

# Palabra Flamenco: Press History, Reviews, Interviews

## ***The Georgia Straight***

### **Review: *La Palabra en el Tiempo* — Vancouver Fringe Festival 2018**

by [Kathleen Oliver](#) on September 5th, 2018

[www.straight.com/arts/1129451/vancouver-fringe-festival-review-la-palabra-en-el-tiempo](http://www.straight.com/arts/1129451/vancouver-fringe-festival-review-la-palabra-en-el-tiempo)

There's virtuosity to burn in this hour of dance, music, and poetry.

I know next to nothing about flamenco traditions, but the sensual pleasures of this show are many: Denise Yeo's dancing, by turns sinuous and ferocious (not to mention her exquisite costumes); the rich voice of poet Garth Martens, and his fleeting images of travel to an unspecified Latin-American location; the soulful singing of Veronica Maguire; and especially the music. Guitarist Gareth Owen plays like he has a hundred fingers, and the foot stomps, handclaps, and clacking castanets of other cast members enhance the extraordinary rhythms of the piece. Let it wash over you

## ***Showbill Canada***

### **Review: *La Palabra en el Tiempo* — Victoria Fringe Festival 2018**

by [Tony Carter](#) on August 29, 2018

<https://www.facebook.com/ShowbillCanada/photos/a.1998813060345102/2484178721808531/>

Flamenco, for anyone who doesn't know, is a Spanish musical tradition of singing, dance, guitar playing, handclapping, and snapping. It is dramatic and highly emotional, and is well-suited to anger, love, and sensuality. Poetry, for those who also don't know, is a literary genre that uses different literary devices to evoke an emotional response. You might not ever think to combine these two things, but on paper they sure seem to go wonderfully together. And if *La Palabra En El Tiempo* is any indication you would be correct.

The self-described "Literary Flamenco Theatre" begins with Garth Marten's poetry, which tells a story that is perhaps more important for its emotional resonance than for its actual narrative thread. His words are equal-parts passionate and desolate — even if his delivery can be a bit clinical.

After that, Denise Yeo's dancing is guaranteed to captivate as Gareth Owen's guitar perfectly sets the tone for the rest of the show. This is taken to another level entirely by the air of authenticity and experience that Veronica Maguire brings to the stage with every word and every movement. It is utterly beguiling to behold as each of these talented performers show what they can do, then build off of each other to a sensual fever pitch.

While Marten's poetry might seem a bit out of place to begin with, it becomes every part as integral to the final product as the four complement each other beat for beat in their performance.

## **THE BOTTOM LINE:**

*La Palabra En El Tiempo* is a gift to behold. Four fantastically talented people have crafted a show that is greater the sum of its parts--parts that were already impressive to begin with!

**Janis La Couvee, Theatre Reviewer**

**Preview: *La Palabra en el Tiempo* — Victoria Fringe Festival**

by Janis la Couvee on Sep 1, 2018

[www.facebook.com/JanisLaCouveeOnline/posts/2050080915055204](http://www.facebook.com/JanisLaCouveeOnline/posts/2050080915055204)

It's been a very relaxed Victoria Fringe Festival 2018 for me with many two show nights. On Thursday I saw the explosive *La Palabra en el Tiempo* and tender and moving *The Wilds* by Wonderheads. WOW to both.

*La Palabra en el Tiempo* — I tried to calculate the cumulative number of years of artistic practice of the quartet on stage. I know Veronica Maguire has been teaching and performing flamenco for over 40 years, Gareth Owen, her son, has been studying and playing guitar for decades. Artistic director and principal dancer Denise Yeo has studied under Maguire and many other flamenco teachers. Garth Martens, poet has been recognized nationally for his poetry and has dedicated years to learning flamenco.

This unique marriage of talents creates an incredible experience — Maguire carries the grief of the world in her voice, Owen seems melded to his guitar, as if one, fingers travelling intimately over the strings, Martens declaims like the prophets of old — stern warnings and jeremiads, potent messages — Yeo is a spitfire, uncontainable in her passionate delivery, staccato feet blurring in ferocious movement.

Powerful and primal exaltations of people who refuse to be cowed.

**Janis La Couvee, Theatre Reviewer and Arts Blogger**

**Interview: *La Palabra en el Tiempo* — Victoria Fringe Festival**

by Janis la Couvee on Aug 9, 2018

<http://janislacouvee.com/la-palabra-en-el-tiempo-at-the-victoria-fringe-2018-an-interview/>

Fringe festivals world-wide provide the opportunity to experience work in many different genres. This definitely holds true for the Victoria Fringe, where this year patrons are rewarded with several dance shows. *La Palabra en el Tiempo* marries fiery flamenco, exquisite guitar and profound poetry. Principal dancer Denise Yeo and poet Garth Martens answered questions about their show. PS: I saw an earlier version of this show at the beginning of the year and was very impressed. It definitely makes my list of "local picks" for this year's Victoria Fringe.

