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THIRD SPACES

Performance

First Look: "Between Two Heartbeats" and Other Dances, presented by Accent Dance NYC

Place

Taylor Dance East, New York, NY,
September 10, 2026

Words

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Accent Dance NYC in "Between Two Heartbeats" by Ingrid Silva. Photograph by Steven Pisano

It hasn't taken Ingrid Silva long to establish herself as an exciting emerging choreographic talent. A few short months after her retirement from Dance Theatre of Harlem—her home of 18 years, where she trained under Arthur Mitchell and Virginia Johnson—and just a few weeks after her presentation of her piece "Interactions" at the Joyce's Ballet Festival curated by Misty Copeland, she showcased a bold new work in downtown Manhattan.

"Between Two Heartbeats," a piece for 10 dancers set to a score by her frequent collaborator Leandro Albuquerque, is a commission by Accent Dance Next, the nonprofit's program launched in 2023 to support emerging choreographers. Ahead of Accent Dance's gala in October, Silva presented a preview of the work (the lighting and costumes were not finalized) alongside three other pieces. Through the evening, themes of transition and identity permuted.

Dancers Elisa Toro Franky and Kevin Ortiz Lemus opened the program, stepping out from stage left in silence, always keeping a back leg elevated in attitude. Their arms waved above them like tendrils of seaweed, and the stage lights cut shadows across their bodies. This was the start of "Mar Y Tierra," a work that Pedro Ruiz originally created for Ballet Contemporaneo of Camaguey, Cuba. "Amargura," a vivid Sardinian song by Elena Ledda featuring a romantic pairing of guitar and piano, soundtracks the pas de deux that follows.

It is an inventive piece, particularly interested in exploring all the ways the two dancers can connect. Lemus lies on his back and props up Franky with his feet, lifts her on his shoulder, and spins her with her legs and arms outstretched like a star. At one point, he propels her around his torso as if flourishing a flag. It could seem stuffed with acrobatics if not for the measured steps and lugubrious cambrés and extensions of the dancers. It ends in a striking arrangement, with Lemus, again on his back, now holding onto Franky's ankles as she steps slowly off to stage right, her arms undulating overhead.



Miaotian Sun in "Rouged Lips" by Tong Ruirui and Miaotian Sun. Photograph by Steven Pisano

Dancer and choreographer Will A. Ervin, Jr. presents his solo work "Patience (24 Hours)" next. Set to the gospel song "Rain" by Sunday Service Choir, the piece is brief but concentrated. With his back to the audience, Ervin starts by isolating his shoulder blades in exaggerated motions; similar "popping" articulations carry throughout the work. When he moves through space, it's as if he's skating or getting carried from one place to the other on a track. This kind of movement builds on itself and starts to feel as if it is performed unconsciously—as if the dancer is turned into a vessel for some higher power that moves within them.

It's a kind of controlled loss of control. Similarly, "Rouged Lips," a Chinese classical dance by Tong Ruirui and Miaotian Sun—performed by the latter—shows a private and emotional moment of a young woman yearning to be reunited with her beloved while confined to her home. Sun repeatedly gazes into a hand mirror before spinning outward, her arms floating. It's a lovely, if slightly repetitive work, with Sun's active beckoning to her own mirror lending the work emotional weight that contrasts nicely with the choreography's airiness.



Accent Dance NYC in "Between Two Heartbeats" by Ingrid Silva. Photograph by Steven Pisano

"Between Two Heartbeats" is the biggest and longest work in the program, set on eight women and two men—all of whom start the piece onstage, facing backwards, and immediately begin to move. Silva, as a choreographer, is at her best during these blink-and-you'll-miss-it passages of footwork, and the dancers are up for the challenge.

Scattered throughout the piece are *développés* into *penchés*, *pirouettes* into *battements*, and, during partnered moments, countless entrances by pairs mid-lift. During a post-show Q&A, Silva named William Forsythe as an inspiration; it's easy to see his influence in her maximalist style, packing as many steps as possible into each beat (Silva herself, she admits afterward, was never a "counts" person anyway).

The choreographer alternates between fast and slow, with the former unfolding more naturally; at times, slowed-down passages sit less comfortably within the music.

One particularly lovely moment of the work shows two dancers in a *pas de deux*, moving tenderly as the rest of the company walks around them (Jerome Robbins's "Glass Pieces" does come to mind, but in my book, that's a compliment). You can also see the influence of DTH artistic director Robert Garland in Silva's choice to mix social dancing with contemporary ballet. But here is where Silva is defining her own clear style—particularly as she explores her relationship to both her Brazilian upbringing and her New York City life.

This is no unplanned dance party, but rather, an enfolded bit of *passinho*, the *baile-funk* street dance that originated in the favelas where Silva grew up. There is much attention paid to the hips and, critically, an element of joy: the dancers shout, a little cautiously at first, and then with abandon. Then, as easily as the piece slipped out of its balletic vocabulary, it soon returns, but with a jazzy dialect. From that point on, the energy doesn't drop for a minute.

Rebecca Deczynski

Rebecca Deczynski is a New York City-based writer and editor publishes the newsletter Mezzanine Society. Her work has appeared in publications including Inc., Domino, NYLON, and InStyle. She graduated from Barnard College cum laude with a degree in English and a minor in dance.