To kick off PS21’s first spring season, Executive Director Elena Siyanko wanted something with both mass appeal and cutting-edge artistry. She landed on a simple, elegant solution: contemporary flamenco.

“Everybody can relate to it, but at the same time it’s extremely sophisticated,” Siyanko said. “The performers we’re bringing are taking traditional flamenco and moving the needle on the form, doing it in the highest possible technical and artistic way.”
PS21’s Beyond Flamenco mini-festival showcases 21st-century approaches to this 600-year-old dance form, which originated in the Andalusia region of southern Spain. Beginning March 15, the festival features three acclaimed choreographers, two performances at the theater in Chatham, a conversation at Time & Space Limited in Hudson, an open flamenco class for all ages and educational workshops for students in local schools.

The three artists—Patricia Guerrero, Eduardo Guerrero (no relation) and Manuel Liñán—are also performing at the upcoming Flamenco Festival 20/20 in New York City. “These three artists represent the future of flamenco,” said Miguel Marín, who founded the Flamenco Festival 20 years ago and continues to curate the program, which travels around the world. “They use the flamenco rhythms, but [it’s not] what you would expect of flamenco. They’re much more contemporary in their aesthetic, the way they present it and the way they use the music. It’s a vocabulary that can express what they want to express as young artists—not something that belongs to the past.”

The PS21 festival opens on March 15 at 6 p.m., with a performance by Patricia Guerrero and her company of “Proceso Eterno (Eternal Process).” The piece begins without music; the rhythms of Guerrero’s feet, magnified by microphones on her shoes, provide the only accompaniment—until she is joined by a live percussionist and then a singer.

“Patricia combines modern and traditional elements of flamenco, and works with abstraction as well as specific themes and narratives, like a modern dance choreographer would,” Siyanko said. Marín describes the 29-year-old dancer as “the next big star in flamenco—the young artist that everyone’s looking at.”

On March 20 at 7 p.m., Eduardo Guerrero presents “Desplante,” his homage to the traditional “minera flamenco,” inspired by the difficult and dangerous work of the miners of Spain’s eastern coast. The work incorporates live versions of mining songs from mountain of Cartagena-La Unión, and riffs on the move known as the “llamada,” the flamenco dancer’s signal to the singer and guitarist that the rhythm is about to change. “He takes flamenco and the history of Spain as points of departure and does something contemporary and radical with it,” Siyanko said. “Flamenco doesn’t always have to be beautiful and glamorous.”

Dancers from Manuel Liñán’s company will be sharing the art form with the community. They will offer an open flamenco workshop for ages 12 and up as part of PS21’s Movement Without Borders series on March 29 at 2 p.m. and teach classes for schoolchildren on March 30 and 31 and April 1—supported by PS21 in partnership with the Columbia County nonprofits Operation Unite New York and Perfect Ten.

Also on the docket, Liñán will discuss his groundbreaking approach to flamenco in a conversation titled “Contemporary Flamenco: Art, Resistance, and Gender” on March 31 at 5:30 p.m. at Time & Space Limited. The dancer/choreographer is best known for subverting flamenco’s gender stereotypes by putting men in costumes and roles historically reserved for women.
“Manuel has broken one of the big preconceived ideas in flamenco: the macho man,” Marín said. “He is the first artist that is bringing queer to this very traditional art form.” Liñán’s performance at the recent Flamenco Festival in Paris was considered one of best shows in the festival’s history, Marín says.
Even as this new generation of artists pushes the form forward, a crucial element remains, he added.

“The intensity and honesty of the emotion is essential to flamenco, and something that defines the art form,” Marín said. “Flamenco is not so much about entertaining but about the expression of human emotion and of a deep truth that the artist wants to tell. Today’s society is needing and looking for that—there are a lot of opportunities for entertainment, but not so many for a deeper connection.”

Tresca Weinstein is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

More Information
PS21’s Beyond Flamenco Festival
Performances
When: Patricia Guerrero, “Proceso Eterno,” 6 p.m. March 15; Eduardo Guerrero, “Desplante,” 7 p.m. March 20
Where: PS21, 2980 Route 66, Chatham
Tickets: $25; members, $20; students, $10; includes aperitivo and dessert
Info: 392-6121 or https://ps21chatham.org/event/beyond-flamenco/
Conversation with Manuel Liñán: “Contemporary Flamenco: Art, Resistance, and Gender”
When: 5:30 p.m. March 31