year plus plateau that lively 120 Clubs sprout everywhere. It is quite a tribute to Cuban resiliency and to its magnificent health system. It helps that Alicia approaches ballet as if her life depends on it. It helps that Alicia succeeds at her craft wherever she goes.

As Alicia Alonso, 88, nears the half way mark of her ultimate accomplishment she travels the world with the Cuban National Ballet making sure that generations of her adoring public witness every milestone. Just in the last three months the company, with Alicia at the helm, has triumphantly performed to capacity crowds in front of the Pyramids in Egypt, in Spain, Cuba, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Next stop is Hamilton, Ontario.

Without a doubt Alicia's passion for her art keeps her young, active and on the move. Her love of ballet has become an inspirational elixir. It fills theatres. It brings to the audience the unusual, unmistakable trademark of Cuban ballet: grace and sensuality in motion. Her mastery of the dance earns her accolades, awards and standing ovations. Arguably one of the most beloved and prominent Cuban icons after her close friend and former President Fidel Castro, Alicia Alonso is an untiring, driven perfectionist. Her phenomenal stamina keeps her on her toes, as it were. Her genius moves her to produce, arrange and direct some of the most unforgettable and hauntingly beautiful performances in the history of the dance.

Although her eyesight has been lost for decades her vision remains as clear as the first day she set foot on the stage and stole the hearts of millions. In her mind Alicia can see forever. The beautiful diva carefully rehearses each performance to its most minute detail. "In my mind I never stop dancing. I hear the music. I follow every step the dancers take. I can tell when things go well. I can tell when mistakes are made and I can guide them until they reach perfection. Ballet is an exacting art form and I am an exacting task master. Nothing but the best is good enough for me."

On October 4th and October 5th Artistic Director and UNESCO Cultural Ambassador Alicia Alonso arrives in Hamilton for a return engagement. Alicia and the Cuban National Ballet have been invited to perform at Hamilton Place by Belma Diamante, President of the Canadian Ballet Youth Ensemble. Judging by last year's performance, the event promises an absolute triumph. It is anticipated that ballet lovers will travel across Canada and the United States to attend the magic staging of Giselle, an 18th century story described by critics as the most romantic ballet of all times. They will not be disappointed. Alicia will be there and Alicia owns Giselle. In fact, she has owned it from the first time she ever performed the dance. It's widely accepted that Alicia's refined technique and her marvellous infusion of passionate, Cuban ballet movements left so much of her powerful footprint on Giselle that no dancer dares alter the ballet.

At Hamilton Place 66 brilliant young dancers from the Cuban National Ballet will honour Alicia's vision of Giselle under the master's watchful guidance. As it recently happened in Egypt, Spain, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic Giselle will tear at a whole gamut of emotions. At curtain call Alicia will take the customary bow and graciously accept the customary bouquet of flowers. A delirious audience will lovingly reward her with one after another standing ovation. Alicia will perform a perfectly-timed, mischievous pirouette, regale the public with a megawatt smile, turn around, take the hand of her husband Pedro Simón and gently walk away. In spite of being totally exhausted by the performance, Alicia will likely dance again in her mind every single step of the entire ballet. She has done it countless times before. She did it originally when she learned Giselle as she laid in bed for a year recuperating from eye surgery. "I danced in my mind. Blinded, motionless, flat on my back, I taught myself to dance Giselle." Now, she dances Giselle, again in her mind, to keep living gloriously for another day. It is her inimitable way of striving for 200.

Alicia will reach the coveted milestone. But for legions of dancers and generations of fans Alicia not only remains as graceful as ever and as ageless as time, she has already achieved immortality. And for two autumn days in Hamilton people will be close to that immortality. At curtain call the audience may just experience Cuba's gentle warmth overpowering the impending winter air through the sheer magic of Alicia's love and through her dancers astonishing performance.

On December 12th, 13th and 14th the Canadian Ballet Youth Ensemble will again host Alicia and the Cuban National Ballet. On this occasion the company will dance The Nutcracker, its acclaimed version of the classical Christmas ballet.

Judging from last year's resounding success this special gift to Hamilton devotees will make Hamilton Place the envy of ballet lovers in Canada.

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