

Spanish Village Expects 5000

Private Event Becomes Public

Angell Estrada, a 29-year-old dancer, moved here from Oakland last June because she had an opportunity to rent the house next door to two friends in the San Diego flamenco community. Those friends, Basilio Ceravolo and his wife, Pilar Moreno, appointed Estrada the director of their FERIA de Mayo — or festival of May. For the past five or six years, it was a private event; for the first time this year, it will be open to the public.

"We had it at someone's private home," said Ceravolo, a leader of the local flamenco community who makes his living as an accountant, "and that's always limiting. We've always had

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more people wanting to come to it than we could accommodate — anywhere from 200 to 500. It's really too much for a private event."

The event has been drawing dancers from many other parts of California, as well as New Mexico and Arizona. A large dance company in toto is coming from Albuquerque this time. At least 2000 people, and perhaps as many as 5000, are expected, including tourists who follow the music into the feria's location in the Spanish Village.

Ceravolo was born in Burbank, but Moreno is a native of Spain and often goes back and forth to her home country, especially for its ferias. "Each town has its own. The one in Seville is the biggest," she said. "They all were derived from the country fairs, like the one we have in Del Mar. People took their horses to trade and their animals to show."

Moreno, who is a singer, said of flamenco music: "It's very alive; it's not just traditional. There are many new composers. When I go back to Spain, I hear it on the radio."

San Diego's flamenco community depends on infusions of influence from abroad, where flamenco culture was born. (Our proximity to Mexican culture does us no good in this instance.) It originated as a folk-art form in Andalusia, Spain's southern region. Its peak in popularity was the last quarter of the 19th Century, when Seville was its center, and gypsy singers



Angell Estrada

and dancers were its greatest practitioners.

How well do American flamenco artists measure up? Moreno was asked. Can they carry it off? "Flamenco is one of those things that you either love or you don't," she said. "For one thing, its rhythms are very foreign to Americans. But the people who have gotten into it are really devoted to it. They take it very seriously."

Estrada, born in Los Angeles of a family with Latino and Arabic roots, has invented her own form of flamenco. "The flamenco that we do has more of an Arabic influence," she

said, speaking of her new dance company, Dunya Dance Theatre, which will be performing on Sunday. "We'll use flamenco rhythms but Middle Eastern instrumentation — the Turkish *oud* and an Arabic drum, a *darbuka*. It's a style unique to me. It's what I was known for as a soloist."

The mix makes sense, since pure flamenco, if there is such a thing, shows Arabic influences.

But, Estrada explained, "Flamenco is not about your technique or how beautiful you are. It's about your feelings." There are no experts? "Well, there are the masters who have been

doing it a long time. But in gypsy culture, everyone is included — the children, the teenagers — at whatever their level is."

She said it was also important to know that flamenco artists don't practice just one art. "You don't just study dance. You also have to study the singing, the music; you have to learn to play a little on an instrument."

In the flamenco culture, you're able to be a beginner more easily than in American culture, which likes its star performers. Estrada said the spirit of it is this: "People will try to expand themselves. People who don't normally sing will sing. Sometimes musicians will put down their instruments and dance." Improvisation is encouraged.

What is more, she said, "When you party, you party with friends and family of all ages. It's not like in American culture, where the kids don't want to hang out with adults, and parents, when they have wine, keep the kids away! It's all very open. At the ferias you really see that."

Those who attend a feria in Spain will also see small temporary structures called *casetas*, complete with wooden dance floors. In the Spanish Village on Sunday, six or eight *casetas* — actually, tents — will be set up by dance companies and nonprofit groups related to Spanish culture. "In Spain you can go inside these *casetas*," said Estrada, "and dance and drink and eat while you're in each 'little house.' It's not just a vending thing, where you don't go inside the booth. You get to go inside and meet and hang out with the people. That's what we're recreating."

(Everyone who comes in costume will receive a one-year membership to Sociedad Flamenco Cultural, which includes free dance classes.)

— Jeanne Schinto

**Feria de Mayo:
A Spanish Flamenco
Celebration of Spring
Sunday, May 30,
11:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.
Spanish Village Art Center
Balboa Park
Free
619-582-7883 or
www.sociedadflamencocultural.org**

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