Innovative flamenco artist Eduardo Guerrero dances "Desplante" to 19th century Sierra Caragena mining songs with vocalist Miguel Rosendo and Javier Ibanez on guitar. March 20 at PS21.
LUIS MALABRAN - PROVIDED BY PS21

Flamenco kicks up its heels at a mini-festival in Chatham, N.Y.

Posted Thursday, March 12, 2020 2:33 pm

In performance

What: "Beyond Flamenco" Mini-Festival
Who: Patricia Guerrero, "Proceso Eterno"; Eduardo Guerrero, "Desplante"
When: "Proceso Eterno," Sunday evening at 6; "Desplante," March 20 at 7 p.m.
Where: PS21 Performance Spaces for the 21st Century, 2980 NY Route 66, Chatham, NY
Tickets: $25 advance, $30 door, $10 students.
Reservations/Information: ps21chatham.org; 518-392-6121.
EDITORS NOTE: Given the fluid nature of the response to COVID-19, please check ahead before attending

By Sharon Smullen, Eagle correspondent

CHATHAM, N.Y. — Far from the tourist haunts of Barcelona's Las Ramblas and Madrid night clubs, Spanish flamenco dancing is evolving.

A new generation of dancers and musicians is reinterpreting the traditional art form for modern times, updating images of foot-stomping senoritas in flounced skirts, unbending male counterparts tossing sweat-soaked hair while singers keen mournful songs and fingers fly over guitar frets.
This week, in "Beyond Flamenco," two contemporary young Spanish innovators reinvent their national dance in separate solo programs at PS21: Performance Spaces for the 21st Century. The mini-festival launches the venue's first spring season of year-round programing, led by new executive director Elena Siyanko.

On Sunday, Patricia Guerrero performs her stream-of-consciousness work "Proceso Eterno (Eternal Process)" with guitarist Dani de Moron, singer Sergio El Colorao and percussionist Agustin Diassera. Next Friday, Eduardo Guerrero (no relation) dances "Desplante" to 19th century Sierra Caragena mining songs with vocalist Miguel Rosendo and Javier Ibanez on guitar.

In addition, Compania Manuel Linan dancers will lead school workshops and a public "Movement Without Borders!" class; and Linan will discuss gender-inclusive contemporary flamenco at TSL (Time Space Limited) in Hudson, N.Y.

"Our direction is to present culturally significant work, definitely international, that pushes the needle of genre and form, and reflects contemporary concerns," said Siyanko during an interview at Bartlett House cafe in nearby Ghent, NY.

"Everybody knows what flamenco is, you don't have to explain a lot. But we pursued companies that push the form in an interesting experimental direction. It's dance theater with flamenco as a departure point."

Siyanko was captivated by flamenco after seeing a performance at age 11 in her native Russia. In contrast to typical highly-produced spectacles, she offers "granular, nuanced artists" that embody flamenco's changing face. Granada-born Patricia Guerrero, 30, has been described as "fast, exciting and full of invention" and is a "top-notch performer," Siyanko said; while Cadiz-native Eduardo Guerrero, 36, "is very avant-gardist." Both earned accolades at Spain's prestigious Festival de Jerez. The musicians "are very important artists in their own right," Siyanko added.

PS21's presentation is part of Flamenco Festival USA, celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2020 with 80 performances by 30 companies at 20 venues in New York City plus metropolitan centers around the U.S. — Boston, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco — and now upstate NY.
The festival "showcases the different styles, both traditional and contemporary approaches, and breaks some conceptions about what flamenco should be," said founder and director Miguel Marin by phone from Seville, Spain. "We want to show the full landscape of flamenco in Spain, what is the new generation's motivation, how do they see flamenco."

In its first year, he presented Farruquito, "one of the most traditional flamenco artists from the most famous gypsy family," and Maria Pages, "who had the most avant-garde contemporary approach."

This year's theme is "Breaking Walls," with artists "who are breaking the molds of flamenco and expanding the horizons, [making] it relevant for today's society."

"Today many young artists choose flamenco as a way of expressing what they want to say. It's not just from their grandparents' old tradition."

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Young audiences connect to artists like 22-year-old Grammy-winning flamenco singer Rosalia who dazzles fans at venues like Coachella and the Grammys.

PS21, he said, "can reach a whole different audience which is knowledgeable about dance but maybe has not seen flamenco [like this] before."

In Marin's native Cordoba village, gatherings included flamenco singing and traditional dancing. "You grow up with that, it's integrated into the culture."

He rediscovered flamenco pursuing an MBA in Kansas City, Mo., which has a flourishing Spanish dance community.

"And I became so passionate [about it] I switched to a Master in Performing Arts at NYU."

Encouraged to bring flamenco companies to the US, he researched the dance scene back in Spain. "It was quite exciting to discover this world. You value your own culture way more when you are abroad."

Because of improvisation, he explained, "the dancer sets the speed, the guitarist is looking at the feet. At the same time the dancer is dancing to
what the vocalist is singing. This energy among them is created on the spot.

"The dancers need to go inside themselves into a trance in order to really be connected."

Songs are not improvised, there is no story, he said; "the energy, rhythm and emotion is what defines them."


While Romani (known as Gypsies) contributed greatly to flamenco's development, Marin added, many communities — Iberians, Jews, Muslims — influenced the art form.

Nowadays, young contemporary flamenco dancers populate the former tourist cabarets and tablaos, small venues named for dancing floorboards. "Sometimes the experience of something very close is amazing," Marin said.

PS21's black box theater offers that intimacy to local audiences — and Siyanko is determined to fill it with international artistry.

"Provoking curiosity is very important," she said. "People want exciting, interesting cultural experiences."