

Rodriguez and Marquez are “Nu Flamenco”

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As a tourist, I saw my first flamenco performance at the Poble Espanyol de Montjuic in Barcelona. I liked it. For sure the meal and red wine that came with the touristy-priced ticket had something to do with my objectivity, but there was a cosmic energy emitted by the dancers that mesmerized me. It drew me in. Each powerful stomp against the hardwood floor was a crack of thunder in my ears. Each dress the dancer's wore was insanely red, vibrant and blinding. But what really pulled me into the performance was the hypnotic and soothing rhythm of the guitar. There's something about the guitar that grounds everything even when the world seems to be exploding all around.

“Nu Flamenco,” the final performance for Knight Arts grantee Tigertail's 2011/2012 season, featured the contemporary flamenco guitar stylings of Jose Luis Rodriguez with dancer/choreographer Niurca Marquez, who is also a resident artist at Inkub8, a Knight Arts grantee. It was nothing like my first experience with flamenco. Instead, “Nu Flamenco” was a quiet, meditative performance, with a few explosive moments, that was as much about silence and substance as it was about music and dance.

The program began with the classic “Rondeña Existencial,” a solo guitar piece performed by Rodriguez, who sat on a chair positioned on top of a wood pallet. With subtle intensity and soulfulness, Rodriguez's performance and presence on stage resonated throughout the Colony Theater. His intention was to communicate through music what resided within his instrument. As the performance progressed, a percussionist and another guitar player joined him, but Rodriguez remained the central figure who methodically nurtured his guitar with delicate, yet firm gestures that seemed to ask, rather than force, the music out.

An interesting element of performance was the fact there



were no live vocals. The only vocals used were rescued and restored recordings that Rodriguez collaged sparsely throughout the performance. The recordings were simultaneously excruciating and haunting to listen to. Excruciating because the volume was too loud. Haunting because these were voices of long dead singers who spoke to us from a time and place that no longer exists. The spirits are with us, an audience member said.

What pulled the performance together for me was Marquez, the Miami-born dancer whose style invokes a new conception of traditional dance. Her presence



on stage, which was limited to three songs, added a layer of complexity and emotion to the performance and made it “Nu.” Her most compelling performance was the duet with her overflowing tomato red gown attached to a voluminous ruffled train. At one point, I realized she was dancing with and against the dresses. As she spun around the train, it caught her, held her in space and propelled her into her next move. The weight of the gown became the centrifugal force that moved and moved with Marquez.

Sometimes we expect magic and get nothing. Sometimes we expect nothing and get magic. “Nu Flamenco,” without Rodriguez or Marquez, would simply be a great show for tourists that is void of emotion and depth. “Nu Flamenco” created a language that emerged from these two artists who are fervently connected and conscious of their art.