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# Time Out

## New York

### Review

## Body heat

Noche Flamenca explodes with genuine Gypsy passion

By **Gia Kourlas**

Flamenco dance generally turns me off. I've always felt that the whole package—smoky stages, fake street settings and passionate screams of *olé!*—had way too much in common with Harlequin romance novels. But Noche Flamenca, a Madrid-based troupe performing at Theatre 80 through August 15, is the antithesis of all those cheeseball clichés. This company, led by Martin Santangelo, seems as though it was founded on family warmth instead of sleazy sex, with dancers and musicians who rely on their own natural stage presence rather than Gypsy stereotypes.

Only 12 inches separates the stage from the audience at Theatre 80, so the performers and spectators keep close quarters. There's no elaborate set, and the only props are chairs, which means the dancers and musicians must provide the atmosphere. That's not difficult for this group of nine singers, guitarists and dancers. Santangelo's program serves as an overview of flamenco styles, ranging from the *Soleá*, a dance about loneliness, to the joyful *Alegria*. The male solo dance *Farruca* and a sultry tango are also performed. The musicians are as charming as the dancers, though the musical segments are dominated by the resonant, powerful voice of Rafael Jimenez "Falo" (try to go on a night when he sings his own brooding, melancholy "Solo de Cante").

Of the company's three dancers—Soledad Barrio, Alejandro Granados and Bruno Argenta—the latter seems to be the most classically trained. Last year, he was wonderful, but this year he is spectacular, with more control over his turns and bal-



**HEART AND SOLE** Soledad Barrio, the current star of Noche Flamenca.

ances and a stronger center. In the malesolo, the fiery *Farruca*, Argenta, who has performed with flamenco choreographers Joaquin Ruiz and Victor Ullate in the past, has always seemed to push himself to the limit onstage; now, his execution appears effortless. Granados is a more mature dancer. Last week, his *Soleá* spoke of pain and longing, but the performance was a bit too contrived. In the end, the passion he conveyed only overwhelmed his personality.

Santangelo used to be the star of Noche Flamenca (due to a back injury, he hasn't danced in two years), but now that role is reserved for his wife, Barrio. The best flamenco dancers are said to possess a spark, or a *duende*. Barrio may be small, but she moves big. While her flexible back and agile footwork are astonishing, perhaps her finest talent is the fluidity of her arms. At one point during her *Alegria*, she turns her back to the audience and faces the musicians. Gradually, as her hips shake to the beat of the clapping singers, her arms float up over her head, wrists and fingers darting back and forth like a snake's tail. Quickly, she whips her body around to confront the audience. Her face is torn with emotion; her torso practically vibrates—it's as if her rapture has been poured onto the stage. She's succeeded in the art of flamenco—she's turned herself inside out.

**Noche Flamenca performs at Theatre 80 through August 15.**