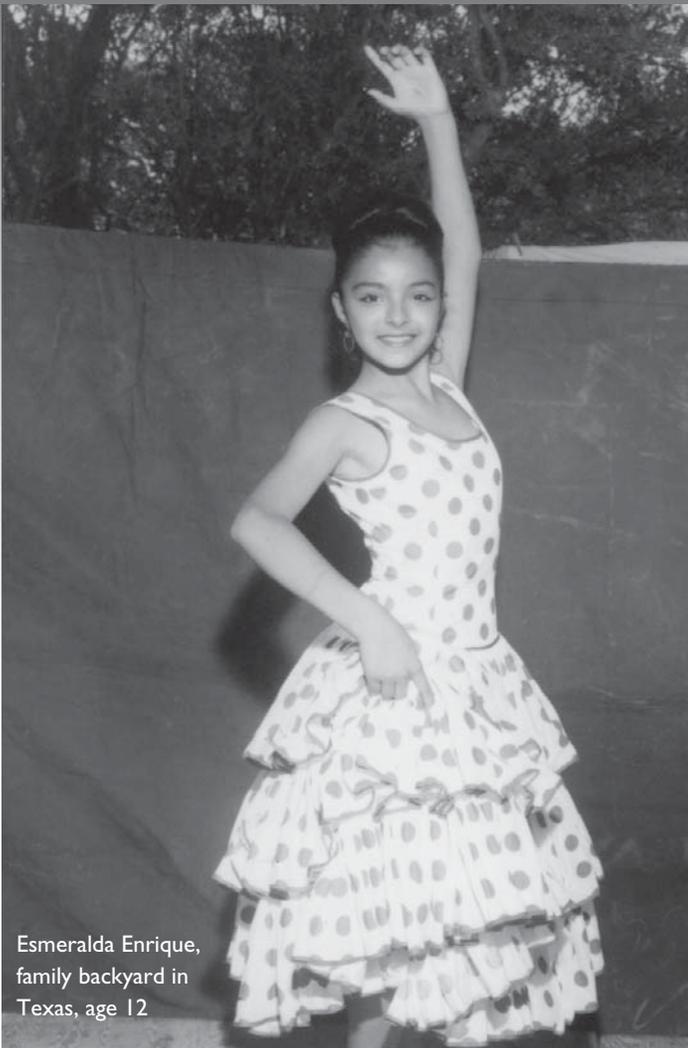


Esmeralda Enrique

WHAT IS NOW IS WHAT IS NEXT

BY SEIKA BOYE



Esmeralda Enrique,
family backyard in
Texas, age 12



Esmeralda Enrique performing
Spanish Classical dance at Club
Hispano, Toronto, c. 1983

Flamenco has three components: the singing or *cante*, the guitar or *guitarra*, and the dance or *baile*. The *cante* is crucial, the *guitarra* follows its lead. Each can also be performed separately. The dance, however, is necessarily dependent upon both. People often think of the dance needing only the guitar, but the *cante* provides the cues for the dancer and for the guitarist. The song carries the message, the rhythm, the tone.

And so, just last year Esmeralda Enrique, relaying a much longed for wish list to the first administrator of her twenty-six-year-old Toronto-based company and school, emphatically included a male or female flamenco singer, the *cantaor(a)*. "I'm tired of having to hear the singer in my head. It's like doing two jobs."

Los Enriques The Enriques

Enrique began dancing at the age of five with lessons from her mother, Herminia Acosta Enrique (Mrs. Enrique). A love of theatre and commitment to community activism propelled Mrs. Enrique to convert the family's San Antonio backyard

into a performance site. Before a backdrop of sheets hung from the clothesline behind a platform stage, Esmeralda, her ten brothers and sisters, her father Julio Martinez Enrique, and other kids from the neighbourhood, performed in variety shows choreographed and directed by her mother who was not, herself, a dancer. Mrs. Enrique had a "joy for children to learn through the arts" says Enrique. She directed her students through verbal description and by instructing them to write out their roles. A San Antonio newspaper article from 1963 compares the Enriques to The Barrymores because of their large theatrical family.



Esmeralda Enrique with her siblings, cousins and neighbourhood friends in a backyard production staged by Mrs. Enrique

These first lessons were in Mexican folk dance. A fourth generation American, Enrique is of Mexican and Spanish decent. Her hometown of San Antonio, Texas, is often referred to as Mexico's northern most city, about 150 miles north of the Mexican/American border. At the age of twelve, she was at a performance of classical Spanish dancing when she encountered flamenco for the first time. Taken by the passion of the dancer and her *bata de cola* (dress with a train), she and her older sister Carla were soon taking lessons with the dancer from that very performance, Yolanda Almanguer. Within three years, the sisters were performing professionally at local *tablaos*, flamenco performance stages or cafés, often in exchange for a meal. To her, the rapid transition into performing life was a normal one. She was used to dancing as part of everyday activities. She recalls doing homework while waiting to dance in the variety shows between movies at the local Mexican cinemas. In the summers they performed almost every night.

