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By Hedy Weiss | Arts & Entertainment, The Daily Sizzle - August 17, 2014

Dance for Life reinforces Chicago's current dancing splendor. Dance for Life is a benefit, and the artists who perform in it are there to give their all without judgment, and deserve nothing but gratitude. But Saturday night's program at the Auditorium Theatre (which reached record attendance, with 2,000 tickets sold), was packed with such exceptional performances by a vast cross-section of Chicago companies and individual artists, that attention must be paid.

To get right to the point: This performance served as a confirmation of the astonishing level of the dancers now working in this city. It is mightily impressive; Joffrey Ballet, Gus Giordano, Hubbard Street, Ensemble Español, River North and Visceral Dance.

Ensemble Español Spanish Dance Theater, in residence at Northeastern Illinois University, in excerpts from Ron De Jesus' recent debut work, "Mil Clavos" ("One Thousand Nails"): In his homage to the company's founder and artistic director, Dame Libby Komaiko, De Jesus (a former member of Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and a longtime collaborator with Twyla Tharp), has whipped up a piece that not only showcases the flamenco technique that is this company's specialty, but turned up the heat on the theatricality they invariably bring to the stage. Devised in three sections (the central section was deleted here for time reasons), it begins with a ferocious, supremely macho trio for male dancers, and then moves into a section that suggests an impassioned love triangle, with a female chorus and soloist further fanning the flames. The lighting by Nathan Tomlinson was stunning; the costumes, by De Jesus and Irma Suarez Ruiz, ravishing. All in all, a stunning performance of a fiery work — and right on the heels of the company's heralded appearance at the renowned Jacob's Pillow summer festival in Massachusetts, as well as some great funding news.