

Soledad Barrio and Noche Flamenca command the stage

By John Soltes / Editor in Chief

NEW YORK (Dec. 16, 2010) — You hear the amazing performers of Noche Flamenca before you actually see them. They emerge in pitch darkness on the small stage of the Cherry Lane Theatre. Their silhouettes are haunting images, casting shadows like funereal shrouds. They emerge, like the earth reborn.

Singers Emilio Florido and Miguel Rosendo clap their hands in unison, while guitarists Salva De María and Eugenio Iglesias strum in the background. They silently make their way to the back as the dancers take their place in the increasingly warm glow of the brightening lights. Juan Ogalla and Antonio Jiménez begin dancing "Amancer," a world-premiere routine choreographed by Martín Santangelo, Noche Flamenca's artistic director. Although one's eyes dart back and forth among the full-throated belts of the singers, the violent strumming of the guitarists and the powerful movements of the two dancers — the spotlight of the performance quickly comes into focus.

As the only woman on stage, Soledad Barrio attracts attention like an hallucinatory drug. She overflows with emotion, but never comes across too showy. She holds a history lesson in her steps. She is that rare gem in the world of dance: a performer who commands, without being commanding. Seeing her in person is a downright necessity for anyone with even a glancing interest in flamenco. Seeing her and Noche Flamenca during their annual New York City season has become a rite of passage: you really don't know flamenco if you haven't seen Soledad Barrio and Noche Flamenca.

In this 75-minute program, which features four premieres and three repertory dances, the focus is on solemnity. The lights are dim or finely focused. The dancers — in both solo and company numbers — imbue an amalgam of confidence and pathos.

Jiménez performs a strong "Solea por Bulerías," while Ogalla is pitch-perfect in "Farruca," another solo number. The duet between Barrio and Ogalla (coined "Alegrías") was perhaps the highlight of the program. That is, until Barrio makes her way for the penultimate offering: "Siguiriya."

In the piece, miles are traveled by this iconic flamenco dancer, if not literally then definitely figuratively. She outlines her rhythmic movements with curled hand gestures and deadly stares. She hikes up her dress a few inches, offering audience members a peer into the madness that is her moving feet. They click and clack, back and forth, round and round. Fittingly, "Siguiriya" ends as the entire evening began: in darkness, with Barrio inching closer to a slowly evaporating spotlight.

The performance concludes with "Esta Noche No Es Mi Día," a tribute to Antonio Vizarriga, a former Noche Flamenca dancer who died recently. The company members offer a touching memorial to their colleague, and a resounding finale to an emotively charged performance.

Soledad Barrio and Noche Flamenca are more than simply torch-bearers for an art form that finds its origins in Andalucia, Spain. They have their fingers on the pulse of evolution, reinventing flamenco by honoring its possibility.

Soledad Barrio and Noche Flamenca are currently playing the Cherry Lane Theatre at 38 Commerce St. in New York City. Visit www.telecharge.com for tickets. Tickets are priced at \$60 with discounts available for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday shows. The dancing troupe continues through Jan. 12.