**Janis:** How long have you been producing work on the Fringe circuit? As an artist/company?

**Denise:** None of us have produced work on the Fringe circuit before. Although Veronica, Gareth, and I have performed across Canada in flamenco *tablaos*, and in major productions like *Recuerdos* and *Pasajes* at the Royal Theatre in Victoria, this is our first Fringe experience as performers. We began working together as Palabra Flamenco in early 2017.

**Janis:** Have you been (or will you be) taking the show to other Fringes?

**Garth:** Yes! After the Victoria Fringe Festival, we will take *La Palabra en el Tiempo* to the Vancouver Fringe Festival. We will also perform an extended, 75-minute finale at the Victoria Festival of Authors, which will conclude with an on-stage conversation with members of Palabra Flamenco led by acclaimed poet, musician, and philosopher Jan Zwicky.

**Janis:** Is your show a new work, or has it been performed elsewhere?

**Garth:** We performed a rudimentary version of our show at the 2017 Victoria Flamenco Festival in Centennial Square and two sold-out shows last January at Intrepid Theatre. We've revised the show heavily for the Victoria Fringe Festival.

**Janis:** Significant awards or accolades? (not just on the Fringe circuit)

**Denise:** Our poet Garth Martens is the winner of the 2011 Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging Writers. For his first book of poetry, *Prologue for the Age of Consequence* (House of Anansi Press), he was a Finalist for the 2014 Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. His recent chapbook *Remediation* is out with JackPine Press.

**Garth:** Singer Veronica Maguire co-founded the Alma de España Flamenco Dance Company and School. For her contributions to dance in Canada, spanning a 45-year career, she is the winner of the Canada Council of the Arts' prestigious Jacqueline Lemieux Award. As for Denise Yeo and Gareth Owen, only a prize culture with monumental blindspots would fail to recognize their work—it's technically ambitious, responsive to the moment, and reliably gravid—among flamenco artists in Canada, they're outstanding.

**Janis:** Can you speak to the creation process of this work?

**Denise:** Flamenco has always made me feel a lot—as both audience member and artist. It's as though I'm asked to discern, below what's happening on stage, the shape of something older and dimensionless. Something worth attending to. Poetry has a similar effect on me, an expansion in my chest, a tug from below. The show was an experiment to see if both art forms in the same space, at the same time, might point to the same thing without one being collapsed into the other. My hope was the flamenco and poetry could be themselves with neither colonized or subverted into something they're not. I'm not a fluent speaker of Spanish and neither is the majority of our audience—another reason we wanted to join English-language poetry and flamenco. I know many are moved by Spanish poetry in the *cante* (singing) in context with dance and guitar. My hunch was English-language poetry might likewise occupy the musical space.

**Janis:** Who will your show appeal to?

**Denise:** This show will appeal to readers, dancers, musicians, therapists, death doulas, people into community healing, rhythm hounds, flamenco *aficionados*, people into world music, closet poets, out-of-the-closet poets, palliative care workers, New Age practitioners, feral Christians, and repentant oil rig workers.

**Janis:** What would you say to entice a potential audience member to come?

**Garth:** Sharp rebuttals, feral melody, hypnotic poly-rhythms, poetry that dresses the wound but cannot save the patient, this is a thunderous and lyrical performance, tinged with fire and shadow. It inspires reverence, a sorrow in which you build something for yourself. What is joy when the roof has gone and fires smoulder in the Arctic? How to grieve and honour the world?

**Denise:** It's like Leonard Cohen meets Antonio Banderas in a therapist's office. It's like *Black Swan* crossed with Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* crossed with *Dune*.

**Janis:** What do you hope to inspire in your audience?

**Garth:** We hope audience members experience something stirred in them, a tug in their being for what has been lost and will be lost. This includes the ravages of climate change, fires in the arctic, mass extinction, recognition of that growing absence and a reverence for the land and water and its animals. I'm reminded of something the poet Jan Zwicky recently said to me: "We are, every one of us, going to die." Even if this planetary crisis is not immediate, even if the genocide is not at home, we are going to die. Flamenco and poetry, when all participants are at their best, are reverence for the present moment. In Andalusia, flamenco was born in rural places, done at weddings and baptisms, a family affair. The art form is essentially relationship: to one another, artists on stage, audiences who cry *Olé!*, adding fuel to the fire, a dancer's thunderous intensities or a singer's resolve; and to something shared, independent of all individual parts. Call this the rhythm or the music, a resonance we're all citizens of, at our best. Call this the world's dream dimension, overheard, truly seen. Audiences cry their *Olés!*, when the art and the groove are good, not mechanically, but because they're obliged to from the diaphragm. It's pulled out, like shock or joy. These rhythms are untameably complex and insistent. We cannot plan on heightened experience, but these art forms can create little rooms for it to happen.

