



Flamenco performance at Plaza Hotel on Saturday

Tuesday, February 14, 2017 at 5:09 pm (Updated: February 14, 5:11 pm)

By Susan Vander Meer
One Roof Publishing



Courtesy photo

Saturday's EmiArteFlamenco event will feature singers Eva Encinias and Joaquin Encinias, guitarists Ricardo Anglada and Mario Febres and dancers Elena Osuna, Nevarez Encinias and La Emi.

Ronald Maltais, artistic director for the Castañeda Concert series, recently announced the next two performances, the first of which will take place at 7:30 p.m. this Saturday in the Plaza Hotel Ballroom.

The performance showcases Flamenco musicians and dancers. The third concert in the series will be at 3 p.m. on May 7 at Ilfeld Auditorium with violinist Elizabeth Young, cellist Dana Winograd, percussionist Ralph Marquez and Maltais at the piano.

The Feb. 18 EmiArteFlamenco event will feature singers Eva Encinias and Joaquin Encinias, guitarists Ricardo Anglada and Mario Febres, and dancers Elena Osuna, Nevarez Encinias and La Emi. The group will also offer two free Flamenco workshops in the Plaza Hotel Ballroom at noon for children ages 6 through 13 and 1 p.m. for high school students and adults.

Maltais, previously director of music at the United World College-USA, left that position to devote more time to composition, directing and performance. He has been a life-long student of the piano, beginning at the age of 4.

Formal lessons at age 8 with noted teachers led to a love of music and a gift for envisioning the creativity and art of performance and composing. Originally from southern New Hampshire, his studies with Maurice Hoffman led to degrees taken at New England Conservatory (piano performance), and Boston University (music composition).

Maltais pursued vocal training and has devoted significant time to choral directing and artistic direction. His Meditation for Viola and Strings was conducted by Lukas Foss at Boston University in 1998. Maltais' travels have led to engagements as a musician and lecturer in several U.S. states and in India, Turkey, South Africa and Peru. He is currently composing an opera based on the life of Camille Claudel. Maltais premiered his Star Axis Preludes for a select audience at the first Light Spectrum Concert — Dwan Light Sanctuary/ United World College-USA — in April 2016.

For La Emi (Emmy Grimm), performance and teaching are the heartbeat of a life spent immersing herself in the art of Flamenco. She has had several apprenticeships under Carmela Greco and has performed in various venues throughout Spain. She has also studied with Ivan Vargas Heredia, José Galván, Gala Vivancos, Inmaculada Ortega, Yolanda Heredia, Juana Amaya, Juan Paredes, Torombo, Rocio Alcaide Ruiz, and many more influential Flamenco dancers. For three seasons she performed with the Juan Siddi Flamenco Santa Fe. In 2014, Vicente Griego and La Emi began her own company, EmiArteFlamenco with Skylight Santa Fe as its home theater. In 2016 she opened EmiArteFlamenco Academy offering classes for toddlers, children and adults. For more information about La Emi, go to www.emiarteflamenco.com

The Flamenco in Las Vegas Castañeda Concert is sponsored in part by Allan Affeldt, Plaza Hotel, Las Vegas Arts Council, New Mexico Arts and donors. Tickets are \$15 per person and available at the Las Vegas Arts Council. They can also be purchased at the Plaza Hotel and at the door on the night of the performance.

What follows is a Q & A with Maltais and Grimm.

Maltais

Q: What is the greatest challenge in putting together a concert series?

Maltais: There are many facets to designing and arranging a compelling concert series. Intuition usually guides me, and I am thinking about great variety in the various programs and juggling the availability of prospective performers. My mission in Las Vegas is to feature New Mexico performing artists. This season certainly achieves that goal as all of the performers reside within the state. When people attend a Flamenco performance, the venue, lighting, sound design, graphic design etc. are all critical components to achieving a spectacular result. In the May concert we will bring back a violinist and cellist; both performed at the Castañeda in Sept. 2016. This decision was partly due to the favorable comments of audience members who enjoyed their virtuosity and musicianship.

Q: What is the most rewarding for you as an artistic director?

Maltais: When I am in the audience or performing in an event I produced it is very exciting to feel the energy in the room; to see how the people attending are reacting to the program. An example is when there was a spontaneous ovation at the end of the first half of the Castañeda concert last fall. Usually ovations occur at the end of an excellent performance. I am very committed to enhancing the concert season in Las Vegas. I begin by looking at what is already happening around town and then proceed to add something different to the mix.

