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DANCE

Celebration of women, told through flamenco

San Francisco troupe presents 'BailaHora' Friday at Fort Mason

By Aimée Ts'ao
Correspondent

March is Women's History Month and Caminos Flamencos has a fitting tribute with its latest show, "BailaHora," which will be performed Friday at the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture in San Francisco. Company artistic director Yaelisa brings together four women dancers to illustrate how performers pass through the different stages of their careers and their lives.

"The name of the show, 'BailaHora,' is a wordplay on two ideas," Yaelisa says. (In Spanish, bailaora is a female dancer and the insertion of the 'H' creates the word 'hora,' which means time.) "I invited three women, featuring two very individual and interesting dancers who are debating here. One, Alexa Micon, is actually French, but lives in Maryland, and the other, Mexican Valeria Montes, now works in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fanny Ara, who has worked with Camino Flamencos for 13 years, since she was 19, is like family. Originally it was just three, until I decided to dance, too."

Her involvement adds perspective to one of the production's main themes.

"The issue of time has come up in my life," Yaelisa says. "The time that a dancer has on the stage, the time it takes to become what you become. In flamenco, time is endless. You can dance till you're 80 if you really want to, if your body sustains what you want to do. There are so many adjustments you can make in your performance style, and your artistic style so you can still communicate. That makes me love this art form even more."

As the daughter of the acclaimed singer and dancer Isa Mura, Yaelisa practically grew up in North Beach's famous Spaghetti Factory, the now-defunct West Coast mecca for flamenco.

"I have seen how the passage



Yaelisa, artistic director of Caminos Flamencos, is one of four female dancers who will perform in "BailaHora" on Friday in San Francisco.

'BAILAHORA'

Presented by Caminos Flamencos
When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: Cowell Theater at Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, San Francisco

Tickets: \$25-\$75; fortmason.org, www.CaminosFlamencos.com

of time changes everything, and it doesn't," she says. "You start out thinking 'I'm achieving something in this art form, then you get to that place and you realize 'I have so far to go.' The show is going to feature the four dancers in their own choreographies and in some ensemble pieces, with the idea of the birth and rebirth of ourselves as artists."

The company also has great singers — Ana de los Reyes and Felix de Lola, both Spanish — and

the brilliant guitarist Jason McGuire, Yaelisa's long-term collaborator and partner.

"Without him we don't create the emotion necessary to convey these ideas, as he can carry that much sound as the only guitar," she says.

Improvisation between the music and dance is an essential element of flamenco.

"It's important to let the audiences see that happen on stage," Yaelisa says. "Essentially flamenco was a 'street art,' an art of nomadic people who melded with the existing people of a town or village."

McGuire offers, "What we're finding is it's really the culmination of a conversation we enjoy having, sharing it with audiences directly. I think they understand that viscerally. They may not know that we're just winging it."

"Speaking from an audience

perspective, it's the most exciting show to see, one that's being improvised and you know it's being improvised. You could come again tomorrow and it would be radically different. Flamenco is the best of classical guitar, of punk rock, of blues and jazz. It's all those important emotions put into one."

As for the Women's History Month connection, Yaelisa embraces it.

"Ironically, a few days ago was International Women's Day, and I asked myself, why does it have to be just one day," she says. "It should be every day of the year because women are expressing their power and their ideas in a safer and more respectful environment, but we have so far to go."

When asked how women fit into the history of flamenco, she responds, "In flamenco, the women

were very important."

McGuire agrees.

"They were in an original power position that wasn't available to any other Spanish women in a culture that does not want women to have power," he explains. "You could be born very poor, but you could have an incredible voice or sense of rhythm. It rarely had anything to do with looks. It was about sheer talent and creativity."

"Even when women became involved in developing it, they still were kept from being singers," Yaelisa adds. "Everything changed

when Carmen Amaya came out on the stage and said through her dancing, 'It's OK for me to be masculine. It's OK for me to be feminine. I can be both.' She's the one who started that in the dance and it's taken decades of development for Spain to even truly recognize female singers as equals."