**Janis:** Is there anything I've missed asking you, or that you would like to comment on?

**Denise:** Flamenco guitarist Gareth Owen comes from a family of flamenco artists. His mother, Veronica Maguire, is the singer of this show. His father was the flamenco guitarist Harry Owen. I am his wife. These details are shared only to underscore the trust and familiarity we have with one another and our joint commitment to the art. Gareth, Veronica, and I have been working together for over eight years and Garth has been a student of flamenco for nine.

### ***Victoria Festival of Authors***

#### **Q&A with Palabra Flamenco**

*by Barbara Black on Aug 27, 2018*

<http://victoriafestivalofauthors.ca/2018/08/27/qa-with-palabra-flamenco/>

The 2018 Victoria Festival of Authors once again offers an event that draws the written word out of its solitary context and, this year, into a joint artistic exploration of movement, music, and poetry. Victoria's popular Palabra Flamenco brings their unique literary flamenco collaboration to the

festival stage with *La Palabra en el Tiempo*. Prior to the festival, I asked artistic director and dancer Denise Yeo and poet Garth Martens about their project and this unique and lasting art form.

**Barbara:** What are the roots of “La Palabra en el Tiempo”? How did it come into being as a collaborative venture combining spoken word, dance, and music and how unique is this concept to flamenco?

**Denise:** Garth and I first explored, in conversation, how English poetry and flamenco might come together a couple years ago. In early 2017, we experimented with existing text from Garth and traditional music from my husband, flamenco guitarist Gareth Owen. My role was diplomatic, finding language both poet and flamenco musician understood. From those early attempts I fashioned an entire show involving four of us: dancer, singer, guitarist, and poet. Poetry spoken alongside flamenco music is not unique in Spanish, but an old practice that arguably pre-dates singing in flamenco. Poetry, in flamenco’s origins, is an oral tradition. The “text” was not traditionally crafted to stand alone on the page. Layering of written English poetry and flamenco is unique. Both English poetry and flamenco are *musical*; however, they do not share a common musical root and therefore don’t always like to reside in the same space together.

**Garth:** I’ve been a student of Alma de España for nine years. For twenty-six years, the school has promoted on Vancouver Island the study of flamenco not as a cul-de-sac within modern or ballet programming, but as an end in itself, deserving and capacious enough for life-long study. This accounts for Alma de España’s integration of the study of dance, guitar, song, and *palmas* (clapping), informed by what’s happening in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, where instructors and students periodically study.

My commitment to flamenco isn’t about trying to bag a poem out of it. I was only ready to try this literary flamenco collaboration after I performed as a dance soloist on stage for more than a year, which is no claim to any expertise beyond that I’d given this art form enough respect to feel in partnership with it. Thankfully Denise, Gareth, and Veronica ensure this experiment is in relationship with tradition. It is important to us that the art forms have their stature, that neither flamenco nor the poetry is diminished.

**Barbara:** Where there’s flamenco there is the notion and practise of *duende*. Christopher Maurer, the editor of “In Search of Duende,” sees four elements at work in poet Federico García Lorca’s vision of *duende*: irrationality, earthiness, a heightened [awareness of death](#), and “a dash of the diabolical.” Denise, who are you when you dance flamenco? What moves and speaks through your body? How is *duende* present?

**Denise:** I don’t know how *duende* is present. I don’t think I intentionally ask for it to show up. Instead I think I can talk about how it is when dancing feels like it’s in service to something a little difficult to talk about. The “good dancing” is when something larger than, more dimensional, deeper, and more foundational is being served. Someone has called it “what is.” In performance the “what is” encompasses myself, the other musicians, the audience, the room, the air, the ground underneath, the rocks: the history and future of these beings. Categories of flamenco music and dance are called *palos*, each with its structural and connotative associations. In my experience, the

archetypal energy of the *palos* invite into the space evokes a reverberation and acknowledgement from every being present. The good dancing requires a kind of deep listening and almost mind-less response on my part.

When the good dancing happens I typically have decided to throw away my plan and surrender and respond to what is going on right in that moment. I don't think about the lines my body makes, or what expressions show on my face. From training and practice, my body moves through different rhythms and forms, but at the mercy of the moment. Usually simple patterns robust and earthy enough to contain heightened energy are what emit from my body. Nothing clever or terribly sophisticated is at hand material-wise when the good dancing happens. Clever and sophisticated are for other times when the performance goal is different.

