

# **The Stage Is Small, the Sweat Apparent, the Spirit Cathartic**

By GIA KOURLAS

Martin Santangelo is the artistic director of Noche Flamenca, but Soledad Barrio, his wife, is the company's fiery, radiant star. In a limited engagement at Joe's Pub, this excellent Madrid troupe accomplishes much in a fretfully short time and, it must be pointed out, on an incredibly minuscule stage. It's not unlike a performance in a subway car, considering the cramped quarters and the occasional sound of a train rumbling beneath the floor.

On Friday night Ms. Barrio shined in a particularly brisk set of flamenco music and dance, working with a guest dancer, Juan Ogalla; two singers, Manuel Gago and Trinidad de le Isla; and a guitarist, Jose Valle Fajardo, known as Chuscales. The show includes impassioned songs and dances, including a tango for Ms. Barrio and Mr. Ogalla, whose inherent playfulness gently coaxes a similar, lighthearted quality from his partner.

In his solo Mr. Ogalla prowls pantherlike across the stage, his swift feet pounding intricate rhythms with the force and rapidity of a machine gun. Using his hips to grand effect, Mr. Ogalla — clearly a favorite of several enthusiastic women in the crowd — is, alluringly, a bit like a flamenco version of [Mick Jagger](#). He holds nothing back but maintains a stellar, even delicate control of his body.

The show concluded with the earthy, sensual Ms. Barrio performing the solea, a cathartic tour de force for which she is perhaps best known. The music pushes her extraordinary athleticism until it appears she is moving by instinct; with her eyes partly closed and her hands twisting deep creases into the folds of her black skirt, she leaves one world and enters another, all the while riding a wave shaped by her quicksilver feet. As her muscular arms rise above her head and her wrists swirl in intricate patterns, Ms. Barrio's fingers seem to vibrate from a mysterious inner pulse.

But as magnificent as Ms. Barrio is, it is the communal spirit of the group that creates such a soulful world, by turns tender and ferocious. There is much to be said for seeing the company on such an intimate stage; extreme effort, apparent in beads of sweat and quivering muscles, provides a detailed rendering of a gut-wrenching art form. The performers have nowhere to hide.