

Compañía Flamenco *José Porcel*

José Porcel, Artistic Director



History of Flamenco

A flamenco performance gives the spectator an overwhelming sensation of happiness, a joyful and sensual mood that no other form of dance is capable of evoking. Because flamenco is an explosion of rhythms, colors, and emotions that contains all of the vitality, sunniness, and passion of the Spanish people, it is a folkloric celebration where, even when "theatre art" is being provided, irrepressible energy remains intact.

The origins of flamenco are still uncertain, and they have been lost through the centuries in a tangled web of influences and contributions from various civilizations. It is highly probable that flamenco singing and dancing originated in Andalucia toward the fifteenth century, during the Gypsies' encounter with the inhabitants of southern Spain. It continues to be extremely difficult to trace the origin of these wandering populations who, when they arrived in the region of Andalucia, were bearing with them a culture that was a mixture of Arabic-Egyptian, Jewish, and Indian (which is obvious, for example, in the gentle and voluptuous movements of the dancers' bodies and arms) influences.

The oldest form of flamenco is *cante jondo*, an intimate and deep-felt song that recounts the sorrows and hopes of the Gypsies as a people. Originating as a rhythmic form of accentuation for singing, *flamenco dancing* was enriched over time by constantly increasing expressive possibilities, along with indispensable accompaniment by guitars, thereby becoming the source of a vast repertoire of *cuadros* (one can consider the solemnity of *soleares* or the contagious festiveness of *sevillanas* and *alegrías*), where the intense and passionate nature of Mediterranean peoples bursts forth.

As a "theatrical performance," flamenco only developed in the past century, through a constant effort involving stylistic experimentation, refinement of expression, and technical codification that gave this form of dancing a true artistic dignity of its own, albeit without causing a loss of its strong identity as folk dancing that is indissolubly bound to the Gypsy spirit. Among the dancers and choreographers who have elevated flamenco to the realm of "theatre art," one cannot overlook Antonio Ruiz Soler (or, more simply, the "Great Antonio"), who was a superb interpreter of such masterpieces as *El sombrero de tres picos*, and Antonio Gades, who, more than anyone else, succeeded in infusing flamenco dancing with a form of narrative richness (such as his *Bodas de Sangre* and *Carmen*).

The Compañía Flamenco Jose Porcel was founded in Madrid, Spain and is among the premier dance troupes that exhibits this exciting art form. The Company brings this tradition to life vibrantly and colorfully with live musicians, vocalists and of course dancers and has delighted audiences around the world for many years.

Map of Spain



Characteristics of Flamenco

Flamenco combines acoustic guitar playing, singing, chanting, dancing and staccato handclapping. The flamenco dancer performs with passion, fervor, even tortured expressions but always striving for grace and dignity.

The guitar — there may be one or several — and the rapid rhythmic handclapping of the singers and dancers set the scene.

Flamenco handclapping produces a sharp, almost piercing sound. Those performers not dancing or guitar playing hold the left arm still. It's bent at the elbow with the hand about neck high and just slightly cupped. The fingers of the right hand slap the left crosswise, covering the hollow.

Try it yourself. If your fingers do not land squarely, the clap is dull, flat. When they hit just right, you'll hear it.

The dancer does not begin immediately, but waits, absorbing the strumming, clapping and singing until inspired to dance.

Like American jazz, flamenco dancing involves improvisation. It's the dancer's spontaneous expression of the moment's emotions. The Spanish call it *duende* (DWEN-day). The word means goblin or fairy, but to the flamenco dancer it signifies an inner force that fuels an inspired performance.

A dancer with *duende* goes beyond technical mastery to vent his or her feelings, achieving a powerful, compelling dance. Those who aren't singing may shout encouragement: *olé* or *¡baile! ¡baile!* — dance! dance! As an observer, you don't really see good flamenco, you feel it.

By Bob Martin at <http://www.inquisitivetraveler.com/pages/artlib/flamenco.html>

How to Dance Flamenco

Arms

If there is something that is characteristic of flamenco, and particularly of its female dance forms, it is the movement of the arms. It requires technique, lots of practice, and artistry. The arms must be held up high, above the head, and in a rounded shape, so that the elbows are not visible. At the start you will get tired, and your muscles may ache, but in due time you will manage to keep them raised and to control them without ever flagging.

