

Rhythmic Flourishes, Poise, Posture and the Forceful Whirl of Skirts

Gala Flamenca at City Center

By Alastair Macaulay / March 7, 2014

New York's [Flamenco Festival](#) is back with us. The crowd that thronged City Center on Thursday for the first of two [Gala Flamenca](#) evenings abounded in Spanish speakers and flamenco aficionados. The performers onstage, most of them strongly individual, all won eager applause.

The evening — just over 90 minutes, no intermission — reached its high point at the end, with a long, voluptuous, powerful [Seguiriya](#) solo by [Karime Amaya](#). (She's the grandniece of the legendary [Carmen Amaya](#).) Only her dancing was solo; the way she worked with her six male musicians (the singers Antonio Campos and Ismael de la Rosa, the guitarists Paco Cruz and Daniel Jurado, the violinist Roman Gottwald and the percussionist Miguel El Cheyenne) made this the evening's most intensely musical collaboration.

The sumptuous hourglass curves of Ms. Amaya's figure — handsomely dressed in gold and black — swayed, tipped and arched. Her head turned vividly in opposition to either shoulder. And her feet — sometimes she hoisted her skirts above her knees — paced, darted and drummed.

Some of the evening's male performers had delivered multiple pirouettes, but her rhythm made her solo far more exciting when she delivered a quick, biting series of single pirouettes. She reached a climax in a foot-trill that was astonishing not just in its power and rapidity, but in its rhythmic and dynamic variety: One pulsation kept playing differently against another pulsation, always with an urgently propulsive force.

The evening's most exciting male dancer was [Jesús Carmona](#). We saw him first in silhouette in the evening's opening Cantes, when it was fascinating to see how just his stance (a taut arc) and the brilliant incisiveness of his footwork raised the evening's tension within a second or two. And he can stand still, with his face turned upward and his arms held in lines descending from the shoulders, and slowly circle his hands to marvelous effect; it's less the hands than the strong stillness of the rest of the body that makes so fine an impression. In the dance duet "Trilla7," performed with Lucia Campillo, every phrase he delivered was an event.

Still, there's something steely about his stylishness. When he returned for his big Alegrías solo later in the evening, he sat on a chair for a silent eternity before moving — finally starting only after some polite clapping from the audience. And what followed was punctuated with all too many bright smiles at us: smiles that did not seek to ingratiate but that broadcast an awareness of triumph.

Certainly he made his [Alegrías](#) wonderfully brisk. Just the rapacious way he strides across stage space is terrific, the fast-slicing percussiveness of his feet is brilliant, and the glamorously alert lines and shapes he made throughout the body were almost as radiant as his smiles. But neither as musicianship nor as drama is this great flamenco.

I have little admiration for the coarser delivery of [Carlos Rodríguez](#), who performed a “Soleá por Bulerías (Sienta)” early in the program. And there is much to object to in the blowzy performance style of [Antonio Canales](#), who delivered “Modernidad” and “Tangos de la Chumbera.” Neither of these men shows the proud, stretched head-to-heel stance that can be part of flamenco’s glory; and Mr. Canales’s manner is campy, ingratiating, even sleazy.

These men have quantitative technique in terms of rapid foot-trills; and Mr. Rodríguez is especially fond of multiple pirouettes. But neither has the rhythmic complexity or dynamic variety that takes flamenco beyond a series of wow effects; and Mr. Canales showed less wow than efforts at seedy charm.

The Caracoles for Ms. Amaya, Ms. Campillo and Carmen Coy — all dressed in red — brought multiple pleasures: the tightly clad curves of the women’s figures from shoulder to thigh, their powerful manipulation of their trains (sometimes seeming as massive as iguanas’ tails), and their constant forcefulness. [Rocío Bazán’s](#) singing of the Señora, for all its idiomatic quality, was unrelentingly loud and abrasive.

Neither the two male singers nor the guitarist were given the extended solos that are often vital ingredients of good flamenco evenings. Although flamenco is a genre where dance and music work together with phenomenal intimacy, here that only mattered much in Ms. Amaya’s Seguiriya.

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