Q: You've taught, conducted and composed music. Which do you most enjoy and why?

Maltais: I made a decision to step away from a full-time position as a music director/ teacher at the United World College-USA this season (after a 15 year run). This surprised many local residents who have been very loyal supporters of my concerts and overall work

in the past. I see it as a way of challenging myself to return to a more intense focus on piano performance and music composition. In the May concert I will present an original work composed for a professional colleague. When you announce such a thing you must follow through. It's a bit frightening, but in a sense you are lighting a fire under yourself! Also, the Brahms Trio which I have programmed for the May concert is quite difficult, and I am greatly enjoying the process of mastering the piano part in this work.

Q: The next two concerts have been set. Talk about the Feb. 18 performance and what led you to select Flamenco as the art form for this event?

Maltais: There is a strong Flamenco tradition in New Mexico. In some ways it is different than what you might see in Spain. I feel it is up to artistic directors to invest serious time and thought in looking for ways to promote important cultural traditions. When I first came to New Mexico I was drawn to Native American music, and through numerous visits to several Indian pueblos within our state I was amazed by what I saw and heard in the music performances and sacred dances.

Q: What appeals to you about Flamenco?

Maltais: The drama of it is compelling; sometimes subtle, but then wild and seductive. The chemistry between the dancers and musicians springs from a kind of improvisational daring. Watching Flamenco (even once) could be a life-changing experience for spectators. I remember seeing a small, excellent Flamenco ensemble in Cordoba, Spain some years ago, and the images are still engraved in my mind, along with the unforgettable sound of their music. I walked back to my inn on that balmy summer night feeling somewhat dazed.

Q: How do dance, vocal and instrumental performances differ in presentation and preparation, or do they?

Maltais: I am not a dancer, but I have observed/collaborated with dancers many times, even composed music, which colleagues then choreographed. Watching the body language of confident musical performers who are not dancers (ex. A jazz quintet) is not so different. There are many ways to communicate, and body movement is key to this.

Q: The objective of a concert or performance is to provide beautiful artistic expression. What are the technical or logistical aspects of putting together an event, aside from practice, practice, practice?

Maltais: The greatest performers sometimes talk of states of consciousness they experience in their quest to achieve the highest possible expressive outcome. Some get there rather easily through natural talent/ intuition. After getting through the preliminary technical work of learning musical notes or learning dance steps you must find a way to take it to a different level. Of course your own gifts allow it to become personalized. Your interpretation would likely be different than any other and this is the magic we strive for. As performance artists we are actually recreating art over and over again. This is a difficult question to answer and I hope my response makes sense!

Grimm

Q: Emmy, talk about your company of Flamenco artists.

Grimm: My company was founded two years ago by my Godfather, Vicente Griego and myself. This is a family company. We feel very blessed because we get to do what we love with the people we love, in the place we were born and raised.

Q: How long have you all been working together?

Grimm: We began working with each other prior to the opening of EmiArteFlamenco. We have been working together many years.

Q: What excites you about the art of dance?

Grimm: Flamenco is an art form that originated through the people. It was born in the streets amongst families. It is a way to tell one's story. It expresses everything that I go through in life, love, heart break, anxiety, joy and many more emotions.

Q: When and how did you become a Flamenco dancer.

Grimm: My father, David Grimm, worked at the box office for Maria Benitez during her Summer Season of shows at what is now The Lodge at Santa Fe. My mother used to go to the shows when she was pregnant with me. I grew up going to these shows and at the age of four I began my studies with the Maria Benitez Institute for Spanish Arts.

Q: What is the greatest challenge when putting a performance together?

Grimm: For me the greatest challenge is making the time to do all of the needed things. It is important to promote the show, but you also must make time to rehearse every day.

Q: What is the greatest joy?

Grimm: I believe that the Lord put us all on this earth to serve our purpose. God blessed me with a love to dance. It gives me true joy to be able to do what I love and share it with my community. This show is truly exciting. We will be celebrating our love for New Mexico, as well as for the art form of Flamenco and what a better way to do it than amongst familia!

Flamenco in Las Vegas

What: Castañeda Concerts

When: 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 18

Where: Plaza Hotel Ballroom

Cost: \$15 per person

Where to purchase tickets: Las Vegas Arts Council and online at lasvegasartscouncil.org

Tickets are also available at the Plaza Hotel.