At the same time as the arm movements are being executed, the hands must be turned inwards and outwards. This movement will have to follow the music, and must be done in a way that does not make the hands look like grinders that have spun out of control. It isn't easy, but once you have achieved it, your arms will have gained in character, personality and artistry.

After mastering the arm movements, they will need to be coordinated with the feet. At first this is somewhat difficult, but later it will become automatic.

Feet

The zapateado (stepping movements with the toe, sole and heel of the foot that produce a rhythmic combination of sounds) is another indispensable part of flamenco. It is executed with the knees slightly bent in order to strike (the floor or stage) with strength, absorb the blow and avoid injuries. The back must be kept straight, and the feet must be kept in line with the hips. There are several kinds of percussion using the feet: the blow, with the plant of the foot, with the heel, with the toes... It is important for them to sound "clean" and clearly, and this can only be achieved with lots of technique, ear, strength and resistance. These qualities will eventually be acquired through practice.

Body

Attention must be paid to the body position from the very start; if you get used to a good position, there will come a time when it will appear without even thinking about it, and it will become your natural posture, even when you are walking down the street. The body position must be very straight, looking bold and elegant, although it also needs to be flexible and stretch out when the steps require it. These movements must be harmonious, natural, effortless; the bailaor (flamenco dancer) must identify with the plasticity of the movement. The head is also important. It will have to remain raised, it will accentuate the meaning of our steps, and our dancing will become more expressive.

Heart

This is the most difficult and most important part. You have to feel flamenco dancing, and you must make the person who watches it feel it as well. You must be able to give an outlet to your feelings and to express your personality. To do this, you must understand the music and allow it to carry you along. Flamenco is not an art form that has set rules. This is where the main difficulty lies. It is important to spend time studying the different cantes (styles of songs) and toques (styles of guitar playing) in detail in order to perceive their peculiarities. You have to know and master the meter, the expressive flamenco vocabulary, the technique, the structure of the different dances, the palos (forms)... Furthermore, you need to know how to combine all sorts of movements and steps naturally, and to be able to improvise.

Flamenco Rhythms

Palmas, or hand-clapping, is like a percussion instrument in itself. It is performed in 2 distinct ways - loud or soft. Loud palmas is made by slapping the slightly cupped palm of your left hand with the middle 3 fingers of your right hand, finding the "sweet spot", so that it makes an effortlessly loud and sharp sound. Soft palmas is made by cupping both hands and fingers round each other, to make a dull muted sound.

"Contra palmas" is made by 2 people. One holds the beat and claps meticulously in time or "straight", while the other person claps in the space between each beat or on the "off-beat". This needs a lot of practice to do well and is difficult to do fast, but can sound spectacular when performed at speed.

Each rhythmic form has its own basic palmas rhythm shown in black as follows. (Gray beats are rest beats).

TANGOS in 4 time:

1 2 and 3 4

RUMBA in 4 time:

1 2 and 3 4

ALEGRIA in 12-beat rhythm:

1 + 2 3 4 + 5 6 7 + 8 9 + 10 11 12

SOLEA in 12-beat rhythm:

1 + 2 3 4 + 5 6 7 + 8 9 + 10 11 + 12

SOLEA POR BULERIA in 12-beat rhythm

1 + 2 3 4 5 6 7 + 8 9 + 10 11 12

<http://www.flamenco-norfolk.co.uk/tutorial.htm>

Vocabulary

DANCE

Hands:

A Fuera (Ah FWEY-rah): outward hand movement

A Dentro (Ah THEN-tro): inward hand movement

Palillos (Pa-LEE-yohss): finger-snapping

Palmas (PAHL-muss): rhythmic hand-clapping

Sordas (SOR-thas): muted (literally: "deaf") referring to softer clapping

Claras (CLA-rass): bright, referring to loud clapping

Footwork:

Escobilla or escovilla (Es-coh-BEE-yah): long footwork section

Golpe (GOAL-pay): Stamp with the entire foot

Planta (PLAN-tah): Ball of the foot

Punta (POON-tah): Toe

Tacón (Tah-CONE): Heel

Taconeo (Tah-cone-AY-oh): Footwork in general

Whole body:

