

Three Dancers and Three Traditions Converge, United by Rhythm

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“Can We Dance Here?” That’s the title of Soles of Duende’s signature work. But it’s also a question that the members of this percussive dance company often find themselves posing.

“We’re constantly asking it weekly, daily, trying to book a rehearsal studio,” the tap dancer Amanda Castro said. Often, the answer is no because there’s a fear that tap and flamenco shoes will damage floors, or that the group’s rehearsals will be too loud.

“People have hung up the phone on us,” said Castro, who is one of three members of Soles of Duende, along with the flamenco dancer Arielle Rosales and the Kathak artist Brinda Guha. “People cut me off in the middle of the word ‘flamenco’ — they’re like, ‘no, we don’t allow that, sorry,’ click.”



Guha and Rosales (in mirror); Guha specializes in Kathak, a dance form from northern India. Credit...Maansi Srivastava/The New York Times

Sometimes the problem is about logistics. Once, after showing up to a festival and finding that they were expected to dance on carpeted metal risers, the performers dragged pieces of wood out of a dumpster and built a makeshift floor.

It's a particular cruelty that a floor to dance on is so elusive for the artists of Soles, because to them, the floor is a beloved collaborator — the foundation that unites their three distinct cultural forms. "It feels like a holy place," said Castro, who, like many percussive dancers, considers herself both a musician and an instrument: In percussive dance, the sounds the body makes (tapping or stomping the floor, clapping the hands) are valued alongside, sometimes even above, how the body moves through space.

Despite its name, "Can We Dance Here?," onstage this week as part of the [American Dance Platform showcase](#) at the Joyce Theater, makes bold statements rather than asking polite questions, as it situates the three styles into joyful and rhythmically thrilling conversation.

Soles of Duende was formed in 2016, when Rosales and Guha, already friends and occasional collaborators, were looking for a third percussive dancer for a performance at Dixon Place. Guha wasn't expecting to find someone at Run the Night, a competition dominated by hip-hop and

contemporary dancers, but one performer caught her eye: Castro, the only tap artist there, who won first place for her performance to music by Vivaldi. (“Classical music slaps,” Castro said.) Later that night Guha messaged Rosales: “I found her.”









The three dancers clicked immediately, united by the commonalities among their forms — the reverence for the floor, the overlapping rhythms — and by what the three dancers themselves shared. Each felt a responsibility to the tradition she carried; all were invested in what true collaboration might look like, hungry to push boundaries and ask difficult questions of their forms.

“We didn’t know what we were going to make, but I just remember this feeling of ease that we’d figure something out,” Guha said. “I’d never felt that way working with anyone else. It felt brave and fearless, like there were no inhibitions.”

After the Dixon Place performance, they were inundated with questions about where they would be performing next. They hadn’t thought that far ahead. Eventually they landed back at Dixon Place, where they created an early version of “Can We Dance Here?,” which they continued developing and performing over the years.

The work of Soles is more of a salad than a juice, Rosales said — “you can still see and pick out the ingredients” — more dialogue than fusion, and decidedly not a watered-down blend of the three traditions, each deeply rooted in a culture and history. Tap is an African American art form, flamenco comes from Andalusia in southern Spain, and Kathak is a classical dance from northern India.



“We’re not trying to reinvent the wheel,” Castro, above, said. “We’re not trying to create a Soles of Duende form of dance or to do flamenco in tap shoes.” Credit...Maansi Srivastava/The New York Times

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She added, “You don’t have to sacrifice any part of yourself to have a conversation with somebody else.”

Experimenting with the boundaries of their forms without “perpetrating a fraud,” as Guha put it, requires constantly negotiating each tradition’s distinctive musical, cultural and aesthetic values. Kathak and flamenco, for instance, are often dramatic and outward-projecting; both have extensive, codified upper body movements. Tap, on the other hand, can feel internal and almost private; dancers sometimes look down at their feet as they dance, faces lost in concentration, arms swinging naturally by their sides.

Flamenco can act as a bridge between Kathak and tap, Rosales said, since it has been influenced by both forms. “If I took my shoes off and did my footwork, it would look pretty similar to Kathak,” she said. “Tap technique is different — the ankles are much looser, they lift their knees — but flamenco has adapted a lot of things from tap.”



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Traditionalists may see what Soles of Duende does as rule breaking. The three dancers are aware of that and strive to be clear about what the rules are so they can be intentional about when and how to break them.

Recently, at a residency at Chelsea Factory, they spent several days immersed in the three styles with the help of guest artists, exploring a folk dance from southern Spain, called Sevillanas, with the flamenco singer Alfonso Cid; the history of the shim sham — a step considered the national anthem of tap dance — with Jason Samuels Smith; and Kathak repertory with [Parul Shah](#).

“They want to go deep,” Shah said. “They really want to know the tradition they’re working in, to pay homage and respect to it.”

For now, that deepening includes the creation of a new piece (to be premiered in 2025) and, they hope, a “Can We Dance Here?” recorded album. What they really dream of, though?

“Infrastructural things,” Guha said. More specifically: their very own dance floor.