Word of mouth spread the news about the talented Enrique sisters. Small stages in their hometown soon turned to higher profile venues when they were invited into the individual companies of Luisa Triana and José Greco. The lineage of both these artists places them among some of the century's greatest flamenco dancers.

Amor de Dios Love of God

In the early 1970s, while attending community college in San Diego where her family had recently relocated, Enrique received a call from her sister who was on tour with the Greco Company. A group of dancers was going to Spain to study; an apartment became available making an otherwise impossible trip affordable. Enrique left college to join the group,

and with \$50 in her pocket travelled to Madrid to study at Amor de Dios ("Love of God") and learn flamenco at its source. Based in a then run-down old building, the famous Amor de Dios housed about thirty studios with classes being held by flamenco's best teachers. All of Enrique's money was spent on classes. When it ran out she would return home. The plan was to stay for one month, but a tide of events kept Enrique dancing in Spain and Europe for eleven years with only a single return home.

While Amor de Dios was everything she imagined, nothing could have given Enrique a better education than when she landed work in one of Madrid's most popular and respected *tablaos*, Los Canasteros. A night out

for drinks led to dancing jobs for the sisters whose Hispanic-American looks made them passable for native Spaniards, or *gitano/a* (nomadic Spanish flamenco peoples). Connections made here resulted in an audition at Los Canasteros. Advised by a friend's agent, Esmeralda and Carmen were told to go onstage, dance, and wait in the bar. Under no circumstances were they to speak a single word. Their American accents would give them away and ruin their prospects. Once they had proven themselves as dancers, authenticity would become secondary. The Enrique's training and talent had made them versatile assets.



Luisa Triana



Esmeralda Enrique and Carla Enrique in Luisa Triana's company

For an entire year, Enrique performed seven days a week, two shows an evening. The experience was both gruelling and gratifying. Catalina Fellay, a longtime member of Esmeralda Enrique Spanish Dance Company and Ph.D. candidate at York University, elaborates on the value of tablao experience. She states bluntly that when you are in a situation where you are expected to improvise, the audience will heckle if not satisfied. "It was the training of a lifetime", Enrique remarks, "Tablao work is the best way to get rhythm, to know singing, to know your own strengths and to develop your style. It is better than company work where you are told what to do ... learning (in a tablao) is a process of osmosis, like learning a language by listening to others speak."

Uno de cal, otra de arena Taking the good with the bad

Los Canasteros was owned by famous flamenco singer Manolo Caracol. The artists Enrique performed with brought weighted expectations and little room for error. Young and still at an early stage in her career, she learned difficult lessons. On stage she looked to the more senior artists for direction on how to approach different cantes and rhythms. During one performance, a *bulerias* was called and Enrique was signalled to begin. Bulerias is a dance that "occupies a special and supreme position in the world of flamenco, constantly undergoing change and wide open to spontaneity." This openness refers to space for improvisation and for showcasing personal style while staying within the confines of a quick twelve-beat rhythm.

Without the example of a preceding dancer, Enrique was lost and unable to meet the challenge before her. Management came down hard, and the abuse was compounded by the fact that she was a foreigner. This incident spurred Enrique to take responsibility for learning the appropriate manner of responding on stage and of truly understanding her art form.

After Los Canasteros, Enrique found continuous work in Madrid, Barcelona, Canary Islands and elsewhere. Regardless of her progress as a performer, as an American she remained a second-class citizen. Flamenco is deeply rooted in a tradition of cultural inheritance that carries with it protective hierarchies and attitudes made manifest in different ways. On one occasion, having finally been able to afford a shawl that would give some variation to the look of her only costume – a white dress that took her three hours to wash and press daily – she returned to the dressing room to find the trim cut off. She saw it later on the neck of one of the family members of the tablao. This disregard and disrespect was another heart-breaking incident. Beyond the flamenco community, dancers dealt with discrimination from society at large. Enrique recalls being mistaken for a prostitute when she was accused of making an error in the way she ordered a tapa for lunch. She was publicly humiliated by the woman serving her.

"Uno de cal, otra de arena" says Enrique, "one salty, one sweet, one salty, one sweet." She maintains today that you need the rewarding and the difficult to make the experience of life complete. After five years, however, Enrique became homesick. Her sister Carla had married a guitar player and moved to Mexico and she had not seen the rest of her family even once. A plane ticket was too expensive. Tired and disenchanted Enrique returned home, took a job as a waitress and stopped dancing. After a year, however, she knew she had to return to Spain. She did just that, found work immediately and continued for another six years. She took both tablao and company work, appreciating the challenge of the tablao while enjoying the camaraderie of a company.