Marcaje (Mar-CAH-hey): Dance steps (which include upper-body movement) as opposed to footwork

Parts of a dance:

Letra (LET-rah) or Copla (KOH-plah): verse

Llamada (Yah-MAH-dah): call to begin or end a dance section

Remate (Ray-MAH-tay): punctuation of the singing with footwork

Salida (Sah-LEE-dah): entrance

VOICE

Cante (KAHN-tay): singing

Salida (Sah-LEE-dah) or Temple (TEM-play): singer's opening or warm-up

Letra (LET-rah) or Copla (KOH-plah): verse

Estrillo (Es-tree-BEE-yo): repeated words, or chorus

GUITAR

Falseta (Fal-SET-ah): melodic themes and variations on the guitar

Rasgueado (Ras-gay-AH-do) or Rasgueo (Ras-GAY-oh): strong, rhythmic guitar strumming which is the trademark of flamenco guitar

PERCUSSION

Cajón (Ca-HONE): the most popular percussion device in modern flamenco - means literally 'box' or 'big box', referring to shipping crates once used by Peruvian dock workers as instruments

Castañuelas (Cas-tah-nyew-EL-ass): castanets, hand-held percussion used by dancers for the forms Sevillanas and Fandangos, and one of the most identifiable sounds in flamenco

GENERAL VOCABULARY

Compás (Comb-POSS):

- 1) the rhythmic structure or signature of a form with its specific accents, e.g., Tangos are in 8, Bulerías in 12, etc.
- 2) one measure of music: eg., one cycle of 12 beats in Bulerías

Duende (DWEN-day): the "demon" or "spirit" that possesses and inspires a flamenco artist

Jaleo (Ha-LAY-oh): shouts of encouragement made by band-members or members of the audience: e.g., "OLE!"

<http://www.elvientoflamenco.com/school/flamenco-vocab.htm>

Biography of José Porcel

José Porcel was born in Sevilla, and at the age of thirteen began dancing Andalusian folkloric dances and flamenco in cultural centers in Valencia. He began his dance studies at 16 with the master Martín Vargas. He moved to Madrid and continued his studies with Paco Romero, Isabel Quintero, Cristóbal Reyes, Pedro Azorín and José Granero.

In 1989 he made his professional debut with the Ballet de Valencia, directed by Martín Vargas, and was promoted to soloist in the company the following year.

In 1991 Mr. Porcel choreographed his first flamenco work, "Te traigo al sur, Miguel," under the direction of the flamencologist Federico Torres, in the Teatro Principal in Alicante. In 1992 he directed and performed in his first flamenco company, in the Expo de Sevilla.

In 1993 José Porcel took part in a tour of America with Clara Romana's company, in the work "Carmina Burrana". In 1994 he was invited to join the Ballet Nacional de España, where he interpreted works including "Medea", "Ritmos", "Bolero de Ravel", "El Sombrero de tres picos", "Danza y tronío", "Los Tarantos", "Fantasia Galaica", "Grito", "Poeta" and many flamenco ballets.

In 1997 he brought his performance entitled "Entranas flamencas" to the flamenco festival of the Palacio de la Música in Valencia.

Within the Ballet Nacional, he worked with masters including José Granero, Victoria Eugenia, Juanjo Linares, Currillo, Manolo Marín, Javier de la Torre, Antonio Canales, Pedro Azorín. As soloist with the company he danced in "Los Tarantos" as Picaos, "Medea" as the man of Medea, and "Grito" as Soleá. As premier dancer in the Ballet Nacional de España he interpreted "Farruca" and "Danza y tronío". In December 1999 Mr. Porcel danced as soloist in the company of Rafael Aguilar, interpreting the Torero in "Carmen" during a major tour of Germany and Switzerland.

In 2000 he danced as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl, under the direction of maestro Héctor Zaraspe. In this same year he was contracted as the first dancer in the Compañía Española de Antonio Márquez, performing on tour around the world and at the Ópera de París for over 20 sold-out performances, followed by a critically acclaimed tour of the United States during the 2001-2002 season.