

Soledad Barrio & Noche Flamenco
Antigona
Z Space, San Francisco
February 23, 2017

It had been several years since I last saw Soledad Barrio and Noche Flamenco. Z Space and piece by piece productions presented them in *Antigona*, where once again she proves why she is one of the great 21st century flamenco artists. Martín Santangelo's re-imagining of Sophocles's tragedy, *Antigone*, provides Barrio with a perfect vehicle for her dramatic powers and her choreography showcases her incisive footwork and exquisitely expressive arms and face. In the more intimate setting of Z Space the audience could experience her intense stage presence so much more acutely than in a cavernous venue, such as Zellerbach Hall at UC Berkeley.

Center stage on a wide platform, a dark satin rectangle begins to shimmer and ripple. As it gains momentum, the growing waves and ominous surges of fabric churn like a hurricane toward the spectators. Then black-robed figures emerge from the contorted folds, their white textured masks of frozen emotions speaking for the mute actor-dancers. As the chaos subsides a lone Antigone remains on stage, employing dance as the language for the prologue to the tragedy soon to unravel. Barrio is simply astounding in her command of all that surrounds her. Her hands caress the air, as her serpentine arms undulate in the atmosphere of her body. Her feet transport her across the landscape exploring the terrain in minute detail – every step, toe and heel, reporting back like rapid bleeps of a radar.

As the story develops, we are treated to high level performances by the guitarists, singers and other dancers. The simpler, more stripped down scenes with only a few performers are the most successful in relating events, and building to the climax. When the entire cast is used, and jokes are introduced – a kazoo marching band and a bullfight, for example – it dilutes the seriousness of the play and diminishes the impact of the greater narrative arc.

Some of the best highlights are Juan Ogallo's passionate dancing as Haemon, Barrio dancing with an excellent Greek chorus of Xianix Barrera, Marina Elana, Angelina Ramirez and Jeanne d'Arc Casas, Hades (Robert Wilson) pulling Antigone on his cape to the Underworld, and a broken Creon (Manuel Gago) lamenting his fate with Tiresias (Pepe 'El Bocado') at the end. Unfortunately, this final moving scene was disrupted by the rest of the cast filling the back of the stage in preparation for the curtain call. It would have been better to have a fade out to black with just the two men alone.

Any Soledad Barrio and Noche Flamenca performance is well worth making the effort to see and this was no exception, despite a few blemishes. It's not often you will have the chance to experience such an extremely high level of flamenco dance and music from any company or be mesmerized by Barrio's artistry.