

Olé! Full flamenco troupe will dance, sing, play at the Manship

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By Robin Miller

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Photo provided by the Manship Theatre -- This will be the first Baton Rouge show for Jacome Flamenco's full company of dancers.

Jácome Flamenco has been infiltrating south Louisiana culture for the last three years.

Sounds like a spy thriller, doesn't it? No worries.

The mission here isn't to replace zydeco and Cajun music and dancing with the popular Spanish art form, but to enhance it.

This is why the full company of [Jácome Flamenco's](#) dancers and musicians will finally stage a public Baton Rouge performance at 8 p.m. Wednesday at the [Manship Theatre](#). A school performance will follow at 10 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 12.

“The company’s founder Chris Jácome and his wife Lena have been giving classes and workshops here for the last two-and-a-half years,” says Renee Chatelain, the theater’s executive director. “They are well familiar with Baton Rouge, but this is the first time the full company will perform.”

Flamenco is a mix of Spanish folk music and dance originating from Spain’s southern region of [Andalusia](#). Performances include guitars, dancing, singing and hand claps.

But Jácome Flamenco will be doing more than introducing Baton Rouge audiences to a form of dance — it will be demonstrating Spanish culture through its innovative collaboration of dynamic music and intricate footwork.

Jácome Flamenco is made up of three dancers and five musicians. Founder Chris Jácome, a virtuoso guitarist and composer, performs with the group of musicians, which also includes vocalists.

“The unbridled energy, inspiration and excitement of Jácome Flamenco’s singers, dancers and musicians take audiences on a whirlwind journey of Andalusía,” the company’s biographical statement says. “You feel the rhythm, hear the song, smell the wine and see the beauty of a distant culture encouraging you to join in. The art of flamenco explodes onstage and audience shouts of ‘Olé!’ become part of the experience, part of the passion of flamenco.”

There is yet another component to this performance that makes it a little more special. For the first time, the Manship Theatre has dedicated a season to raise money for a cause, this being its 2014-15 dance season.

“If you’ve ever attended a show on Broadway, you know how they talk about Broadway Cares at the end of each performance and how the organization raises money for HIV/AIDS research,” Chatelain said while announcing the theater’s season lineup last August. “They pass buckets around the audience, and we’ll be doing the same thing here for Dance Speaks at the end of our dance performances. This is a way we can use the arts to improve our community and for a social cause.”

Dance Speaks is an organization that raises money to transport children with HIV and AIDS to Camp Hope, run by the HIV/AIDS Foundation in Houston, where children with these diseases can attend summer camp.

“They have the staff to attend to these children and their special needs,” Chatelain says. “We want to send 15 children.”

So far, some \$8,000 has been raised at performances by LA Ballroom Studio, Pascal Rioult, Of Moving Colors and the Cangelosi Dance Project.

“We’re halfway there, and we hope to raise the other half through the national company performances of Jácome Flamenco, then Sidra Bell on April 18, as well as our other performances.”

In the meantime, Jácome Flamenco will add its own flavor to Louisiana culture not only through its performances but in transporting students and instructors in LSU’s dance program to Seville, Spain, for a week of instruction on Monday.

“They’ll not only be learning flamenco but attending flamenco performances,” Chatelain. “It’s a great opportunity for them.”

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