

Dreaming in War Time and in Flamenco Dreaming

by Judith Lynne Hanna, Ph.D. - Thursday, November 23, 2006



We all have dreams. Sometimes they are embodied on stage. Born in El Salvador, flamenco choreographer and dancer Edwin Aparicio lived through the country's civil war until he was eleven, the age of recruitment to the military. When he heard gunshots, he didn't want to deal with the stress. "I went to sleep." At the beginning and end of his sleep, the "entresueño," he wasn't sure what was real and what was dream.

To escape becoming a soldier, Aparicio was able to join some family members who lived in Washington, DC. At Bell Multicultural High School, he did not like his gym class and jumped at the chance to take the alternative — ballet. He soon decided he wanted to be a dancer. His parents thought being a mechanic was a real job, but he was committed to dance. One of his teachers at a summer dance camp, Dana Tai Soon Burgess, convinced him he could be successful as a flamenco dancer. So in 1996 at age nineteen, Aparicio was on scholarship with Ziva Cohen's Spanish Dance Ensemble, learning and performing flamenco.

The following year, Aparicio went to Spain where he received most of his training from renowned flamenco artists Tomás de Madrid and La Tati. He continues to go to Spain every year to study and perform. Aparicio made his debut at the legendary Casa Patas in Madrid in 2001.

Aparicio has been performing, choreographing and teaching flamenco dance throughout the U.S. for the past nine years. This includes teaching at the DC Dance Collective where

I joined him in one of La Tati's workshops that he had organized. Aparicio has performed in "El Gato Montés" and in "Don Giovanni" with The Washington National Opera at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He danced with companies such as the "José Greco Spanish Dance Company" and has often shared the stage with internationally celebrated artists. He teaches for Dance Masters of America. Aparicio's agenda includes dancing in Miami, Chicago, New York, Las Vegas and Spain.

Drawing upon his youth in El Salvador, Aparicio's fifth production was the acclaimed "Entresueño," premiered August 4, 2006, at the GALA Hispanic Theater in Washington, D.C., with subsequent performances in New York City and Chicago. In "Entresueño," flamenco dancers captured the transition from awareness to sleep — when imagery is exaggeratedly vivid and the boundaries of time and space disappear. The work explores human consciousness where memories blur and mix with imagination. Reality gives way to the dream. Experiencing the intensity of the flamenco art form is, in a sense, akin to entering a dream-like state. The greatest performers of flamenco have often been described as having *duende*, a temporary trance-like state, in which they are possessed by an intangible spiritual aura.

With evocative vignettes, "Entresueño" begins and ends with the dancers, three women and one man, facing away from the audience, their bodies appearing as silhouettes at dusk. The "La Penumbra" opening section represents the *entresueño* before entering sleep, while "La Aurora," the second section, explores the state of *entresueño* before awakening. "Abre los ojos," wake up, performed by the entire cast, concludes the performance.

Joining Aparicio was a strong set of performers: the Madrid-based and internationally recognized flamenco artist "La Truco" (Eliezer Truco Pinillos), the hit of many shows Nélida Tirado, teacher and performer La Genoveva (Genovieve Guinn), singers highly regarded for their authenticity and passion David Castellano and Jesús Montoya (El Genio Gitano), and guitar virtuosos Pedro Cortés and Ricardo Marlow.

While the "Entresueño" group pieces are choreographed, there is room for improvisation in the tradition of flamenco. Individuality is especially noticeable in the interplay with the musicians. The individual artists choreographed their own solos.

La Genoveva in "Déjà-vu" performed the *soleá por bulería*, a 12-count structure with accents on 3, 6, 8, 10 and 12, which combines the sadness of *soleá*, a *cante hondo*, (deep song) and light heartedness of *cante chico* (little joyful song). She displayed what she had learned from master dancers in Spain where she also performed. La Genoveva offers flamenco classes and workshops in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.

Nélida Tirado performed a solo, "Latidos," a *taranto* (a sad story originally about tragedy in the mines), a difficult piece because each singer sings in his or her own way and the singer drives the 4-count rhythm, also with 1-2s or 1-5s. Tirado's sensuous, passionate,

steamy, torridly suggestive movements in a long-sleeved, high-neck clinging red dress made hearts pound and blood stir. Her electrifying presence and s-shape and dramatic angles of her body were mesmerizing.

Tirado began her formal dance training at age six at Ballet Hispánico de Nueva York, followed by studies of classical ballet, modern dance, classical Spanish dance and flamenco. She has performed in a number of companies, including Compañía María Pages, and in prestigious flamenco festivals in Spain and other countries. She was a featured flamenco star in the internationally acclaimed production "Riverdance" on Broadway. Aparicio, too, displayed emotional powers in his "Pué...", a soleá, which he considers "personally deep and mature with respect to the community." Like an electric switch turning on and off, he morphed from cool walks, fluid articulate hand gestures to tense hellfire footwork and crisp multiple turns. In the zapateado (syncopated slow-to-furious percussive sounds made by nail-studded heels and toes footwork), his feet attacked the floor with staccato machine-gun rapidity.

La Truco's solo, "Amanecer," an alegría (a lighthearted song with a 12-count rhythm) was the most mimetically dream-like. Under the spotlight she was a child seated and playing with a stuffed animal. She spots a pair of flamenco shoes and discovers the joy of dance. Then she transforms into an adult woman, moving into a breathtaking spiritual dimension. Afterwards the dream ends and "La Truco" is once again the little girl, now falling deeply asleep.

La Truco, a native of Spain, received a certificate of "Instructor of Flamenco and Spanish Dance" from the Escuela Profesional de Musica y Danza de Madrid in 1985. She continued her studies with notable dancers, performed as a soloist in dance companies of flamenco legend and established her own dance company which toured in Spain, South Africa and Indonesia.

In the finale the women danced barefoot yet were still able to show excellent dancing skills. They were joined by the musicians.

At the discussion and book signing of my book *Dancing for Health: Conquering and Preventing Stress* at DC Dance Collective, Aparicio, it turns out, was seeking insight into his own experience with stress a few weeks after his tour. "I had imagined illness and felt I was going to die. My stomach ached, I had a dry throat, I was gagging. When I performed, I had a bottle of water in the wings and choreographed for a drink break. At thirty I had had experience as a soloist, but I realized I was stressed out about carrying a company under my wing — it was my first U.S. tour. I had to carry everyone. Usually when dancers can no longer perform, they start a company. I didn't know where to start. I was doing everything, lighting design, sound engineer, the whole tour. When someone would ask how the project was going, I'd get a knot in my stomach. I learned how to keep my sanity, with a half-hour of meditation." And dance.