

Antonio Vargas



Born in Casablanca, Antonio Vargas was attracted to Flamenco at a very early age. His inborn musicality could equally have drawn him to become a concert cellist or a percussionist. However his passion for the art of Flamenco and the full realisation of its potentials have been the driving force behind his long and brilliant career.

His musical education started when he was only a toddler, and one could say that a career as a musician would have fit his parents' expectations. However, when his family moved to London he was nine years old. He had the opportunity not only to continue his musical education, but also to benefit from a myriad of dance teachers

and schools, and from being exposed to one of the most eclectic arts-scenes in the world. It was like being in the womb of creativity.

Had he been taller, the Flamenco world might have suffered a great tragedy and lost him to ballet; but as fate would have it, his physique did not conform with the ballet masters' specifications, and his teacher advised him to do Spanish Dance. That must have awoken in him recollections of his aunts, both flamenco dancers, and the rest is history. As soon as he could, he escaped to Spain and immersed himself in the *mecca* of Flamenco, learning with the best teachers in Spain at the time, not only to dance but also to play the Flamenco guitar.

Antonio Vargas

His, was the great generation of flamenco personalities: Antonio Gades, Mario Maya, El Güito, Cristina Hoyos, Manolete - names that are synonymous with the recent high profile of flamenco world-wide. His main teacher was Antonio Marín, a one-leg genius who created dancing-monsters through his daughters' feet. Soon Antonio had auditioned and been selected when he was only eighteen years old as a member of the Pilar Lopez Company, followed by the Rafael de Cordova Company. With them he toured extensively throughout Europe and South America, and absorbed invaluable information regarding staging, theatre lighting, and artistic direction.

Antonio has always been a pioneer in the field of Flamenco Dance Theatre.

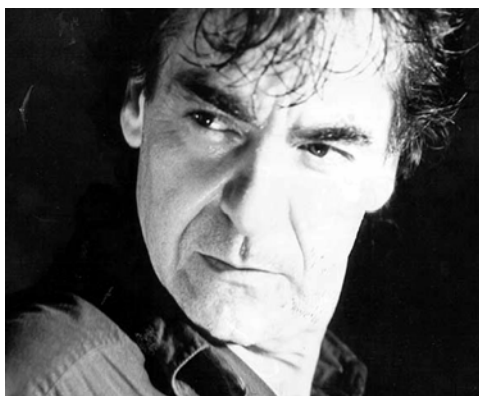
Back in 1962, when he formed his first company, he had already the desire to take Flamenco out of the tight boundaries of the traditional, predictable performances that most audiences were used to; he always believed that Flamenco could lend itself to interpret great novelists and poets and that it could be put on stage side by side with

the most established, mainstream art-forms, such as opera and choral works, without jeopardising its authenticity.

The list of Antonio's works is extensive. From opera to film, from small stage performances to big festivals, from solo performances to productions with the best artists that Spain has to offer at the moment, Antonio has done it all, including a television show with the Beatles (Granada Television, 1964); he played the Fiddler in a London production of *Fiddler on the Roof* (Her Majesty's Theatre, 1967); he has created his own Flamenco Dance Theatre works and adapted well know plays and novels to the Flamenco repertoire.



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Some of the events in which he was involved as artistic director were:

La vida Breve, Opera, Basil Coleman Production for the BBC - Dance Director.

Llangollen Festival, Wales - Co-ordinator, Dance Director.

The Flamenco High Mass:

Royal Festival Hall, London - Dance Director, Musical Director.

Blood Wedding

The London Operatic Society - Dance Director, Musical Director.

Medieval Festival of ITA, Guadalajara, Spain

Co-ordinator, Artistic Director.

Festivales de España, Cuervas de Nerjas, Málaga, Spain

Flamenco Program Director.

AFI Fashion Parade

Najee Men's Fashion -- Choreographer and Meteur en scène.

Strictly Ballroom, Film

Choreographic assistance and background on dance from Spain (played the role of *Rico*).

Time Trax, *Dream Team*, Science Fiction Series

Guest artist.

Carmen, Opera

Harvey Goldsmith Production, Melbourne, Sydney, Zurich, Munich

Artistic Director and Choreographer of Spanish segment.

Fiesta, Spanish Festival

Schloss Kaltenberg, Prince Luitpold of Bavaria - Designer of complete event, Co-ordinator, Choreographer and Artistic Director of Flamenco segment.

Mission Impossible II, Film

Material assistance to John Woo, choreography of dance segment (played *cameo* role, *Sr Arena*).

The House Plus, Carnivale, Seymour Centre, Sydney

Artistic Director and Choreographer of new contemporary version of Federico García Lorca's, *The House of Bernarda Alba*.

(See attached brochure for more information about Antonio Vargas y su Teatro Flamenco)

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Recently Antonio has concentrated on creating special choreographic commissions and on developing new concepts for future productions. These involve not only the traditional flamenco repertoire but also the interpretation of well-known works (from Greek mythology to Karl Orff's *Carmina Burana*) by flamenco artists.

From April to June 1999 Antonio choreographed and staged a flamenco segment for Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible II*, directed by John Woo, which was released in May 2000 in the US and World-Wide shortly thereafter, breaking box-office records. He also accepted an invitation to play a cameo role in the same film.

