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Fired up for flamenco

Guitarists showcase different styles on opening night of international festival

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter
Wed. Oct 21 - 4:46 AM



Bob Sutherby, left, and Daniel MacNeil perform a free concert at Keshen Goodman Library, Halifax, at 7 p.m. tonight. The concert entitled Two Flamenco Guitars featuring Sutherby's traditional approach to flamenco and MacNeil's more modern one is on the opening night of the Fall For Flamenco International Festival running to Oct. 30 in Halifax. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

WITHOUT FLAMENCO guitar, there would be no dance, says dancer Maria Osende.

And without Bob Sutherby, there may have been no flamenco scene in Halifax, says guitarist Daniel MacNeil.

MacNeil, who accompanies Osende during performances with the Maria Osende Flamenco Co., fell in love with flamenco the first time he heard Sutherby play.

"Something touched me inside," says MacNeil, sipping coffee while surrounded by Zehava Power's oil paintings of flamenco dancers at Fred Salon and Gallery in Halifax.

"I was going to pursue jazz, but then I went the flamenco route. For my first two years, Bob introduced me to the techniques and standard forms of flamenco. He was the one who musically brought flamenco to Halifax."

Tonight, MacNeil and Sutherby, who accompanies El Viento Flamenco, kick off the Fall for Flamenco International Festival with a concert at 7 p.m. entitled Two Flamenco Guitars at the Keshen Goodman Public Library in Halifax. They'll each perform at several different events before the festival wraps up Oct. 30.

Sutherby and vocalist Maral Perk will perform Thursday at 7 p.m. at the Captain William Spry Public Library in Halifax and MacNeil will perform with vocalist Enrique Rojo on Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at the Spring Garden Road Public Library in Halifax.

Weather permitting, the performance will be preceded at 2 p.m. on the library lawn by a demonstration of Spanish-style riding by Rachael Argo and her mare Caprichosa.

All library concerts, which include a performance by award-winning Spanish guitarist Juan Campallo and vocalist Javier Rivera on Monday at 7 p.m. at Alderney Gate Public Library in Dartmouth, are free.

Sutherby and vocalist Sean Harris perform Oct. 29 at 7 p.m. at Potter Hall at Dalhousie University.

The Maria Osende Flamenco Company, including MacNeil, joins clarinetist Kinan Asmeh of Syria, pianist

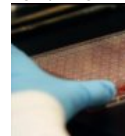
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Library, Dartmouth. Spanish guitarist Juan Campallo and singer Javier Rivera. Both artists perform Oct. 27 at the Cohn with Rafael Campallo.

WORKSHOPS

•Flamenco Beauty and Passion, Thursday, 7 p.m. FRED, Agricola St., Halifax. \$25, 423-5400.

•Flamenco Fitness, Friday, 4 p.m., Interlude Spa, Marriott Harbourfront Hotel, Upper Water St., Halifax. \$15.

•Family Flamenco Dance, Friday, 5 p.m., Grace United Church, Dartmouth. \$20 family, \$10 adult, \$5 kids, free under 8.

•Flamenco Guitar, Friday, 5:30 p.m., EFT Atlantic, 5663 Cornwallis St., Halifax. \$18.

•Flamenco Singing, Friday, 7 p.m., EFT Atlantic, 5663 Cornwallis St., Halifax. \$18.

•Flamenco Dance, Saturday, 11 a.m., North Street Church, 5657 North St., Halifax. \$15.

•Masterclasses, Halifax Dance, Maritime Centre, for those with flamenco skills: Oct. 25-26, Rafael Campallo, dance; Oct. 25, Juan Campallo, guitar; Antonio Montiel, percussion; Javier Rivera, cante; Oct. 28-30, Maria Moreno, dance.

• www.flamencofestival.ca

Dinuk Wijeratne of Halifax, pianist Alex Conde of Spain and bassist Haggai Cohen Milo of Israel for a concert blending jazz and flamenco entitled Flamenco Con Fusion on Saturday at 8 p.m. at the North Street Church in Halifax.

And both guitarists and their respective flamenco companies perform on Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium as opening acts in the festival's showpiece concert, a performance by Rafael Campallo Flamenco, dubbed the sexiest man in dance, direct from Spain.

The festival (www.flamencofestival.ca) also features master classes in dance, guitar, percussion and vocals, and workshops in guitar, singing, dance, fitness and beauty.

Tonight's concert is the first time Sutherby and MacNeil will play together and features two approaches to flamenco guitar.

"My approach is more traditional and Dan's is more modern and based in composition," says Sutherby, who grew up in St. John's and moved to Halifax eight years ago when Evelyne Benais brought El Viento Flamenco, including vocalist Harris and percussionist Tony Tucker, to the city.

"It's a really good time to hear the possibilities on the flamenco guitar," adds MacNeil, who grew up in Westmount, Cape Breton and moved to Halifax about seven years ago.

"Flamenco is an umbrella term for a number of styles or forms that exist within flamenco," explains Sutherby, adding that technically there are 92 forms of flamenco, though only about 40 are active.

"In a typical concert, you see about 15."

Both guitarists have studied in Spain for two months at a time, Sutherby in Seville and MacNeil in Madrid. The training was intense — eight to 10 hours a day.

"I lived with my teacher and I'd do lessons, followed by class accompanists, listen to him practise and then go to bars where singers sang all night and guitarists were hired to improvise and follow the singers all night long," recalls MacNeil.

"You also spend lots of time at cafes soaking up the ambience," says Sutherby.

"Seville is more conservative, more traditional. All artists perform in Seville at one point in time. Madrid is more progressive, more forward leaning," he continues.

"They push the wall as far as it can go without leaving the genre," adds MacNeil.

He says flamenco guitar, in his experience, is more difficult technically than other styles of guitar.

"It's physiologically more demanding. You spend countless hours to get the techniques in your muscle memory and use all your fingers in multiple ways. After a very trying time of learning the demanding technique, I began learning solo repertoire and became a dance accompanist with percussion," he says, noting he also plays tabla and pakavaj (Indian drums) and an oud, a Middle Eastern instrument that is a predecessor to the lute.

After a couple of years as percussionist, he moved into the guitarist role.

Sutherby began his flamenco career as an accompanist, after 14 years as a rock and roll musician.

"Dancing was the big attraction. As an electric guitarist, you lock yourself in with the rhythm centred around the drummer. When I started accompanying dancing, I had to pay attention to what the dancers' feet are doing. There's the challenge of locking in with the choreography and of coming up with choreography. Only much later did I start learning solo repertoire."

He enjoys the flamenco company performances when a singer will go off on a tangent and

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the musician has to follow the improvisation.

"Or a dancer can decide to throw in something new. You have to be ready for surprises. Sometimes you rehearse all parts of the choreography and then the dancers open it up, but they always bring it back. It keeps the excitement in the live shows."

MacNeil says he enjoys the more organic, social parts of his work with the dance troupe.

"There's a sense of ensemble effort. It's a completely different satisfaction from solo work, which I love. I compose my own stuff and there's a deep satisfaction in composing my own pieces and seeing them performed."

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