

thINKIngDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Alan Simpson

the power of community

by des amaiya

wepa! to open pride month, i am lucky enough to witness Philadelphia's premier all-female flamenco group, Pasión y Arte, and their student showcase celebrating their 25th year. a unique, welcoming warmth greets me in the space, and the audience is among the most diverse community that i have been a part of this past year. the bodies surrounding me range from eight to about 70 years old, and span cultures from white to Black, light and dark latin folk alike. artistic director Elba Havia y Vaca opens the show with a resonant speech with an emphasis on joy, community, and empowerment of the arts.

guitarist Gabriel Gonzalez and singer María López Enríquez of Madrid, Spain support the 11 movement offerings with spectacular, heart-rending swells that echoed the heart of the movement. they direct their attention carefully towards the dancers, the rhythm of the song in conversation with the percussive footwork of flamenco technique. i arrive at the simultaneous feeling of seeing something new while being magnetically pulled toward the sight. [Pasión y Arte's](#) mission which "embraces artistic excellence in performance, education and community engagement focused on modern feminist flamenco," comes through in the work that honors feminine grace, strength, and the complexities of womanhood.

the stage keeps a consistent general wash so we are able to truly see the textured, patterned, three dimensional costumes. an invisible tether between them and the musicians, the clothes dance too, as they live and pulsate in rhythm, to the breath and control of the performers. each sound is like a splatter of rain from a fallen branch, soft yet sharp, awakening the senses. the clarity of the dancer's clear footwork strikes me and i viscerally remember my time studying step dance through high school and college. the bruises on my thighs and palms still feel as tender today as they did then. i find myself bouncing my leg and tapping my foot, as others around me clap along with the music. the power of their stomps, heels, and toes, as well as some of the rhythm being made using their hands to clap onto their bodies, communicate the clear technical challenge of the form. the arms are often held in a structured positioning that breaks at the wrist to emerge into a wavelike texture. the articulation of the fingers is a particularly shining detail, as they break off of a clean

line like the legs of a jellyfish, curving and caressing the air.

during particularly complex rhythmic phrases, audience members chime, “wepa!” and other sounds reminiscent of, “oh!”, “aye,” and “whoo!”. when there’s no dialogue between audience and performers, a lack, or vacuum develops. there is an overflowing of exchange as the passion of the dancers and musicians ignites the audience. the conciseness of the work beguiles the group of watchers, embodying joy and strength. this is a piece of the joy of community and sharing art. the strong, intense gaze of the dancers and playfulness of their energy draws me in, and i am attuned to their palpable chemistry. i circle back, once again, to the joy Havia y Vaca mentioned in her curtain remarks, and it is prevalent throughout the evening, and throughout the theater. each exclamation from behind, next to, or in front of me, enticed me to hum in agreement. wepa!

[Pasión y Arte's 25th Anniversary Student Showcase](#), Pasión y Arte, Performance Garage, June 1st.

Homepage Image Description: *Four women stand in a group with their arms upraised and their heads in profile. They are wearing long-sleeved shirts in yellow, red, navy blue, and black.*

Article Page Image Description: *A group of women in printed blouses are moving across the stage. The two women in front have one arm raised on the forward diagonal.*

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