

## **Summer and Autumn Flamenco Festivals in Southern Spain**

In summer and early autumn, southern Spain resonates with flamenco festivals featuring cante (flamenco singing), toque (guitar), and baile (dance). These festivals are sponsored by their respective cities, the regional government (Junta de Andalucía), and private foundations and donors.

The Bienal de Flamenco de Sevilla is one such festival. It takes place every other September, and is a particularly large and important venue for professional artists who premiere new choreographic works, such as Antonio Canales' dynamic *Torero*, and Sara Baras' introspective *Juana La Loca*.

### **Cordoba**

Summer and autumn flamenco festivals in southern Spain have much to offer, as does the *International Guitar Festival in Cordoba*, which commences each year in early July, lasts for approximately 14 days, includes numerous guitar, cante and baile performances, and offers workshops in dance and music. In summer 2001 I attended most of the festival concerts and took part in an advanced flamenco dance workshop taught by Inmaculada Aguilar, a well-known and respected dance teacher in Cordoba. The class included flamenco dance technique and choreography for the ancient La Caña, and was accompanied expertly by a professional flamenco guitarist and cantaor (flamenco singer). A working knowledge of the cante is essential for flamenco dancers, and the cantaor worked closely with Inmaculada and her students.

### **Granada**

Another exceptionally fine summer festival occurs in Granada each year from the end of June until the middle of July - *El Festival de Música y Danza de Granada*. Last summer, the festival celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with performances at the Alhambra Palace Generalife (outdoor garden) theater. Included in this venue was internationally renowned nuevo flamenco dancer/choreographer Eva La Yerbabuena, who presented her dance theater extravaganza *5 Mujeres 5* on a beautiful summer evening at the outdoor theater. Other performances took place in a variety of venues around the city, including in local cuevas, caves that were originally the traditional homes of Gypsy families. Contemporarily, many of these cuevas have been converted into flamenco venues, called zambras. In 2002, the Zambra Flamenca de Maria La Canastera, one of the oldest

traditional Gypsy flamenco venues in Granada, will perform in the 51<sup>st</sup> festival. Although Granada plays a major role in the evolution of flamenco, the Granada festival did not always feature flamenco, as it was initially a medium for classical dance and music. This has changed in recent years, and as a result of this and smaller, grass roots festivals in the region, flamenco afición in Granada is at a very high level.

Another engaging summer dance event in Granada is *Muestra Andaluza de Jóvenes Valores del Baile Flamenco*, which features young, award-winning flamenco dancers. As part of their award, these artists tour their competition dances throughout the country. Here, the dancers were firmly innovative, as was the case with Daniel Navarro and Rosario Toledo. This is especially so when their dances are juxtaposed against more traditional treatments of the same material, for example, in contrast to the flamenco dances performed at the Zambra Flamenca de Maria La Canastera. Daniel and Rosario's choreographies are more angular, the use of the compás (rhythmic structure of a flamenco song/dance) is often more subtle or idiosyncratic, extended footwork sequences are often used, and braceo (arm work/arm gestures) is included as part of both short and long footwork sequences. The above described features are the antithesis in more traditional flamenco dance settings, and these young dancers embrace an alternative aesthetic with these modern flamenco dance innovations.

### **Jerez de la Frontera**

Throughout the year Spaniards, tourists from around the world, artists, students, and scholars flock to Jerez de la Frontera to take part in numerous cultural activities that feature a year round cycle of events focused exclusively on flamenco.

Jerez de la Frontera is located approximately 1 hour by train from and south of Seville, and is considered by many flamenco artists as the historical center for cante flamenco. Numerous important singing dynasties are centered in Jerez, and these fine singers helped to create and disseminate the Jerez style of the flamenco bulería. Uniquely different from other versions of the song and dance, the Jerez bulería is remarkable in every aspect, particularly for the way that it connects the Gypsy community with the community at large.

## **Viernes Flamenco**

In all of the summer festivals in Jerez de la Frontera the bulerías was a favored, featured element, and all festivals usually ended with a rendition of the song with dance. Much to the delight of the audience, singers and guitarists often included a short, snappy baile desplante por bulerías (danced variation) at the end of a concert, as was the case in the August festival, *Viernes Flamenco*, which took place every Friday night during the month of August in 2001. Each evening featured two or three singers and guitarists and one dancer, each dancer performing two solos. One evening, award-winning dancer Mercedes Ruiz performed a highly technical, innovative, and contemporary flamenco *Zapateado* that received meager applause, and later went on to bring down the house with her intricate, stylish and charming dance, *Bulería al Gólpe* (bulería performed with rhythm). In Jerez, even distinguished dancers must prove to knowledgeable aficionados that they are fully capable of performing the bulería. On the same program, the cantaor El Mono received equal praise for his humorous rendition of the song with dance.

In mid-September each year the Festival de la Bulería takes place in the Plaza de Toros in Jerez de la Frontera as part of the larger Fiestas de Otoño/Vendimia (grape harvest). Last year the XXXIV Fiesta de la Bulería included numerous singers and guitarists who performed a variety of cantes and toques flamenco, most segments ending with a short, crisp, and wry baile por bulería de Jerez. The featured dancer at this venue was flamenco artist Maria del Mar Moreno, who performed a Romera, a hybrid flamenco song and dance similar to the Alegrías de Cádiz. Moreno, a seasoned dancer, teacher, and historian performed the piece with poise and energy. She is a traditional dancer, and strikingly different from the modern innovators in her strict adherence to more conservative flamenco steps, postures and temperaments.

## **Conclusions**

Flamenco summer festivals in southern Spain are numerous and rich, featuring flamenco dancers that exhibit a variety of stylistic approaches, from ultra modern to traditional choreographies. Given the scope and depth of each venue, scholars, researchers, artists and teachers can gain valuable insights into flamenco by attending one or more of these festivals, and participating in the classes, lectures and exhibits that are a part of each one. Particularly in Jerez de la Frontera, dancers and teachers can participate

in flamenco activities during the summer and autumn on a daily basis, an excellent process of immersion that leads to a fuller understanding of the art form.

**Internet Resources:**

For the *International Guitar Festival in Cordoba*, see [www.guitarracordoba.com](http://www.guitarracordoba.com)

For the *Festival Internacional de Música y Danza in Granada*, see [www.granadafestival.org](http://www.granadafestival.org)

For *Muestra Andaluza de Jovenes Valores del Baile Flamenco* and other events and classes in Granada, contact [www.carmencuevas.com](http://www.carmencuevas.com)

For *Viernes Flamenco*, *Festival de la Bulería*, *Vendimia*, and other events and classes in Jerez de la Frontera, contact Joaquin Agabo at [www.duendelenguas.com](http://www.duendelenguas.com)

For the Bienal de Flamenco de Sevilla, see [www.bienalflamenco.org](http://www.bienalflamenco.org)

This Article was published in the: [Dance Research Journal](#) 34/1 Summer 2002, pp. 102-105.

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