
AXS ENTERTAINMENT / ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT / PERFORMING ARTS

'Baile de Palabra' flickers but rarely flames

October 24, 2015

7:55 PM MST



Baile de Palabra

Used with kind permission of Dublin Flamenco Festival

Baile de Palabra by Mercedes Ruiz

Rating: ★★★★★

The fifth Dublin [Flamenco](#) Festival concluded Saturday night with international, multi-award winning Flamenco dancer, Mercedes Ruiz's taking to the Helix with her labour of love, "Baile de Palabra" ([Dance](#) of Word). The culmination of a lifetime dancing flamenco, Ruiz claims in "Baile de Palabra" she can "dance flamenco the way I feel it, getting into its essence from sensations and emotions shared by music and words." Electrifying at moments, "Baile de Palabra" showcases Ruiz's immense talents, but with its long lingering articulations, slow pace and poor lighting, "Baile de Palabra" shows power but not enough passion and is never consistently exciting or engaging enough to be truly outstanding.

Divided loosely into four sequences, marked by costume changes between red, white and black dresses, ending with trousers and bolero jacket, Ruiz takes the audience on a quick stop tour of a number of flamenco styles as well as her own love affair with flamenco. Throughout, brief explosive snaps hint of something passionate to come, but for the most part "Baile de Palabra" is dominated by meticulously slow movements, particularly during the first two sequences, feeling at times like flamenco in slow motion. The second sequence, which featured a white bata de cola for

petenera, showed flourishes as Ruiz swirled about in her white manton. Matters took a more interesting turn as, dressed in black, Ruiz demonstrated her excellent castanet skills and let loose a little, and again during her final sequence, but by then it was too little, too late. The final series of brief tableaux testified to the stillness at the heart of this production, a stillness it craved release from.

Though excellently accompanied by guitarist Santiago Lara, with outstanding cante by singer David Lagos, the prolonged guitar pieces and maudlin singing added to the slackening of pace. Technically there were issues too, with volume too loud at times and lighting poor throughout. But if the dance was not all it might have been, the dancer was exquisite on occasion. Ruiz was technically excellent with hands, hips, shoulders moving with sensual ease. When she let loose it was electrifying, but too often it felt as if control overshadowed the passion being channelled.

For Irish audiences, unavoidable comparisons with Israel Galván's excellent "La Edad de Oro," a highlight of this year's Dublin Dance Festival, won't serve "Baile de Palabra" well. Though both featured excellent dancers taking a back to basics approach with one dancer, one singer and one guitarist on an essentially bare stage, comparisons end there. "Baile de Palabra" does indeed showcase flamenco movement and sound, but it is reined in too tight, moves too slow and never really ignites. But in the moments when it does catch fire it confirms Ruiz as one of flamenco's current greats. One only wished it would have burned more often.



Chris O'Rourke

Theatre Examiner

© 2006-2015 AXS Digital Group LLC d/b/a Examiner.com