

DANCE REVIEW

Flamenco, hip-hop, Greeks

Noche Flamenca's "Antigona" ambitious at its best, overdone at its worst.

By Nancy G. Heller
FOR THE INQUIRER

Sometimes, less really can be more — and more can be far too much. Noche Flamenca's *Antigona*, which had its East Coast premiere Thursday night at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, consists of 15 short scenes, some of which seem to belong in other productions.

Instead of enhancing the overall work, the projected texts, ancient Greek-style masks, and comedic interludes too often distract from the power and beauty of the stripped-down dance and musical sequences.

Based on Sophocles' tragedy, with a nod to recent Spanish history, *Antigona* marks a significant departure for Noche Flamenca. After two decades of presenting exquisite, traditional flamenco music and dance to audiences all over the world, artistic director Martin Santangelo is exploring new creative ground. His *Antigona* is nothing if not ambitious, and in some cases, these ambitions lead to theatrical magic.

It sounds like a gimmick, adding a hip-hop dancer to a flamenco ensemble. But David Thomas (a Bronx native, cast here as Antigone's brother, Eteocles) was a revelation. His too-brief duet with Salvador Rivilla (Polyneices) was a high point of the evening.

Likewise, the distinguished flamenco singer Manuel Gago (Creon, King of Thebes) proved to be a surprisingly effective actor, while flamenco dancer Maria Elana (Ismene, Antigone's sister) revealed impressive comedic chops.

However, much of the satire and slapstick humor felt out of place. The kazoo band in "Creon's Inauguration" was a brilliantly jarring touch, used — along with a silly bullfighting sequence — to mock Creon's dangerous sense of self-importance. But the reanimated corpses felt too Monty Python.

For this viewer, at least, the

best parts of *Antigona* were the simplest: gut-wrenching mini-solos danced by company star Soledad Barrio (in the title role); a stunning vocal duet between Gago and José Ramón Jimenez (Tiresias), and Creon's final lament. When you have this kind of artistry available, you don't need anything else.

Additional performances: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, 3680 Walnut St. Tickets: \$20-\$75. Information: www.AnnenbergCenter.org or 215-898-3900.



Company star Soledad Barrio in "Antigona," based on Sophocles' tragedy, with a nod to recent Spanish history. CHRIS BENNION

