

Pena: putting the spark in flamenco

A standing ovation and encore calls summed up audience feeling towards flamenco guitarist, Paco Pena as he performed for a good-sized crowd at SUB theatre last weekend.

The audience was eager and quick to respond to a polished and technically sound sampling of various flamenco stylings. Some of the pieces were stylistic variations on simple Spanish folk songs and were light and joyful. Others were much deeper pieces that were highly impressionistic and dealt with sterner emotions.

First, the guitarist would establish a pace and mood, then with subtle shadings of his harmonies would change the mood and have it evolve. Or, with an abrupt change, he would radically alter it, exploring some aspect of it before

returning to resume its evolution.

A variety of techniques were used to achieve this effective music. They varied from the use of harmonics, to a light, rapid-fire trill on the upper strings, to a hard-driving, rhythmic strumming that accented the bass strings. Percussion was attained by tapping the guitar's face, tapping the toe, or occasional clicks from the performer's heel on the floor: this all added depth and accented the movement of the music. By plucking the neck strings with his left hand, Pena achieved a fast-moving and catchy syncopation.

Paco Pena had firm command over his instrument as distinct, well-formed notes flowed out evenly and under control, forming a complete and coherent whole. Senor Pena's playing was solid, imaginative,

yet conservative as he stayed within bounds he thought would be familiar to his audience.

"Since the flamenco music is foreign to this country," Senor Pena paused during the concert to say, "I usually take time to explain the music at my concerts so that you may appreciate it better." He described the common opinion that flamenco music is Spanish as incorrect. Flamenco music is the folk music of a small area in southern Spain known as Andalusia.

"This area was conquered or visited by many peoples and they have all left their influence on the culture of the area and have all been part of the development of flamenco music," he continued. The most prominent of these peoples were the Moors who ruled

Spain for over eight centuries and have left a strong influence on the architecture, language and music. Tribes of gypsies settled in the Andalusian region and brought with them their music, thus gypsy music became one of the roots from which flamenco music grew.

Paco Pena noted that Spain is not a homogeneous country and that there are great cultural differences among localities; even those that lie close together. As a result, many different styles of flamenco music have arisen, often being named after the locality from which they came. A random cross-section of these styles was presented at this concert Sunday night.

"The people suffered many hardships," Paco Pena said, "and they used this music to express their emotions. Originally, flamenco music was singing and dancing, with the guitar being used for a background." Apparently, it is only recently that flamenco guitar has been respected as an art form in its own right.

Paco Pena was born in Spain in 1942 and has been playing professionally since the age of twelve. His tours have included Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada and he is as highly acclaimed in Spain as he is abroad. In 1970, Paco Pena founded his Flamenco Puro group consisting of himself, two dancers, two singers and another guitarist. He was afraid that spectacular and commercial tours were debasing and even destroying true flamenco and organized his small company to help preserve it. At

SUB theatre, however, he played entirely alone.

On stage, Paco Pena appeared reserved and relied entirely on his playing to establish a rapport with his audience. Above all he is a professional. He gave the impression that he was there to present professional flamenco and played to an audience that he expected was there to hear the same.

By the second set both the audience and the performer had established their pace; were relaxed and opened up. During the second half, Senor Pena brought the performance home with a number of pieces that were thoroughly enjoyed and were the climax of the evening.

One piece showed the South American influence on flamenco music as Latin American rhythm was interpreted through the stylings of a flamenco guitar. It was attractively done. Another piece showed the Moorish influence on flamenco. This piece was based on enticing middle-eastern harmonies. The difference between this piece and the previously played number illustrated the diversity of style and influence to be found within flamenco music. Finally, *Malaguena*, a tune that should be familiar to anyone who has heard Spanish music was played. This simple tune was repeated several times, each time with a unique variation and tone. A standing ovation. Then an encore and was over. It was a good and solid performance; a third set would have gone down well with everyone.

by David Oke

Fink, Duck, Camp at Hovel

"They" are

Cathy Fink and Duck Donald. Between the two of them, they offered music played on eight different instruments - she mainly on banjo and guitar, he usually on guitar and mandolin.

The two have only played together for two years, but on stage at the Hovel they were as smooth and relaxed it seemed to have been a much longer partnership. Duck Donald (the names are in the right order - honest) did some impressive work on the mandolin - there were some astonishing sounds issuing from the un-repossessing little instrument. Cathy Fink equally impressive with her fast and confident banjo work. It was a highly-polished performance in all, contrasting nicely with the duo's relaxed and humorous stage patter.