**Barbara:** Garth, Tracy K. Smith on poets.org writes "...the *duende* sleeps deep within the poet... asks to be awakened and wrestled.... We write poems in order to engage in the perilous yet necessary struggle to inhabit ourselves—our real selves, the ones we barely recognize—more completely." How is your poetry or that of other poets woven into "La Palabra en el Tiempo"? Is *duende* present there, too?

**Garth:** These encounters can't be guaranteed. At best, we create rooms or clearings where a meeting might occur. I don't want to claim more than that. There is no exercise that predetermines it. We can look where we don't want to, but need to. Get close to what's grotesque or in descent, and if the instant is seared, that's it.

I like what Smith writes, and I add there is more than the self in *duende*. In Jan Zwicky's *Auden as Philosopher*, she separates inarticulate, obliged response to a Sacred Presence or Event from an attempt to communicate this experience so others know it. There is a tension between testimony and technique. It's possible *duende* emerges when an artist, capable of baroque majesty, works crudely to reveal a truth. Of responses to Sacred Presence or Event, among examples from Zwicky's essay, *duende* is nearer Auden's "panic dread".

I wrote the poems when visiting a friend in New Mexico. Denise and I combed through the work, chose whole poems, or a section of one, or fragments, and identified each of these with one of flamenco's traditional *palos*, categories of traditional flamenco music and dance, such as *fandangos*, *tarantos*, *bulerías*, and *soleá*, each with their own structure and emotional associations. How are these woven into *La Palabra en el Tiempo*? I perform poems in context of the *palo*, in place of or alongside flamenco song (*cante*). I speak in relationship to others on stage and what they're up to, with resolves for the guitarist or dancer. Apart from mine, we include in the show an untitled poem by Andalusian poet Antonio Machado, translated by Robert Bly.

**Barbara:** For people who are not familiar with flamenco, what are the greatest misconceptions (or the greatest surprises) about this art form?

**Denise:** I think that flamenco can bypass cultural norms and other similar learned structures in the brain. Like other musical forms, it can tug directly at emotions and evoke feelings to do with parts of ourselves that we might have forgotten. People are surprised when they see flamenco because

it sounds and looks unusual to those steeped in dominant western culture. It's unusual and foreign to them, and yet they feel a response to it.

**Garth:** Flamenco is often associated with the words 'passion' and 'fiery', and it is those, but one of the art form's surprises is the breadth of personhood it allows. Faces we're not meant to show, we're told are inappropriate, rule the moment.

**Barbara:** As one of the collaborators in this piece, tell me about the beats, the rhythms, the words, the emotion, the voice of flamenco, how they affect you personally in performance, in the heat of the moment.

**Denise:** In performance the rhythm, words, emotion, and *cante*(song) serve to remind me what we're trying to achieve. They set off a frequency that points to the archetypal energy invoked. My thinking and feeling is shaped and responds in kind.

**Garth:** Every so often, I've had to scrap-heap my understanding of what happens, rhythmically speaking, in flamenco. I'm grateful to Denise and Gareth for their patience and time in helping me recalibrate my *palmas*. I'm learning not only where movement begins, through shoulders, wrists, and hands, but how rhythm might, if I practice, pool in my consciousness so that my thinking informs my movement and ultimately the groove. If I admire the dancer's footwork rather than heed it, or over-think what I'm hearing, I wobble. Ideally I'm at ease, in relationship, listening, physically ready but relaxed. If everyone, guitarist, singer, dancer, and *palmero*, is at their best, monuments happen — surprises that satisfy because they seem destined — etched in commotion on stage. Where lightning was. You can't legislate that. You can only round your corners.

The emotion, when it enters, is unpredictable. Today in rehearsal, Denise and Veronica introduced something for *soleá* for only the two of them, and in their circling there was trust and grief and inheritance. I saw vulnerability on Denise's face, frustration, and a welling up. I was very moved. At another re-worked section of *soleá*, when speaking my poem to Veronica with greater sensitivity, responsive to her movements and inches from her face, I again felt unusually emotional. With every performance, in rehearsal or on stage, the weight shifts. We're very close. In rehearsal, there's laughter when we screw up or goof around. Sometimes there are arguments.

**Barbara:** Will there be more exciting projects in your future combining the spoken word and flamenco?

**Denise:** I think so. The experiment to bring English poetry and flamenco together has been even more successful than I thought it would be. We've learned so much. It has opened horizons I hadn't considered when we first collaborated.

**Garth:** Yeah, we have more to do.

**Barbara:** Here's a Bonus Question: what is the sound of flamenco without an audience?

**Denise:** There's always an audience. Sometimes the audience isn't people.