Flamenco at Plaza Hotel thrills audience

Tuesday, February 21, 2017 at 2:10 pm (Updated: February 21, 3:35 pm)

By Beth Urech
For the Optic

The buzz in the Plaza Ballroom was palpable 15 minutes before La Emi Arte Flamenco was scheduled to begin last Saturday.

Most seats were occupied. Stage lights illuminated the raised stage, which was positioned in the middle of the room. Thank goodness!

For the 2016 Meadow City Music Festival, the musicians were shunted to the back of the room with no stage lights at all.

As Saturday's crowd continued to spill into the ballroom, Allan Affeldt was carting in extra chairs and placing them seven and eight rows from the stage.

Mark and I had just enjoyed a delicious meal in the restaurant with dear friends Marcia and Herb Smith before wending our way to the ballroom. Yikes, we had to hustle to find four seats together. We were behind a post, but, oh, well.

At exactly 7:30 p.m., soft-spoken Ron Maltais took the stage and looked at the full house.

"Wow, this is incredible," he said. "Let me know if you cannot hear me."

In unison, the audience responded, "We cannot hear you."

Ron gravitated to a chair on the stage which had a microphone in front of it. He sat and started speaking into the microphone, "I'd better sit. Otherwise you might expect me to dance."

Then he introduced the evening's entertainment and mentioned this is the second in a series of three Castañeda Concerts. He listed the major donors and added, "To quote Hillary, it takes a village." The rest of his sentence was drowned out in applause. Ron praised Allan's generosity in providing the ballroom and hotel accommodations for the performers. More applause. Ron recognized The Las Vegas Arts Council, Susie Tsyitee and Sharon Vander Meer. Then smiling as he continued, this reticent impresario admitted, "I haven't known Emi Grimm very long, but we have become best friends." Whistles from the audience.

Apparently the performers are all related but before we could figure out how, the lights dimmed and the performers took the stage.

From the first guitar strum, the audience was hooked. As the second guitarist started strumming, Eva Encinias began singing. Then the elegantly slim and enormously talented Emi Grimm got our hearts beating and our feet tapping with her first solo flamenco. Her body arched to the music. As Eva sang, I wished my Spanish were better. All I understood were the words "puerto de la rita" so had to imagine the scenario.

When Nevares Encinias, the male solo dancer, started dancing, I forgot about imagining and let his dancing encompass me. His grace. His power. His sexuality. He was wearing tight pants and a sport coat. When he took off his sport coat, so did we. In the first half of their program, the dancers soloed and danced duos. Elena Osuna displayed her strong legs shamelessly by hiking up a skirt with the six white ruffled panels. (I counted.) For her extended solo, she received the first standing ovation of the evening.

Time for a break. Perhaps the performers needed it. We did not. The audience did not stop applauding until it was obvious that we were having an intermission. After 20 minutes, Ron returned. He thanked KFJN. Joseph and Loretta Baca were in the front row so we could see how much they were enjoying the evening. Also mentioned were the Optic with an article by Sharon Vander Meer.

Ron said that he has lived in New Mexico for a long time "longer than anywhere else" and regrets that young people are not learning about their heritage. Nor are they dancing. He hopes to change that by having Emi teach dancing to our youngsters once a week. Details to follow.

As Ron left the stage, the dancers returned decked out in new costumes! Emi wore a slinky red dress adorned with form-fitting black lace. Elena was now in shades of pink with 10 ruffles. (I counted.) Nevares had on a patterned shirt and vest. Then after a couple of dances, Emi left the stage. Vocalists Eva Encinias and Joaquin Encinias accompanied by guitarists Ricardo Angled and Mario Febres focused our attention on their music. I think I caught the word "Puerto" again. Certainly an incentive to study Español diligentemente.

Suddenly Emi bolted onto the stage resplendent in a red dress with a 6-foot train of ruffles. As she danced, she twisted and ever so often suggestively kicked the train as if to indicate that nothing was going to get in her way. By now the audience was totally transported. When vocalist Joaquin started dancing, the crowd went wild. Sporting long hair, a bald pate and a belly, he was nowhere near as sensuous as Nevares Encinias, but we didn't care.

Quickly, almost too quickly, each of the performers had one more solo before disappearing. The crowd sprang up to give La Emi Arte Flamenco a standing ovation. The applause was loud and insistent. The performers returned to the stage where Ron gave each of them a gorgeous bouquet of long-stemmed red roses. Long-stemmed red roses are the sign of love. And we were all in the love with the performers whose stomping heels, flashing eyes and clicking castanets aligned us with the art of flamenco in our universe. Olé!