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Mediterranean rhythms

<Emoción Flamenco Festival>

Nov 9-11, Bham Town Hall
www.flamenco-birmingham.com

Expect much foot-stomping, swirling and dazzling fretwork as the Town Hall opens its doors for three days devoted to the sights and sounds of flamenco.

Opening with Pepa Molina (Nov 9), a rising star in Spain whose take on the traditions of flamenco is both pure and contemporary, the festival continues with the UK premiere of Los Arrieritos' 13 Rosas (Nov 10), a drama following the story of 13 women during the Spanish Civil War, concluding with Último Tango Fusión (Nov 11) who be mixing flamenco with Argentinean tango. Led by Eduardo Vassallo, Principal Cello of the CBSO, they'll be joined on stage by dancers Pepa Molina, Cesar Velazquez and Carolina Gonzalez. And if you want to try your hand, there's also several workshops covering clapping, dancing and guitar (Nov 10-11).

The festival has been pulled together by Spanish dancer Ana García, founder of Alma Flamenco and latterly a TG Collective collaborator.

"This is a pilot festival, so we'll see how it goes but I started this project with the hope that it will become an annual festival," says the dancer, choreographer and teacher whose background is in classical Spanish dance, ballet and flamenco.

"Flamenco is more than just a dance form, it's an art form... it's more like a philosophy, you get hooked!" she chuckles.

"Flamenco gives you a feeling of expression you couldn't find in any other dance form."

It's often described in terms of passion and sex, but Ana says that's just scratching the surface.

"It's more than just about passion, it's more emotional, it's a way of expressing life, the highs and the lows."

And this spread of emotions is expressed in the festival's line-up.

"Pepa Molina is pure flamenco, but also very modern, she really reflects exactly what is going on in Spain as flamenco is

changing all the time. Not the singing so much, but especially the dance and guitar. Pepa is so skilled, flamenco is taking in other dance forms and the musicianship is increasingly more technical.

"She'll also be appearing on the last night, which will be much more relaxed and an experiment. I love Argentinean tango and this will show how tango and flamenco can be put together. I like to think of it as Argentina and Spain shaking hands," she smiles.

A more political and social tact is taken by Los Arrieritos' 13 Rosas which demonstrates how the traditions of flamenco can be used in a narrative setting.

"It's a mix of contemporary dance, flamenco and drama and shows just how far flamenco can go. It's an emotional story concerning 13 women from the moment they were captured to the moment they are killed. It's a more intellectual show."

Set during the Spanish Civil War, it reflects how the country is still coming to terms with the recent past.

"It's not that long ago," Ana interjects. "Spain has changed so dramatically, it's gone from a dictatorship to a democracy.

People have not talked about that much and are only now discussing it which is one reason why Spain is making such good art at the moment – not just dance, but all art."



<opening night>

The Car Man

When developing a new dance version of Carmen during the late '90s, Matthew Bourne was inspired as much by Hollywood B-pictures and thrillers of the 1940s and '50s as Bizet's famed opera.

"I'm a big fan of Hitchcock and film noir and other thriller movies and I thought it would be nice to have something with a few surprises in it and a few twists and turns along the way," he recalls.

Referencing his operatic source material, Bourne's unique twist on the tale relocates the narrative from Spain to the fictional sleepy US town of Harmony, with the central character – the drifter car mechanic Luca – providing him with the (pun) title for the production: The Car Man.

"I didn't want to call it Carmen because I don't want people to think they are seeing the opera when they're not. So we changed it to The Car Man. I thought it was enough of a change for people to know it wasn't the opera, that it was different, but also that it had links with the opera and the music – I didn't want to lose that", says Bourne.

Ditching the cigarette factory, Bourne's version is set in a greasy, dirty garage run by the hard drinking slob, Dino. The arrival of hunky Luca shakes up the status quo as he ends up having a tempestuous fling with Dino's fiery wife, Lana, as well as setting his sights on the sensitive and sexually confused Angelo, who becomes a scapegoat in a murder plot.

"Anyone who knows the opera will recognise parallels between our leading characters and the characters of Carmen, Don Jose and Michaela," says Bourne, who adds that the work challenges the conventions of dance and choreography with movement and gestures. "The only rule for me is that there are no words used to tell that story."

First performed in 2000 to rapturous reviews, this revival has already played to packed houses in London prior to touring nationally.

Nov 13-17, Birmingham Hippodrome

