

Flying Inkpot Review: First Impressions 24th March 2013

Production: The House

Company: Flamenco Sin Fronteras

The House of Bernada Alba is Spanish dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca's 1936 play about a house of women in mourning over the death of the patriarch and the resulting torment, oppression and tragedy that ensue.

The work has graced the stage in various versions, notably as a one-act ballet by British choreographer Sir Kenneth MacMillan. It seems natural to set the tale to the compelling rhythms of flamenco considering its origin but Flamenco Sin Fronteras has also decided that the Albas are to now be the Neos, with playwright Joel Tan transporting Lorca's story to Singapore and portraying Bernada as the authoritative matriarchal figure of a Peranakan household.

Flamenco's vocabulary lends itself extraordinarily to the friction between the five sisters of the household. The accelerated stamping and the menacing clapping all add to the various confrontational moments in the piece. A slinky falsetto violinist and wonderful guitarists and percussionists make up an onstage band which also contributes greatly to the action.

Meanwhile, Tilly Wong plays a striking Adela, the youngest daughter who defies Bernada and has a secret affair with Joseph Fernandez who is betrothed to her eldest sister. She exhibits a beautiful, contrapuntal use of her upper and lower body, her delicate arms belying the ferocious footwork beneath her flamenco skirt. It is a shame that Toshiaki Konno's slick Fernandez doesn't get much stage time, even though all the sisters lust over him, and he is the cause of much of the story's drama. He performs with suave confidence, repeatedly lowering his heel on one foot, arms suspended.

Unfortunately, *The House* isn't so convincing in its moments of flirting with contemporary dance. In the second act, Wong and Konno perform a sensual duet while a jealous elder sister, Martha looks on voyeuristically. Generic deep plies and emotive reaches make up most of this comparatively rigid section, and the previously-seen dynamism of these tremendous performers is momentarily withheld.

4 out of 5, Germaine Cheng, 24 Mar 2013