



MELLIZO DOBLE

INTERVIEW WITH ISRAEL GALVÁN AND NIÑO DE ELCHE

The audience of the Festival d'Avignon remembers your collaboration on *Fiesta*, which you performed in 2017 in the Cour d'honneur du Palais des papes. You share a desire to get flamenco off the beaten track, sometimes by innovating in radical ways. How did you two meet? How would you describe this flamenco you share? What attracted you in the other's work and personality?

Israel Galván: In 2018, Paco (Niño de Elche) invited me to SONAR, an electronic music festival that takes place in Barcelona every summer. He asked me to appear in his concert, *Coplas Mecánicas*, particularly by working on the musical and rhythmic aspects of my steps. The show was very electronic, with a lot of distorted sounds and flashing lights... We performed in front of almost 1,200 people, mostly youths. In 2019, I invited him to Tokyo, where I was dancing in El Garlochi, a famous cabaret-restaurant. It's a tiny stage where they usually perform traditional flamenco, in front of a seated audience, who came to also have dinner before or after the show. They gave us *carte blanche*, complete artistic freedom. Our very different experiences so far sealed something between us. It seemed obvious that we could be on stage together, that we shared a desire to take risks, to dare to do things while knowing that the other will always support and never limit us. As a child, I used to work with my parents. I didn't like to dance, not even flamenco. It was then I became aware of the demands of being a professional flamenco dancer. In Seville, there was already a generation of artists with very strong and very different personalities. I grew up in *intablaos* (cabarets), which today would seem like surreal places, in total freedom. Paco is an artist with whom I feel supported on stage, a brother in flamenco, like a fraternal twin. My parents taught me to kill my partners and the audience. Paco is a little like my partner in crime!

Niño de Elche: The first time we worked together was for a performance of *La Edad de Oro* in Santiago de Compostela. Afterwards, I took part in the creation of *Fiesta*. It's then that we really got to know each other. We realised that we have a strong artistic connection which allows us to look at flamenco from a new vantage point which keeping in touch with the classical format. Israel has always been one of my references. Unlike other flamenco singers, who find inspiration in songs, I find mine in the performing arts, in literature, in painting. Moreover, Israel has always been interesting, beyond just his practice of flamenco. He is a mirror in which I can see myself reflected. I share both his desire to escape and betray the traditional models of flamenco and his way of exploring its most unexpected and bucolic roots. His ability to reinvent himself, free of aesthetic prejudices, and his capacity for stylistic betrayal at the personal level are what drew me to him. It makes Israel an undisciplined artist. It's what I'm most interested in today.

At some point, Niño de Elche turns into Israel Galván, and vice versa. You almost blend into each other. Can you tell us more about this *folie à deux*, this mad desire to dance and sing, to create? What does your presence on the stage tell us?

Israel Galván: It's not madness! It's natural for us. It's our language, our way of interpreting the culture and tradition of Seville and Elche, where we're from. At the same time, we love Art. That's what makes us fraternal twins. Because without forgetting our traditions we speak of Art, and not only of dance or singing. Twins also seem to be a source of strange and magical power to others...

Niño de Elche: We're fraternal twins because we share a way of approaching and confronting artistic practice in flamenco. Our point of view is conceptual. Our vision is that of twins. It often includes the disintegration of the idea of singing, of playing (the guitar), of our relationship to the audience, to the *palmero* (who sets the rhythm by clapping his hands), to the poet. This doubling is but a desire to go beyond a discipline, a desire for indiscipline. Our bodies and actions become part of an imagery that can then connect to flamenco or other arts, in order to be free to interpret the movement, the voice, the gesture, the sound, the text, or the light.

The show is built like a classic recital, made up of two sets of six *palos* (songs) each, with unique, almost dadaist titles (like “*carbonic Seguiriyas*”). Tell us more about this form, and about the connection between the singing and dancing.

Israel Galván: For this piece, I wanted to dance along the traces of memory carried by traditional music and singing. I tried to find an economy of movement based on Nino’s voice, to connect our personal rhythms to more universal myths. Dance can be archaic, cosmic, and solemn, or more modern, rhythmic, like an arcade game. I went looking for twin figures in various sources such as the Book of Genesis (Esau and Jacob) or David Cronenberg’s *Dead Ringers*. I also called on more personal myths, such as my memories of Garbancito, a picaresque character and director of the Bai Bai community centre in Seville, who served as ringmaster during flamenco shows. We’re thought of as those revolutionary artists, but deep down this is a very classic recital. It’s not a modern show. For instance, it’s not about a fusion of styles. It’s not provocative: he sings and I dance. I like the way he moves, just as he likes the sounds that come out of my throat. I dance but I also, and at the same time, provide percussive musical accompaniment. I try to be at once a drum kit, a tambourine, or a drum machine, like a mechanical dancer. This show is like a flat we’d share.

Niño de Elche: The show isn’t built according to a classic perspective. Flamenco is in fact not its sole reference. Which doesn’t mean that there aren’t any tensions with the traditional imagery of flamenco, far from it. We started working on this show by exchanging and discussing music, our desires for the choreography, sounds, and ideas for the space of the performance. We built this project based on those elements of reflection. In this piece, we approach the repertoire of flamenco (*martinetes, seguiriyas, pregones, bulerias, tangos, farrucas, caña...*) from our own vantage point. The musical sources are very diverse. They’re also accompanied by texts by authors like Eugenio Noel or Juli Vallmitjana. We worked on those references in a rather fluid manner. We’ve both experimented with the traditional limits of flamenco and we know how to play with the imagery the repertoire offers. This format helped us find new questions and extensions based on what flamenco presupposes, as an art that can be at once modern, classical, and avant-garde. The titles all evoke poetic facts. We use very few elements, but they’re all very specific and concrete. They all make it so each part of the show is unique.

Interview conducted by Francis Cossu the 8th April 2020 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach