



## HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

# Cuban Dancer Performing again with Help from Specialists

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A rare medical problem almost **crippled** Cuban dancer Yankiel Vásquez. But a team of **physiotherapists** helped him recover. The 29-year-old Vásquez is again dancing with Cuba's National Ballet.

Vásquez is from the town of Mantua in rural western Cuba. He joined the ballet in 2011. But shortly after he started, he became sick with Guillain-Barré **syndrome**. That disease of the **immune system** attacks the nerves. It sometimes makes a person unable to move their arms or legs.

When Vásquez was sick, he thought his dream of dancing with the ballet was finished.

Vásquez said, "It took me several months to learn to walk again." He had to recover physically and mentally. He said the recovery process was "intense."

This year he returned to the National Ballet, where he is now a "first dancer." This means he has reached an **elite** level in the ballet. Vásquez said: "Reaching 'first dancer' is what one dreams of as a child."

Cuba's National Ballet began in 1948. It is one of the world's most famous ballet companies. For many years, a school linked to the ballet has helped its students dance in many places around the world.

The Cuban National Ballet has 70 dancers. The company also has a team of physiotherapists who help the dancers stay healthy. The team helped Vásquez become healthy again.

A team of physiotherapists from Chile recently arrived as well. They are helping the dancers prepare for performances. And they are sharing their knowledge with the Cuban team of physiotherapists.

Viengsay Valdés is director of the National Ballet of Cuba. She noted that physical exercises are very important. "A dancer is like an athlete. The importance of having physical preparation is essential," she said.

I'm Andrew Smith.

*Nelson Acosta and Mario Fuentes reported this story for Reuters. Andrew Smith adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**crippled** -*adj.* unable to walk or move legs and arms

**physiotherapist** -*n.* a health care worker who helps restore, improve, or preserve physical movement and function

**syndrome** -*n.* a medical problem or condition, characterized by a group of physical changes and symptoms

**immune system** -*n.* the system in the body of a person or animal that protects against infection

**elite** -*adj.* among the best or at a very high level compared with others

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