The music was old; Fink-Donald concentrated on tunes from the twenties, forties and fifties, but the arrangements were new - simple and unpretentious. His strong voice with a touch of country twang) combined with her clear, ringing vocals to offer a series of pleasing harmonies. Their voice dynamics were controlled and well-planned, carefully designed to sound forceful and laid-back at the right times.

The two are a singing encyclopaedia of musical information. Between songs they offered names, dates, song titles, recording labels and stories - all background information about the origins and history of the "old-time country, pre-bluegrass" music they played.

Half-way through the evening the audience was given a wonderful surprise - Peter Paul Van Camp. Van Camp had been billed with the duo on the Hovel printout and when he didn't appear with them in the opening

set, most people assumed there'd been a mistake or mix-up or whatever.

Mr. Van Camp is the best worst poet that the Hovel has ever seen, perhaps even the best rotten poet in the world. He looks like a starved seagull dressed in tie-and-tails; hair parted in the middle and greased down to dance-floor finish; baggy pants reaching only to mid-calf; socks loudly striped, badly fitted suits, raised collar and horn-rimmed glasses perched on his beak.

The audience tried. They tried not to burst out into screams of laughter in the middle of a poem. They were unsuccessful. Mr. Van Camp read some of the most trite, clumsy, stupid wonderful poetry ever written. All this in his high, cracking voice. One memorable poetic work was

about Elmer Brown, a bad boy who made faces at people. It was an audience-participation poem - our line was what people should say to bad face-makers: "Here's the way YOU look!"

The audience loved this deceptively clumsy poet. You have to be pretty good to be that bad - especially in this kind of spoof.

Mr. Van Camp has been with Cathy Fink and Duck Donald for just under a year - and is an invaluable addition to their act.

The trio is based in Winnipeg, but their gigs have taken them all over western Canada. They were last in Calgary and head out to B.C. next. They hope to return to Edmonton sometime soon, and the members of last weekend's Hovel audience doubtless all hope so too.

Went away hungry, or Eat and run at the Jube

Appetites were whetted but not satisfied at the Edmonton Symphony's presentation of *Jacques Brel Revisited* last weekend.

French music has a special character, one that is very different from American pop. The performance was an introduction to Brel's talent for many and unfortunately, the music was not all it could have been.

Between songs, narration by John Neville deadened audience enthusiasm and shattered the rapport. As a result, the audience had to be re-excited and re-involved every ten minutes or so; a difficult task indeed. But the music shone through despite this technical problem - its vitality and "Frenchness" could not be stifled.

The star of the evening was Leon Bibb. I left wishing he had sung much more than he did. His voice made the spine tingle, with its emotion and virtuosity. One of the songs (*Alone*) was philosophical and quiet in tone. The other (*Amsterdam*) was bouncy and boisterous. The audience obviously loved him in both tempos.

Charlene Brandolini was very good as well, in spite of a couple of cracked notes. Her voice was unpretentious and polished at the same time. Her two solos (*Marieke*, *Sons of...*) were well suited to the

character of her voice.

The two remaining performers (Leah Petersen, Brian McKay) suffered in comparison to the more experienced performers. Miss Petersen seemed harsh; although her songs were perhaps not written to be crooned I think they could have been handled more smoothly. Mr. McKay had two solos - his voice had a wobbly vibrato that sounded especially poor when compared to Leon Bibb's clear, strong bass.

Before offering the *Jacques Brel Revisited* selections, the Symphony performed two mood-setting pieces. The first was the *Donna Diana Overture* by Reznicek; a light piece ranging in mood from gay and dancing to pensive melancholy. Ibrt's *Suite Symphonique*, the second piece, was delightful; I found the bright brassiness of the carousel movements particularly fun. These two pieces did a good job of preparing the audience for what was to follow.

The evening was enjoyable, even though I'm still not sure why Neville's narration was deemed necessary. The narration hindered the performance, but the music was able to magically recapture the audience time and time again. I can hardly wait to see a complete production of the original *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*.

by Janet Russell

Edmonton Film Society

Jean Renoir Series
continues

"GRAND ILLUSION"



Prisoner Pierre Fresnay chats with Erich von Stroheim, the incapacitated head of a P.O.W. camp, in *GRANDE ILLUSION*, the classic Jean Renoir film being shown by Edmonton Film Society Feb. 11 in Tory Lecture Theatre, U of A, at 8 p.m.

Memberships \$7.00 for 6 films
Wednesday Nights

Tory Lecture Theatre
Feb. 11 8 PM

B.O. funky

Backline Orchestra, a funky dance band, will perform for four nights at the Hovel, beginning on Thursday, Feb. 5. Thursday is a membership social, members please bring only one guest each. Doors open at 8:30, shows start at 9:30. Admission \$2 for members and \$3 for non-members.