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World festival, sensual to staccato

By Allan Ulrich
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Photo: Marc Aviles, This Is It Photography

Eden Alcomendas (left), Jordan Peralta, Sarah Sucayen and Ronald Inocencio of Parangal Dance Company were opening- weekend performers at the San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival

A jam-packed opening that catapulted an enthusiastic audience from Northern India to a village in Bolivia launched the 38th annual San Francisco Ethnic Dance festival Saturday, June 4, in a program that featured 10 of what [Julie Mushet](#), executive director of World Arts West, says are 100 world dance traditions flourishing in the Bay Area.

Again, thanks to Artistic Directors [CK Ladzekpo](#) and [Carlos Carvajal](#), the crowd at the Palace of [Fine Arts Theatre](#) got a smooth, fast-paced show that cannily juxtaposed duets with immense group efforts. Debuting companies contended for attention with familiar troupes, and, under these conditions, more of the same should be interpreted as a compliment. The only reservation came with the music: There was too much canned stuff and, in this context, that's almost always a downer. The live contributions here were worth the price of admission.

Of the 11 festival debutants this season, three bowed Saturday. From the South Bay came Shambhavi's [International School of Kathak](#) featured in a lively *tarana*, in which nine gorgeously costumed women, including director [Shambhavi Dandekar](#), mixed fluid unisons with rapid spins and eloquent hand gestures. The contribution from Bolivia (also a debut) was a suite from [Espíritu Andino](#), in which the five dancers, under the direction of [Jacqueline Gumucio](#), re-created life in the Andes, culminating in a boisterous *cueca*. They're a discovery.

So is Azama Honryu Seifu Ichisenkai USA Kinuko Mototake Okinawan Dance Academy. The troupe (Master Kinuko Mototake, Mieko Merrill) offered a delicate courtship ritual, in which every gesture, from a crooked finger to a raised eyebrow, connoted a world of feeling. For contrast, [Melissa Cruz](#) and [Kerensa DeMars](#) of the [San Francisco Flamenco Dance Company](#) delivered a duet steeped in sensuality, with a *farruca* finale marked by staccato footwork. Their exceptional musicians were guitarist [Daniel Fries](#) and singer [Azriel Goldschmidt](#). Whoever thought of pairing the latter with Indian vocalist [Saneyee Purandare](#), for a sublime duet, is a genius.

For spectacle, two contributions competed for attention Saturday. Based in Marin County, Ballet Folklórico Netzahualcoyotl explored the movement traditions of the Mexican state of Veracruz. The fantastic costumes, especially the headdresses, dazzle. Artistic Director [Netza Vidal](#) moves his dancers in straight-line patterns, which suggest fields of crops sprouting to maturity in the sun. And the introduction of a giant wheel (a *crusceta*), with dancers attached, was a theatrical coup.

Again, [Parangal Dance Company](#), a festival favorite, scored with Eric Solano's re-creation of the traditional culture of the Philippines, more precisely, of the mountainous region of Northern Luzon. Solano moves his huge cast with assurance, whether in love or war.

The program opened with Antoine Hunter's vivid movement interpretation of Janice Mirikitani's poem "And Still We Dance." And still they do.

Allan Ulrich is The [San Francisco Chronicle](#)'s dance correspondent.

San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, June 11 and 18; 4 p.m. Sunday, June 12 and 19. \$33-\$48. Palace of Fine Arts Theatre, 3301 Lyon St., S.F. (415) 392-4400.