

Powerful outpouring of emotion in purest flamenco form

July 9, 2009

NOCHE FLAMENCA

Playhouse, Arts Centre, until July 11

www.nocheflamenca.com

Reviewer Jessica Nicholas

DON'T come to Noche Flamenca's latest show expecting polka dots. You won't find any. Nor will you find an elaborate set or lighting rig (in fact, the "set" for most of this show consists of a handful of wooden cafe chairs against a black backdrop).

What you will find, though, is a powerfully authentic representation of flamenco at its purest. This is flamenco laid bare, stripped of all but its most essential ingredients — cante (song), toque (guitar) and dance — and presented by artists who are not so much performing as living their artform in front of us. In the program notes for this show, Noche Flamenca's artistic director Martin Santangelo insists that "flamenco was, and always will be, about real people". And so, rather than simply watching a show, it feels as though we are being invited into the world of these artists as they express their individuality and the universality of emotion.

Singers Manuel Gago and Emilio Florido carry much of the show's emotional weight, pouring out their poetry in raw ululations that cut across the rhythms of the guitarists (Salva de Maria and Juan Antonio Suarez "Cano").

The two male dancers are a study in contrast: Juan Fernandez is all compact precision, while the extraordinary Jose Suarez "El Torombo" — one of the most exciting dancers I have seen on stage — moves with a wild, untamed energy that radiates an air of dangerous unpredictability.

Then there is Soledad Barrio, the dancing heartbeat of Noche Flamenca, whose majestic "solea" moves through sorrow, introspection, anger and defiance as her body becomes a twisting, arching vehicle for flamenco's tormented but miraculously resilient soul.