Esmeralda Enrique and guitarist Chuscales performing Flamenco at Club Hispano, Toronto, c. 1983

Canada? Canada

Esmeralda Enrique's journey to Canada in June of 1981 was an unexpected, last-minute decision. She came here instead of going to Japan, where flamenco continues to be extremely popular. She broke a contract to do so – something she had never done before. For years an agent Enrique names only as Domingo had been sending artists to Canada to perform at Toronto's Don Quijote, a flamenco club located at 300 College Street where, at the time, the pay was better than in Spain. She was never interested. Even when it was a friend inviting her to perform in a new tablao, El Flamenco, that her boyfriend was opening, Enrique was wary of the tales of cold weather and the unknown. But with *persao* (persistence) and fine paella, her friend was able to convince Enrique to immigrate. Once again Enrique's experience and training in flamenco, classical Spanish and regional dances, and a regimented work ethic, made her a much sought after performer. In the end, it was a favour to a friend and a leap of faith that brought her.



Esmeralda Enrique and partner
at the tablao El Flamenco, Toronto, c. 1981

El Flamenco was located west of Spadina on Bloor Street in Toronto, above a Hungarian restaurant. On opening night, Enrique peeked out through the curtains and saw a room full of people. She noticed one gentleman – a man in a white shirt and white pants, a stranger in a crowd mostly familiar to the performers. He was Sal Principato, her future husband. He came to the club every night for over a week and one evening after the band sang happy birthday to Enrique, he invited her for a glass of champagne. Three weeks later they were engaged, in three months they were married and have been so for twenty-seven years. Fate brought her to Canada, love kept her here. The rest has been continuous hard work. It was only upon coming to Canada that she knew flamenco would be her life's work – "I suddenly realized that I couldn't do anything else" laughs Enrique.

Eventually El Flamenco closed. Without the network she was accustomed to in Spain Enrique had to ask herself, "How will I make my way?" She had acquired some students and was teaching out of a studio at Yonge and Eglinton that she rented by the hour. Her best students became performers for shows she participated in around town. In 1982, the Esmeralda Enrique Spanish Dance Company (EESDC) was born. With increasing success, her Academy of Spanish Dancing helped to support the company. The school's location changed twice before settling, ten years ago, in its current location at 401 Richmond Street.

When Enrique began her school and company, Paula Moreno was the prominent flamenco artist in the city. Enrique essentially worked in isolation and marks participation in the fringe Festival of Independent Dance Artists in 1992, the festival's second year, as the time when she started to meet, know and collaborate with other dance artists. By this time she had received intermittent funding from the Ontario Arts Council's Culture Specific Program co-ordinated by Rina Singha and Susan Cohen. When asked if she felt supported, she plainly states, "Not necessarily." Support came from within. Her husband Sal and Nancy Cardwell (stage name Paloma Cortés), company member of fifteen years, have been invaluable supporters. Cardwell, a right arm to Enrique, has helped determine the direction of the company over the years. Catalina Fellay recalls doing data entry on occasion, everyone helped with something. Five company members have been with EESDC for eleven years or more; Nicolás Hernández, the company's musical director for over twelve years ... they are family. Enrique credits her own business sense and need to balance the cheque book as an important part of the company's survival. She is also the company seamstress. Her mother taught her how to sew.

Reviews of Enrique as a soloist at the Don Quijote club in the mid-1980s and of her company throughout the 1990s are always glowing. Kathleen L. Smith, 1985: "... numbers are characterized by sinuous arm movements and beautiful posture." Paula Citron, 1995: "I love it when a show exceeds my expectations and this just absolutely caught fire by the end...." Deirdre Kelly, 1995: "With her undulating rhythms



Esmeralda Enrique performing at Don Quijote, Toronto, c. 1982

and her skillful articulation of percussive footwork, Enrique invigorates the serpentine line of beauty that highlights this ancient lifestyle." Success and popular favour have only spurred Enrique to work harder, learn more and live up to the challenge of continuing to surpass her own reputation.

A central component of her annual season performances is to bring guest singers, musicians and dancers both from Spain and elsewhere. This gives her, her company members and students the opportunity to enhance their training and to work

with a live cantao/a. Enrique herself continues to dance, her solo a highlight in her abstract choreographies. She is captivating, Fellay explains that, "the art form allows for longevity in the performer. The dancing becomes more expressive and less flashy, different rhythmic cycles are chosen, ones that are intended for the mature artist." She gives the example of the *seguriya*, a twelve-beat cycle that carries with it a certain weight and moodiness. When asked what she most enjoys watching Enrique perform, Fellay laughs and says, "She performs all of the forms so well, but for me it's the classical Spanish dances, not many people know them anymore." Fellay continues, "Everything that I think about dancing is what I have learned from her ... It is hard to believe that she is just one woman, one woman whose influence is so great. It wasn't her mission to do what she has done. It is her passion that has brought her here." A three-time Dora Mavor Moore Award nominee, in December of 2008 Enrique was voted one of Canada's Ten Most Influential Hispanics from a pool of over 600 people.

Today, Enrique is enjoying the help of a dedicated new part-time administrator, Jennifer Watkins. The company has a busy performance schedule year-round at private, corporate and artistic events. When asked what's next, she smiles a wise, beautiful smile and looks around her office and the answer is obvious. What is now is what is next for Enrique. This philosophy has done her well. With far more than two jobs going on in her head, if she is indeed tired, it doesn't show.

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