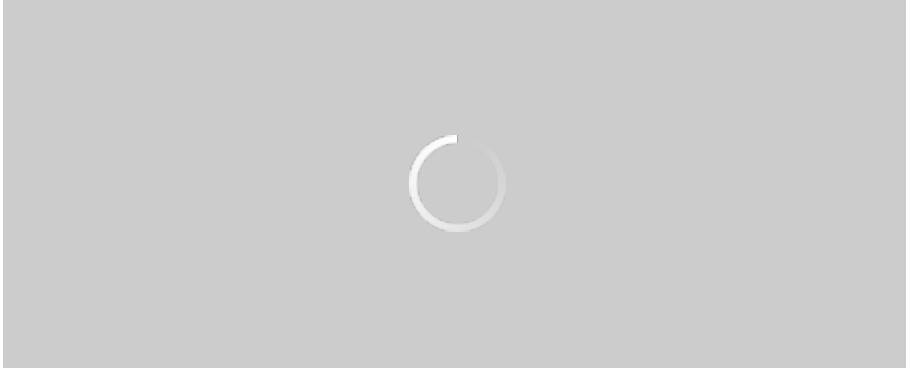


SPANISH MEETS GYPSY



CAFE SEVILLA HOSTS FLAMENCO-GYPSY-BELLY DANCING FUSION DINNER SHOWS.

By Michelle Ruggiero and Jahnelle Washington

Iconic Spanish images are layered on the wall. A bull hangs below the national flag of Spain. Soon, this intimate setting will entertain a dinner crowd with live music and performances, while inviting them to explore a variety of authentic Spanish dishes.

It's just another evening at Cafe Sevilla.

Located in the heart of downtown Long Beach on Pine Avenue, Cafe Sevilla began as an intimate Spanish tapas bar, growing in popularity because of a renowned fun and interactive dining experience.

Every Saturday night, it hosts a Flamenco and Gypsy belly dancing -dinner show. Guests select their meal from a three-course menu showcasing authentic Spanish cuisine, and then prepare to be dazzled during the performance.

A Taste of Spain

Patrons aren't limited to the three courses. Feel free to indulge. For starters, a list of popular, cold and hot tapas are available; from a spicy ceviche dish of red snapper, shrimp, octopus and salmon with blood orange sangria and jalapeno to a trio platter of grilled Spanish sausages, Brava sauteed potatoes and Shrimp al Ajillo.

The first course includes a salad with Balsamic-orange vinaigrette, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and is topped with goat cheese.

Next, choose between the famous Paella Valenciana, a traditional Spanish dish of bomba rice and saffron, enriched with chicken, Spanish sausages, scallops, shrimp, mussels, clams, calamari and vegetables. The other offering is a duet of pan seared salmon with chimichurri and Rioja short rib in a red wine sauce.



The Paella Valenciana is Cafe Sevilla's most popular traditional Spanish dish of Saffron-infused rice mixed with green lip and black mussels, clams, calamari, shrimp, and scallops in their pink shells. Photo Courtesy of Cafe Sevilla's website

For dessert, try the award-winning chocolate espresso creme brulee, crema catalana or, to cleanse the palate, the lemon tart – a lemon custard topped with lemon zest confit and fresh cut strawberry – are all terrific choices.

An extensive menu of Spanish wines and refreshing sangrias are also available for pairing.

Showtime!

Featured guitarist Joef Fargier presses his fingertips over the strings of his guitar. Strumming softly, he closes his eyes, breathes deeply, and releases a powerful roar of raspy vocals. Instantly, you are taken to the streets of Spain.

The audience sways back and forth to the music as Flamenco dancer Arleen Hurtado graciously approaches center stage. She throws her arms in the air and assumes a strong, grounded posture. For a moment, everyone is still. Fargier's last strum lingers briefly before Hurtado's foot thunderously strikes the floor. And so it begins.

Hurtado's petite frame stomps across the stage, commanding the audience's attention. Her arms slice through the air, feet effortlessly matching the rhythmic cadence of Fargier's, rising in strength as the tempo picks up, then peacefully stepping to the fall of Fargier's melodies.

For Hurtado, it is all about the "golden moment."

"When I'm on stage at this moment, I'm just living my truth," Hurtado says. "It's also about giving back. If I can connect with somebody out there watching me, one person, then it's all worth it."

Hurtado has been engulfed in music and dance all her life, dabbling in tap-dancing, Jazz and even drumming since she was a young girl. While visiting Spain with her mother at the age of 12, she experienced a performance that changed her life forever.

"I saw a man dancing, I started crying, and that was it. I don't know what he made me feel, I just felt his energy. He was dancing and drumming at the same time and I just said 'Oh my god I have to do this.'"

For Hurtado, Flamenco is "that amazing meeting of dance and percussion" that has inspired her to continue with 15 years of professional dance.

Her belly-dancing partner, Jasmine Nicole Ortega, who goes by Jasmina, describes her style of dance as "a story without words."

She contrasts Hurtado's aggressive footwork with fluid hip movements. Gliding across the stage, varying tempos dictate her hips, similar to the push and pull of tides by the moon.

While the show may appear heavily rehearsed, the duo confesses that each act is improvised, crafted solely by the shifts in music and the the emotions they experience on only that particular evening.

"I learned that the best Flamenco dancers are the improvers. You feel the music, you feel what's happening in the moment, and it's the same with belly-dancing," Hurtado says. "It's exciting when we go up there because it's a fresh new experience and we're in the moment."

While each performance remains unique, the venue has never changed, providing a platform that no other venue can.

"What makes [Cafe Sevilla] special is the fusion. A lot of people don't know the difference between Middle Eastern music to Persian music to Flamenco music," Jasmina says. "So this is a really broad way to introduce to the general public something that's exotic and gives you both [styles of dance]. You get the feeling of a belly dancer and you get the real Flamenco."

CATEGORIES

DINING

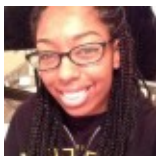
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