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The Dallas Morning News
DallasNews.com

Sunday, S



NAN COULTER/Special Contributor

Jose Junco exuded machismo and that was just fine by Friday's highly emotional audience at the Gypsy Tea Room.

Fiery allure

Ida y Vuelta flamenco dancers sizzle up close

By MARGARET PUTNAM
Special Contributor

They smoked, they drank, they talked — and from time to time they shrieked. *Ida y Vuelta* Flamenco Dance Company performed only a few feet away from the onlookers at the Gypsy Tea Room on Friday night, and made a visceral connection.

The audience clapped hands in rhythm to the guitarist, singer and drummers. They shouted out in Spanish, egging the dancers on, or displaying admiration. As the evening wore on, the shouting and shrieking grew more intense, more frequent.

Flamenco moved into theaters long ago, but for some dance lovers; the form fits better in clubs

and taverns. There you can see and feel the intensity, the tortured faces, the pelting feet, the connection between dancer and musician.

At the Gypsy Tea Room, just the way the program started had a simplicity that said spontaneity. Musicians streamed in, followed by dancers. All sat along the back of the stage.

Julia Alcántara started the show, holding a microphone and singing a García Lorca song, backed by Pilar Moreno. At the last moment she burst into a frenzy, and just as quickly, subsided.

In "Tangos," four women lined up in two rows and swiveled and

glided in unison. Their faces glittered with pleasure, their eyes flashed.

But not until the second part of the program did the real nature of flamenco surface. Ms. Alcántara thrust arms high overhead, neck tilted, mourning the death of a friend, and the death of so many Sept. 11. She danced slowly and deliberately, as though holding grief at bay. But emotion surged through her body, and she lunged low to the ground, swiveling wildly as the singer moaned.

She was more than matched by guest artist Jose Junco, whose stride onto the stage for "Farruca" brought a few screams from the audience. Then he merely stood, one arm lifted, one leg stretched

out, face looking straight forward. Far more screams. Sex oozed out of him. The combination of elegance and confidence made him an idealized version of masculinity. Who else would have dared to wear a polka-dot shirt, with ruffles no less, over black bolero coat and tight pants?

The coat came off, of course, but he didn't try the sexy toss you'd expect. He didn't need to. Every movement he made said machismo, whether it was furiously pounding feet, triple turns that ended with a sudden long slide to the floor, or abrupt half turns. His footwork was clean, fast and loud. He did not need the drummers, who bore down relentlessly. He was an act unto himself.