

## In a Star-Studded Festival, Only One Center of Gravity

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New York is blessed in that one first-rate flamenco troupe, Noche Flamenca, keeps returning each year. Since starting as chief dance critic here in April, I have encountered many dance companies, and many more individual dancers, for the first time. Of these there has been none I have been so glad to discover as Noche Flamenca and, above all, its lead dancer, Soledad Barrio.

I can think of no current ballet dancer in the world as marvelous as she. Outside ballet, my first comparison would be with the very different Madhavi Mudgal, a celebrated exponent of the Odissi style of India, though virtually unknown in New York. These dancers are never farther than a few yards from their musicians and yet turn stage space into something sublime.

As a rule, Noche Flamenca is fastidious about appearing here in small downtown theaters where the close quarters allow the music and dance to work ideally together upon the audience. So it is quite a coup for the City Center, in Midtown, that at its Fall for Dance festival on Thursday the company gave the premiere of its new “Martinete y Solea” there.

Singer, guitarists, clappers were all — startlingly — amplified. So was the floor on which first Juan Ogalla and Antonio Rodriguez danced together (the Martinete) and then Ms. Barrio danced alone (the Solea). The altered sound world changed the whole drama of the dance; the aural balance wasn’t quite right, since Ms. Barrio’s heels could seldom be heard when all the musicians were clapping and strumming together.

But how fascinating to see her nonetheless triumph in a theater this large. She is a mistress of stillness and slowness: she has only to extend a straight arm and walk slowly forward across the stage, and it becomes an existential drama. Out of these passages of pressure-cooker restraint come her great explosions of woodpecker footwork, the astounding bodily arcs that she holds and in which she unexpectedly revolves upon herself, suddenly focusing on a point of floor as if it were a snake she was defying, or standing stretched like a human bow for archery.