

A feel for flamenco

15-year-old Nardi ready to show her flair for flamenco at annual show

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter

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Flamenco dancers Francesca Nardi, left, Maria Osende, centre, and Colleen Power, right, rehearse with musicians, background from left, Joyce Saunders, Enrique Rojo, Gina Burgess and Daniel MacNeil. The group presents its annual Flamenco Valentine in the Schooner Room, Casino Nova Scotia, on Saturda

HER NAME was Lola. But she wasn't a showgirl. Lola Flores was the Spanish Ava Gardner, or the Penelope Cruz of the 1950s, a Spanish singer, dancer and actress, a diva who popularized flamenco, says Maria Osende.

And The Maria Osende Flamenco Company will present a glamorous number by Flores as part of its annual Flamenco Valentine, on Saturday, 8 p.m., in the Schooner Room at Casino Nova Scotia.

"It's the most varied Flamenco Valentine yet in terms of content," says Osende, born and raised in Madrid and a former dancer with the Spanish National Ballet and the Deutsche Oper Ballet in Berlin.

"It's very theatrical. The pieces are tragic and humorous, traditional and contemporary."

In all, there are eight pieces in the show, ranging from solos for dancers, musicians and singers to duets to full company numbers.

And, at 9:30 p.m., after the performance, there's a dance party with DJ Junior, featuring a range of music to get everyone — not just flamenco dancers — on the dance floor.

This is the sixth year for Flamenco Valentine, which was previously held at FRED. The show has outgrown the trendy Agricola Street gallery-cafe, and Osende has exchanged some of the intimacy for a bigger stage, better lighting and better sightlines, leading to a more dramatic presentation.

The first year Osende performed with four musicians. This year the show has grown to include four dancers — Osende, Francesca Nardi, Michelle Raiche-Marsden and Colleen Power — and five musicians: guitarist Daniel MacNeil, vocalists Enrique Rojo (el Henry) and Joyce Saunders, violinist Gina Burgess and percussionist Ian MacMillan.

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FLAMENCO VALENTINE:

PRESENTED BY: Maria Osende

Flamenco Company

WHEN: Saturday, 8 p.m., dance party, 9:30 p.m.

WHERE: Schooner Room, Casino Nova Scotia, Halifax

WHO: Featuring dancers Osende, Francesca Nardi, Michelle Raiche-Marsden and Colleen Power, guitarist Daniel MacNeil, vocalists Enrique Rojo "el Henry" and Joyce Saunders, violinist Gina Burgess and percussionist Ian MacMillan.

TICKETS: \$24 row seating, \$28 to \$32 tables, includes free parking. Call 451-1221, visit www.ticketatlantic.com or participating Atlantic Superstores.

"We have a different focus each year and different works," says Osende, who has been based in Dartmouth since 2002.

"I've been quite inspired choreographically this year."

"Expressing very deep emotion is very Spanish, not very Canadian. I've never done a piece like this."

By contrast, the Flores number, sung by Saunders, is fun and glamorous with some very over-the-top humour and a very Broadway flare, Osende says.

"It's like a diva singing," she says of the tune, Pena, Penita, Pena, which is sorrow, sorrow, sorrow in English. "Everyone in Spain knows it; it is super-famous and a very catchy tune. It's like Strangers in the Night."

The dancers, clad in sexy lace costumes, strike a variety of poses in the background "like accessories," she explains, while Saunders sings.

Nardi, 15, is in both pieces, along with a tango, composed by MacNeil.

"It's really upbeat, fun, bright, colourful, with a lot of fun music. The dancers dance together sometimes, sometimes on their own," she says.

The Grade 10 Citadel High student says her favourite piece is the seguirya.

"I love being dramatic, the whole theatrical thing is fun. It's such an exciting piece . . . very intense, very powerful."

Nardi, who began studying ballet at four and flamenco at 11, is the youngest Canadian to have attended the Cristina Heeren Foundation of Flamenco in Seville, Spain.

She won a scholarship to the prestigious school last summer where she trained between five and six hours a day, five days a week, with "incredible dancers from Spain, and teachers from Argentina, Peru, Cuba and all over the world. We learned to work with musicians, were immersed in the culture, the amazing music and the whole spirit of it."

Osende predicts a bright future for the very talented Nardi, who is making her debut with the company.

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