
La voz de los flamencos: Retratos y autorretratos

Report by: Alexander William Ibarz

This fascinating book about Flamenco is unlike any other. Its author and compiler, Miguel Mora, is well-known for his passion for Flamenco. Over a lifetime of reporting and admiring the evolution of the art-form, he has developed a close rapport with scores of artists, singers, dancers and musicians, and in this handsome book it is the voices of the men, women and children of Flamenco, which he records for posterity.

The book itself contains over 100 photographs, lavishly printed in a large art-house style, and comes together with a twenty-track CD, with the original lyrics printed at the back of the book. The songs range from early recordings from the 1920s right down to the work of the all-time greats like La Argentinita, Carmen Amaya, Antonio Gades ('el comandante'), Paco Lucía, Enrique Morente and finishes with a choice recording by one of Tomatito's and Farruquito's contemporaries, Miguel Poveda.

Flamenco's mystique has been well-earned, and in part this has to do with its strong oral and folk roots, which help keep the media pundits at a respectable distance. It takes the personal touch to get to grips with Flamenco, which is now a global phenomenon, with hundreds of thousands of devotees around the world from Japan to the USA.

For this reason, Miguel Mora hands over the task to the maestros: the bailaores, tocaores and cantaores, the dancers, the musicians, the singers. This fascinating insider's view provided through interviews is prefaced with three personal dictionaries of Flamenco, one by no less a figure than Enrique Morente, one by the great Flamenco guitarist Gerardo Núñez, and another by one of the finest contemporary dancers, Eva Yerbabuena. The interviews and dictionaries get to grips with what dance, song and music means to the artists, from the everyday perspective, providing fascinating insights interspersed with remarkable photographs. These include: Pilar López (1913-2008), Mario Maya (1935-2008), Antonio Gades (1936-2004), Manuela Carrasco (1954-), Sara Baras (1970-), Israel Galván (1973-), Farruquito (1982). There are also comment and historical sections.

The late Gades, one of the greatest dancers of all time, famous from Triana to Carnegie Hall, once remarked "I always found it hard to believe that I was Gades". Success brings despair. As the old lyric says: "Desiring one thing / a world appears / once you have possessed it / it turns out to be smoke." From tales of poverty-stricken Spain of the 1930s, and scratching a living in Cuba, the book leads us to the high and low points of the modern media age; as on the day a young star from an old Flamenco family bought himself a second hand BMW from the proceeds of his first recording, and hours later found himself in the midst of a tragic car accident. It cost another person's life and dealt the young Flamenco star a prison sentence.

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