

## ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## Gypsy rhythms

Los Flamencos breaks new ground by merging classical choral music with Spanish dance

**H**ats off to those brave souls whose passion leads them to new territories. It takes guts to be a pioneer in any era, place or discipline.

Although Sarah Vincent and Maria Laskar are Montreal's second generation of flamenco exponents, they are also pioneers. The artistic director and general director, respectively, of their company, Los Flamencos, they have coined the term flamenco fusion to describe the large, multidisciplinary events they marry to the earthy gypsy dance.

Marija Scekcic is an international student who, after graduating from Concordia's dance program in June, will return to her native Croatia, bringing contemporary dance to a country where none exists.

Combining music, song, poetry and theatre, Los Flamencos has developed a hybrid made-in-Quebec vision of flamenco.

Laskar, a theatre director, is in charge of next week's production, *Voces del Corazon* (Voices of the Heart), featuring 70 members of the Metropolitan Choir and 12 flamenco musicians and dancers.

While the company has staged several productions, including the four-part *Chemin des Gitans* series about the migration of gypsies from India through Egypt and Turkey to Eastern Europe, *Voces* marks the first time it has tried to integrate classical choral music with flamenco.

In keeping with the gypsy tradition of celebrating in gatherings, *Voces* will be staged in a church, the conventional meeting place or home to choirs in this society.



LINDE HOWE-BECK

## DANCE

Laskar says while the idea for the venue is in the spirit of the gypsies, the use of choral music with flamenco's *palmas* (rhythmic hand clapping) is not. Vincent, who has written original music and choreographed dances, agrees. It's difficult to teach the rhythms to the singers. "Flamenco has very complicated rhythms. It's a little bit like jazz."

All the music in the show with the exception of four pieces by Paco Pena's *Misa Flamenca* album is by Vincent.

Finding a balance between the lofty, airy choral sounds and the grounded emotions of flamenco music and dance poses big challenges, she explains.

"We're trying to keep the choir's an-

gel voices - but trying to bring them down (to earth with flamenco)."

Compared to the intimacy of original gypsy dancing, *Voces* is a vast production, a result, no doubt, of the director's big ideas.

"We're getting very good working with lots of people," Laskar said with a laugh. "Each time, we say we will make something smaller, but it just gets bigger."

For Verdun-born Vincent, Los Flamencos is a way of expressing her passion for flamenco and her love for her native Quebec. After studying and dancing flamenco in Spain and France, she returned to Montreal to found a school and perform in 1984.

"For me, it was important to do fla-

menco from here. I live here. I live with the winter. The musicians also play blues and jazz. This flamenco is us. It's from here. This is very important."

Laskar and Vincent formed Productions Flamenco Montréal and its company Los Flamencos in 1995, the year after a chance meeting.

Laskar knew nothing about flamenco. It was a "coup de coeur" for the Algerian-born woman with the Spanish mother. "It was destiny. It was my background."

Marija Scekcic's heritage is front and centre on the program she shares next week with Katie Ewald.

A Serbo-Croat, Scekcic watched as her Serbian father and Croatian mother were driven apart by the civil war that raged in her homeland earlier this decade.

"Trapped in a system of horror and dishonour, I learned that love and dignity, even when brutally interrupted, can never be destroyed."

Having studied ballet for 15 years, she went to England where she saw contemporary dance for the first time.

In 1995, she got a student visa to attend Concordia.

Free Fall-Slobodan Pad is a joint production by the two promising young dancers-choreographers. Ewald was part of Tangente's season opening last fall and Scekcic represented Concordia at another downtown show this year.

Danced by four interpreters, *Ludilo*, which means madness, is inspired by Scekcic's father and dedicated to her

mother. "It's the madness (*ludilo*) that carries all my shattered dreams in which I can't stop shivering..." Scekcic writes.

It was this madness, she says, that drove her lawyer-father away from his home and business in Croatia. Fired from his job because of his ethnicity, he fought legal battles against the Croatian government for more than seven years before leaving to conduct

his case from Serbia.

"I feel I'm going along the same path," Scekcic says regretfully about being obliged to leave Canada. Her visa expires when she graduates.

In true pioneering spirit, she intends to introduce contemporary dance to her native land by remounting *Ludilo* in Croatia.

There is no political intent in this piece, she stresses. "I didn't create it out of hate or anger. I created (it) out of pure joy because I don't know how else to live."

❖ *Voces Del Corazon* by Los Flamencos will be at *Eglise St-Jean Baptiste*, on *Rachel St.*, at the corner of *Henri Julien St.*, Friday and next Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$26.50 and \$21. For information, call (514) 790-1245.

❖ *Free Fall-Slobodan Pad* by Katie Ewald and Marija Scekcic is at *Théâtre La Chapelle*, at 8 p.m. Friday and May 15 and at 3 p.m. May 16. Tickets cost \$12 and \$10. Call (514) 843-7738.

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