Mosaico Flamenco, a collaborative project showing works in progress, premiered in San Diego, California, in February 2000. He returned to the US in 2001, with *Laberinto Flamenco*, touring San Diego, Boston, New Hampshire, New York, Washington DC and Mexico; and in 2002, with guest appearances at the Chicago Flamenco Festival and in Washington, Las Vegas and Albuquerque.

In *The House Plus* (Sydney, Sep-Oct 2001) Antonio revisited Lorca's *The house of Bernarda Alba* from a different angle, transforming it into a contemporary dance work.

New Zealand was also a popular location with performances in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin in 2001-2.

Kathleen's Antartic, a multi-media production on the life of Kathleen Scott, the wife of Robert Falcon Scott (played by Antonio), had its world premiere at the Fortune Theatre in Dunedin in March 2002.

Singapore (2002-2005) has been another extremely popular stop for Antonio, and promises to be a very important gateway to Asia, with the opening of the New Arts Centre at the Old Parliament House and other activities in Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan and China.

He returned to the US in 2003, 2004 and 2005, but has concentrated mainly on the writing and production of a Flamenco Manual/DVD series that cover musical relationships, structure of the various Flamenco songs and introduces his own Flamenco Notation System. The first volume was filmed in Spain and features Antonio Vargas and other world-renowned flamenco artists such as Talegón de Córdoba, Domingo Ortega, Andrés Peña Morón, Rafael Campallo, Rafael Jiménez "El Falo", and many others. This project will be launched in 2006 and the next volume will feature Belén Fernandez, Luisa Triana and Mercedes Ruiz, winner of the 2002 *Bienal de Sevilla*.

In the pipeline are a spectacular new Flamenco stage-production and a Flamenco feature film.

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What the Press are still staying...



“Vargas rattles those hills with a bravura macho flourish.”

Sydney: Sydney Morning Herald, Oct 1, 2001

“Riveting flamenco (...)

An intensely focused performer, (Vargas) can make even minimal movement more expressive than text. (...) a triumph of acting as much it is of dancing.”

Wellington: The Evening Post, Nov 16 2001

“Flamenco invigorates (...)

Dramatic performance (...) in the modern idiom (...), dance of passion (...).”

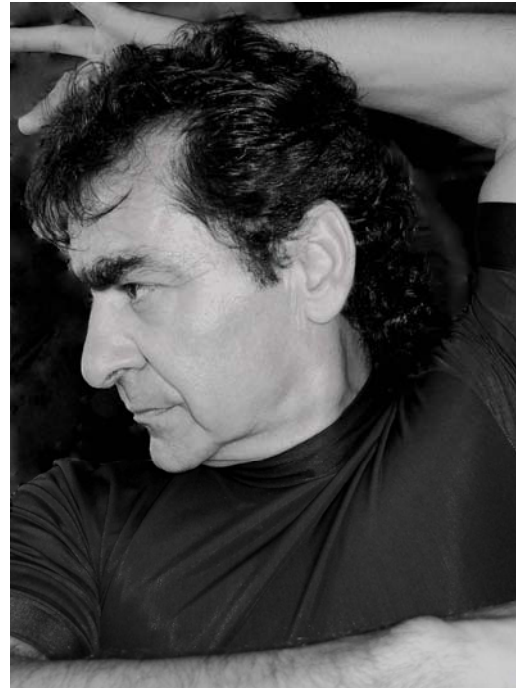
Wellington: The Dominion, Nov 16, 2001

Antonio Vargas is the embodiment of the masculine principle, exhibiting the self-control of the virtuoso flamenco dancer. (...)he dances with such volcanic energy (...); (his) fancy footwork (...) is an education.”

Dunedin: Listener, Apr 6, 2002

“Vargas (...): his lunges cocked tight like a drawn bow, his crossover footwork sewn like perfect stitches, his turns knife-edge smooth.”

Washington DC: Washington Post, Oct 1, 2002



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Antonio has many qualities. Some he shares with many other Flamenco artists in Spain today, such as being a great dancer and a great teacher, but there are some that make him unique:

He never forgets his obligations as a teacher and as a promulgator of the Flamenco art, and still finds time to conduct courses and workshops and to stage experimental works, giving his best students the opportunity of experiencing his magic as a "people-mover". Once an artist or a student has been on stage with him or directed by him, their dancing lives are no longer the same.

Not only is Antonio a master of syncopation, but he has an intrinsic knowledge of all types of music. He plays the flamenco guitar, the cello, the piano and percussive instruments.

His generosity as a teacher has no boundaries. Antonio does not hold back when he teaches; he treats all students with the same respect he affords a professional, and the material he teaches in a beginners' class can be used by the students if and when they start performing in public. When he teaches,

the studio becomes a temple, and the religion is Flamenco.

Although his company is based in Spain, and it is part of his mission to tour his dance theatre productions, he is always open to work with and encourage resident artists, not only Flamenco artists, but also contemporary dancers, jazz musicians, percussionists, etc. To have him present, even if only in a rehearsal is an unforgettable experience, a true inspiration.

