

Primeros Pasos
Ballet Hispanico's Education Program

The Forms of Spanish Dance

Spanish dance can be subdivided into four styles:

- Folkloric (folk or regional dance)
- Escuela bolera* (eighteen-century classic dance)
- Andalusian
- Flamenco

Folkloric dance encompasses the complete Iberian panorama of fifty-three provinces with an endless array of colorful regional costumes and hundreds of folk dance forms. Many of these dances, stemming from Greek, Phoenician, Celtic and Moorish origins, employ complex steps, patterns, and use props such as wooden shoes, water pitchers, flower arches, maypoles, stilts, swords and kerchiefs.

Escuela bolera (Bolero school) possesses the refinement of eighteen-century academic dancing. Elegance was and still remains the hallmark of this distinguished balletic form of dance, which is performed in soft slippers (*zapatillas*). Based on the principles of classical ballet, *Escuela bolera* features technically brilliant jumped, beaten, and flying steps, coupled with adornments in the use of the arms and castanets (wooden clappers).

Andalusian (*baile andaluz*) is the style most people associate with Spanish dancing. The uplifted chest of the male and the arched back and fluid, sensuous arm movements of the female, all performed to the sound of castanets, characterize these dances.

Flamenco, in contrast to the above dance styles, has a highly charged level of dynamics, with its ambiance of merriment (*jaleo*), singing (*cante*), and rhythmic hand clapping (*palmas*) that often involves the audience. It is closely associated with the Gypsies, and features bravura, improvisational performances by the *cuadro* (group) of guitarist, singer and dancer. It is essentially a solo dance with strong Eastern and Moorish influences (sinuous arms and hands movement). Flamenco is the most popular form of Spanish dance and has been described as a "way of life of those who sing and dance their sorrows and joy."

From north to south, the four principle styles of dance can also be identified by the indigenous music that accompanies each form. The sounds range from bagpipes (*gaitas*), metallic triangles (*triangulos*), jingling tambourines (*panderetas*), flutes (*flaviols*) and castanets to the familiar rhythmic hand clapping (*palmas*) and flamenco guitar, which was introduced to Spain by the Arabic culture.

(Source: Matteo, *The Language of Spanish Dance*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.)