



## **We Love These Kids Keeping Flamenco And Spanish Dance Heritage Alive**

<http://content.jwplatform.com/previews/Dp0Ldxei-oxdMzglm>

Flamenco class at Ballet Hispánico starts with drama: The students stride in with perfect posture, chins held high and ready to perform. They look proud, as they should.

“We call it flamenco, but it is embedded in something much richer,” said Michelle Manzanales, director of Ballet Hispánico’s School of Dance, located on Manhattan’s Upper West Side.

That something is a mix of Hispanic heritage, language, music and dance embedded into music.

Students can take open classes, or commit to a pre-professional program between ages 7 and 23.

And at the very beginning stages, the pre-professional dancers learn ballet and flamenco equally.

On a recent afternoon, Dance.com visited a second year flamenco class, with a mix of students about age 7, who had either studied for one year or were just starting out.

In flamenco class, instructor Gabriela Estrada focuses on the basics of using the traditional long skirt, hands, feet, castanets — and putting it all together. Just as in ballet, students learn the basic positions of the arms, legs and then bringing it all together in combinations and performance.

What sets flamenco apart is that it is a form of dance within music. Or as Estrada says, in flamenco dance, the body becomes a musical instrument.

To instill that awareness, Estrada emphasizes musicality in every way with her students. “I ask them to be very attentive to the musician in class, looking at his breath, his hand and his foot. And then be expressive.”

While Ballet Hispánico’s professional dance company tours the world, the organization’s headquarters in Manhattan are all about keeping the community going strong, especially during Hispanic Heritage Month. A Salsa Extravaganza, with free classes, was held Sept 24, and its “A la Calle” Block Party is on October 1, during which West 89th in Manhattan will be home to dance, music and food.

Open classes for adults, such as Caribbean Flow , can introduce dance to those who didn't take [classes growing up](#). A class like [Sekou McMiller's Afro-Latin Jazz Fusion](#) adds soul and spice to classic jazz.

Which is all part of Michelle Manzanales's plan to build a diverse community around the company founded in 1970 by Tina Ramirez and now run by artistic director Eduardo Vilaro.

"In a city like New York, where we are saturated with opportunities to dance, why come to Ballet Hispánico?" asks Manzanales. "Part of it is the legacy of our founder and that she was trying to give our artists a place at the table. We honor that tradition, but we also explore and discover the contemporary voice of dance."