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Ballet Points to U.S.-Cuba: Friendship Is Not an "Impossible Dream!"

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Friday night rush hour included many curious Angelenos inching their way to the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion at the Los Angeles Music Center to experience the acclaimed Ballet Nacional de Cuba. The legendary Cuban Prima Ballerina Assoluta Alicia Alonso choreographed the lively rendition of *Don Quixote*.

The hard work of the performers and the exuberant reaction by the audience illustrated a compelling argument for opening travel between USA and Cuba. The audience participated as bit players in the political drama that has separated Cuban families for more than 50 years. Angelenos by their very presence became "goodwill ambassadors" for improving USA-Cuba relations, that some say is an "Impossible Dream." It is complicated, but not impossible!

As an example, November 2010 historically marked what some people thought was impossible when the American Ballet Theatre arrived from New York to perform in Havana. Uniting families and promoting cultural exchange by ensuring opportunity to travel for all citizens should become a priority for all nations. Less political posturing and more "people to people" interaction through tourism is good for the future of humanity.

As lead ballet characters Kitri (imaginary Dulcinea) and her beau Basilio twirled to a final crescendo, the entire audience stood clapping for 3 curtain calls. Between the yells of "Bravo" were shouts of "Viva USA-Cuba!" The dynamic young Cuban dancers had performed passionately as they symbolically reached out their hands to their American neighbors, touching many hearts.

Michael Ryan and Renae Williams Niles of the Music Center expressed how thrilled they were to secure this Cuban cultural experience for Angelenos. They shared that the dancers enjoy celebrity status in Cuba. The troupe brilliantly represented the

culture of their country and one could feel it was a hopeful step toward every dancer's dream of individual recognition globally. That dream becomes a possibility when USA and Cuba find the way to move forward to normalize relations allowing talent of both countries to be shared and showcased on both shores.

While critics reviewed the performance, I submit the argument to consider is the bigger picture of what the significance of this Cuban ballet touring the United States at this particular time in history means for the people of Cuba and of America.

There is an opportunity through cultural exchange to dispel the notion that neighboring peoples must be foes when there is government disagreement on issues. In spite of deep political divides reconciliation should be undertaken for the good of separated Cuban families and to advance a more peaceful world. Cultural exchange through the arts and tourism is historically one of the best ways to share common interests, influence values, and inspire virtues.

After the performance, we were invited backstage to meet the Cuban cast, conductor, and crew. Two of the performers had just eloped to Las Vegas to get married and were excited to share their dream experience with their families in Havana. At the same time, a Cuban-American fan shared her dream of taking her four-year-old daughter to Havana to meet her grandparents for the first time. My colleague referred her to our company's www.CubaATI.com for complete assistance with all their travel needs.

In May 2011, the government of Cuba announced that new regulations would soon make travel for all Cubans to the United States a possibility. I know from visiting Cuba that their people look forward to the opportunity of traveling to the United States to get to know the American people and culture.

For travel dreams to be realized and families to be reunited, it takes governments to move forward with reasonable requirements for travelers. So to all legislators on the world stage who produce regulations, do not make travel an "impossible dream," make peace through friendship your glorious quest!