

# The New York Times

CRITIC'S PICK

## Review: Radiant Artists, With a Percussive Bond

Amanda Castro, Brinda Guha and Arielle Rosales come from different traditions but share a reverence for the dancers' foundation: the ground.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/17/arts/dance/soles-of-duende-gibney.html>



Yes, you can dance here: from left, Arielle Rosales, Amanda Castro and Brinda Guha at the Gibney Dance Center in Manhattan. Credit...Scott Shaw, via Gibney

By [Siobhan Burke](#)

June 17, 2022

If you're familiar with the percussive dance trio [Soles of Duende](#), the title of their latest show, "Can We Dance Here?," answers itself long before their feet hit the stage: Yes.

It's a tongue-in-cheek question from three bold, radiant artists — the tap dancer Amanda Castro, the classical Indian Kathak dancer Brinda Guha and the flamenco dancer Arielle Rosales — who are done asking for permission, whose work proudly and generously takes up space.

On Thursday at the Gibney Center in Manhattan, they were joined by the musicians Raaginder, Okai Musik and Ryan Stanbury for the premiere of “[Can We Dance Here?](#),” part of Gibney’s Spotlight series, which supports early-career artists. By the end of the swift, hourlong program, as the packed house called for more, it was clear that this team is ready for an even bigger spotlight. “Can We Dance Here?” is a treasure and a triumph.

If the dancers are asking permission from anyone, or anything, it's the floor, which they treat with reverence, sometimes kneeling down to touch it before coaxing rhythms from its surface. At their most intense, they appear to draw energy up from deep in the earth. Though their dance forms — just as rigorously forms of music — come from different cultural lineages, they share this regard for the ground, and for the feet as a conduit to something greater than themselves.

The members of Soles — who describe themselves as a Brooklyn-born Puerto Rican raised in Connecticut (Castro), a Mexican Puerto Rican Jew from the Lower East Side (Rosales) and a Bengali Indian from New Jersey (Guha) — began collaborating in 2016. While each has room to revel in the specifics of her tradition, “Can We Dance Here?” is remarkable for how it brings their styles into unforced, candid conversation. This fluency — which extends to the musicians, who breezily complement the women’s footwork on violin, trumpet, piano and percussion — seems to spring from their relationships as people, as friends. You sense that they really know and appreciate one another.

The show begins not with the feet, but with the voice, the dancers standing in a close-knit triangle formation to which they often return, vocalizing steps in their own dance lingos. Their dialogue grows more complex as instrumental music kicks in, layered with the sounds of their shoes — or, in Guha’s case, bare feet below bell-clad ankles — slapping and drumming the floor, locking into rhythmic harmony. Duos and trios also reveal surprising convergences in the upper body, in particular between the tendrilled, curvaceous arms of Kathak and flamenco.

“Can We Dance Here?” emphasizes the collective, but each dancer also shines on her own. Early on, Guha gets the audience to make noise with her, through the magnetism of her soulful gaze and imploring claps. In the second half, Rosales dons a simple ruffled skirt to offer a stately, sultry flamenco solo; at one point later on, her rapid-fire stomping shakes the theater.

Castro, an unassuming star wherever she goes (lately she’s been a standout in works by [Ayodele Casel](#) and Dormeshia), captures our attention with her warmth, conviction and spot-on timing, whether miming a tap-infused game of Double Dutch or handling a

costume malfunction. (When a belt began to fall off her fabulous white jumpsuit, she simply ripped it off and tossed it aside.)

Together they live up to their name. The program notes include a passage from Federico García Lorca's "Theory and Play of the Duende." The duende, a kind of creative force or spirit, is "not a question of skill," he writes, "but of a style that's truly alive: meaning, it's in the veins: meaning, it's of the most ancient culture of immediate creation."

These dancers have it, and I hope they get the chance to share it with many more people.

### **Soles of Duende**