



DANCE

ENSEMBLE ESPAÑOL BRINGS THE HEAT

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PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHANIE BASSOS

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Even in the final days of her life, Dame Libby Komaiko remained involved in almost every aspect of Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater, the company she founded in 1975. Executive director Jorge Pérez, who started training with Komaiko in 1985, sat at her bedside in the ICU, consulting about music and costumes for an upcoming show. “We worked harder because we knew that the company was keeping her going,” Pérez says.



Komaiko died in February, at 69, and in her memory Ensemble Español pressed ahead, trying to match her passion and tenacity. “There was no downtime to mourn the way you normally would,” Pérez says. “We just kept working.”

The company is dedicating its appearance at the Auditorium Theatre’s Made in Chicago dance series to Komaiko, as it did in June with its American Spanish Dance and Music Festival. Like the six world premieres featured there, this repertory concert will showcase the company’s trademark flamboyant costuming and kaleidoscopic lighting.

The program, a double bill with the Latino-focused outfit Cerqua Rivera, includes artistic director Irma Suárez Ruiz’s *Pasion Oculta*, a high-octane modern flamenco piece, and Komaiko’s *Ecos de España*, a boisterous folkloric dance set to the Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Capriccio Espagnol*. The night also marks the return of the company’s premier dancer, Claudia Pizarro, an exhilarating performer who was on leave for part of last season. “The theme is passion,” says Pérez of the lineup. “It’s hot, it’s Latin. This is the hottest ticket in Chicago.”