

MEMORIAL

Flamenco puts feelings into motion

By ANDREA SUTTON

Maria Del Espadin says it is her mission in life to show people what traditional flamenco dancing really is.

Flamenco puro, as she refers to it in Spanish, is not rehearsed. Instead, it's spontaneous and an expression of feelings.

The dance of gypsies, flamenco was originally used by the outcast group as therapy — a way to express the triumphs and mishaps of the day.

Del Espadin's great-great-grandmother was a gypsy. Her family called her la Espanola, the Spanish woman.

"I think because this type of dancing is so much a part of my heritage, I like to be true to it."

Born in Sicily, Del Espadin has Spanish and Tunisian ancestors. La Espanola's love for dancing was shared by the rest of her family.



FAMILY TRADITION: Maria Del Espadin, director of Del Espadin Flamenco and Spanish Dance Academy, inherited her love for traditional flamenco from her family. She has passed this passion to her daughter Gabriella Aliberti, whose flamenco name is La Tempestad. — photo by Bill Olive



SPANISH TRADITION: The Baile Espanol ensemble of Del Espadin Flamenco and Spanish Dance Academy, 3939 Hillcroft Blvd., will perform at a grand opening show from 7:30-10:30 p.m Saturday. Pictured are Irma Laucircia, Claudia Valadez, Nora Villarreal and Frieda Rivera. — photo by SCOTT CORRON

Del Espadin has Spanish and Tunisian ancestors. La Espanola's love for dancing was shared by the rest of her family.

"My whole family always danced," she said. "They didn't need an excuse. We could dance around the house. My mother said I was dancing before I was born."

Del Espadin now has a new home for sharing her flamenco tradition in the Memorial area. She has opened a new studio for the Del Espadin Flamenco and Spanish Dance Academy at 3939 Hillcroft, Suite 160.

Del Espadin will celebrate its grand opening 7:30 p.m. Sept. 9 with a night of international dance featuring exhibitions by more than 10 different groups who will perform dances from around the world, including Greek, Middle Eastern and Irish.

Admission to the grand opening is \$6 and tickets can only be purchased at the door. Seating is limited and is

first-come first-serve.

Del Espadin has passed the family tradition on to her daughter Gabriella Aliberti, who will be among the performers Saturday night. Her flamenco name is la Tempestad, which is Spanish for a violent storm with high winds.

At the studio one week before the grand opening, la Tempestad danced with a new guitarist for the first time. For a true flamenco dancer, that's no problem. And it wasn't for her. She danced and the guitarist followed.

"He doesn't know what she's going do," Del Espadin said. "He has to be good enough to follow anything."

This is quite different from much modern flamenco dancing, which Del Espadin said is usually completely choreographed. At the new studio, she hopes to emphasize the art of flamenco puro and rid dancers of the less-spontaneous sort.

Flamenco dances should express a feeling. One of the dances is the alegria, Spanish for happiness, and that's just what it is used to express. The gypsies didn't learn their dances at an academy. Instead they danced what they felt.

Del Espadin has lived in the Houston area for 10 years, and in that time, has formed two dance companies, taught at the Jewish Community Center and worked with Young Audiences of Houston.

Her dance companies Solo Sevillana and Del Espadin Baile Espanol have performed in conjunction with the Houston Polo Club Paella Festival, Bayou Arts Festival and Houston Symphony.

In addition to flamenco, the academy teaches regional and classical Spanish dance.

For information, visit www.flamencohouston.com or call 713-705-8701.