

Carole Edrich previews **Flamenco Festival London 08**
at Sadler's Wells, March 3–16, 2008

Seville, fount of flamenco creativity, is a fitting theme for this year's Flamenco Festival opening night. María Pagés (**Compañía María Pagés, Sevilla, March 3–6**) describes it as a dreamtime exploration of "the mother of all my adventures on and off stage". Pagés is famous for her long and sinuously twisting "endless arms" and her glittering history includes dancing in three famous Carlos Saura films, performing in *Riverdance* and choreographing for the Spanish National Ballet. Although she has a reputation for innovation, it's not the same as the ground-breaking deconstructions done so well by Rafaela Carrasco or the multi-faceted interpretations for which Belén Maya is famous. Instead it's a softer, more natural-seeming progression where clearly recognisable classical flamenco is widened by the incorporation of other disciplines.

The very traditional Farruco family (**Los Farruco, March 7–9**) dance with a style and level of spontaneity that you'd expect in a tablao (small, intimate flamenco venue) rather than the big stage, and represent the heart of flamenco puro. While other performances die in the transfer, the Farrucos are larger than life and their deep knowledge of the dance and technical expertise make for an entertaining and satisfying evening.

Carmen Linares is rightly known as the First Lady of Cante (flamenco song) and Miguel Moveda is a well respected rising star of the new

generation of cantaoers (singers). In **Cuatro Esquinas (March 10)**, they take us on a varied journey through space and time from the gypsy roots of flamenco to modern innovations and fusion influences. They are accompanied by Juan Carlos Romero and dancer Pastora Galván. Sister of the famous and controversial Israel Galván, Pastora's dance technique puts a contemporary edge to a very traditional foundation.

Mujeres (March 11 and 12) means women, and this interpretation of the essence of great flamenco women is expressed through three dancers with very different styles of movement. Merche Esmeralda has a reputation for pure old-style flamenco dance and cante and can be recognised by a stylisation that includes very idiosyncratic facial dancing. Belén Maya is a very modern flamenco dancer and one of the best of our times. She is one of a handful of dancers who can perform a really modern interpretation while making it feel real. That's because, like Rafaela Carrasco, even when exploring different styles she keeps the visceral rawness that is a trademark of the dance and its traditions. Some say that Roció Molina, the youngest of the three, has the best technique of any living flamenco dancer. Her approach is very modern and she has a fluid, very feminine and well transmitted style rooted in good, traditional technique.

Israel Galván (**La Edad de Oro, March 13**) is a kind of progressive rhythm box of ultra-contemporary (Nuevo) flamenco.



spirit and feel. Carrasco's dances are atmospheric, performances are tightly choreographed and seamlessly restructured, and the way she shows things often challenges our preconceptions while staying absolutely true to flamenco's history and nature. *Una Mirada del Flamenco* (a view of flamenco) is no exception. Look

Above, Merche Esmeralda. Photograph by Luis Castilla.

He can dance incredibly complex rhythms and contra rhythms which are fascinating in their intricacy. *La Edad de Oro* is his journey back to the routes of flamenco and has been given the Galván trademark avant-garde treatment. It's not a new act, but a significant one revisited in which he uses the three cornerstones of flamenco: guitar, vocals and dance. Each one of these provides a different perspective of the mythical "golden age" of flamenco.

Concha Buika (*Mi Niña Lola, March 14*) is an Afro-Spanish singer whose fusion of different influences with flamenco Coplas (rhythmic flamenco verses) are often the basis of a wide range of world music interpretations.

Rafaela Carrasco (*Una Mirada del Flamenco, March 15*) is probably the best modern flamenco choreographer of our time and as such she is very consistent. She's also an exceptionally versatile modern flamenco dancer. Her forte is in the exploration of limits and a particularly considerate deconstruction of flamenco which maintains an authentic

out for the men dancing the Farruca (a traditional men's dance) in bata de colas (long flamenco skirts). This is a perfect example of Carrasco's unique view as well as an illustration of how far flamenco has evolved over the years on physical, emotional and intellectual levels.

As you'd expect from the name, **Viva Jerez! (March 16)** is a celebration of flamenco from that area. Several generations of dancers will perform together and you can expect a lot of bulerías (the dance with the frenetic fast footwork) as that's traditional to Jerez.

The Fringe is playing an increasingly important part this year. You can learn palmas (clapping) or Sevillanas before joining Escuela de Baile's Juerga (party) night at the Lillian Baylis Theatre, and the Instituto Cervantes has talks, two film screenings and a "meet the artists" session. All in all we're in for a rich treat at this festival. ●

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