

# The Boston Globe

## **Their hallmarks: collaboration, sophistication**

By Karen Campbell, Globe Correspondent | February 18, 2008

Noche Flamenca star Soledad Barrio dances as if she's channeling 500 years of pain, despair, and passion. Whether hunched low to the ground, eyes closed, or head thrown back, torso deeply arched, the small, muscular dancer moves with an introspective quality that is deeply personal, almost private, yet somehow universal. And it seems to unfurl totally in the moment, with an intensity and focus that is riveting.

In the "Solea" Saturday night, she slowly awakened from deep stillness to gradually find strength and resolve in the music, drawing inspiration initially from the singers' dazzling antiphonal duet, then from the whole group as they closed ranks around her, driving her on. Footwork was clean, sharp, impeccably controlled, sometimes launching her into vivid turns that spun on their axis in a near 45-degree angle to the floor. Her feet unleashed long strands of rhythmic sequences that hammered into sophisticated syncopations with the musicians.

But the wonder of this Madrid-based company, founded 15 years ago by Barrio and her husband, Martin Santangelo, is that while Barrio may be the main draw, she's far from the whole show. A concert by Noche Flamenca is a group effort. Like really good jazz, it is fueled by an interplay of spontaneous invention in which all the players contribute, and the communal spirit that bonds this troupe of three dancers, two guitarists, and two singers is palpable. Concerts by Noche Flamenca, frequent Flamenco Festival headliners, seem less like staged contrivances than intimate parties to which we've graciously been invited.

Longtime company members Antonio Jimenez and Juan Ogalla contributed their own solos, each performed with distinctive flair. With his commanding presence and high carriage, the dramatic Ogalla prowls the stage like a panther, with lunges and long gliding steps that explode into brilliant footwork and razor-sharp shifts in direction and dynamic. Toe kicks and sideways flicks of the feet angle with machine precision, knees and ankles swiveling. Jimenez is more grounded, less flashy, yet unafraid to take his moves off center, with skewed hops and kicks that pitch his body forward and back.

Manuel Gago and Emilio Florido were the evening's excellent singers. In a soulful cante complemented by the virtuosic flourishes of guitarist Miguel Perez, Florido's warm, colorful vocals ranged from sotto voce murmurs to guttural moans that seemed to catch in the throat to keening, melismatic wails. In his engaging guitar solo, Eugenio Iglesias developed contemplative ruminations into a jazzy contemporary groove.

The company prides itself on maintaining the purity and integrity of the art form - flamenco distilled to its very essence. The whole group came together at the end for a touching tribute to singer Antonio Vizarraga, a founding member of the company who recently passed away. As the lights dimmed, they formed a circle of clapping hands raising slowly to the heavens.