

# fiesta flamenco

PASSIONATE ~ PROUD ~ EXCITING ~ LOUD



## **DANCE EXPRESSIONS November 2009** **A Day of Dance**

Should you be overtaken by the urge to learn Flamenco dancing, you will be delighted to know that you don't have to hotfoot it over to Seville in order to do so – you need only hop on a train from Kings Cross. Reigning over various venues in the East Midlands and based near Grantham, is professional dancer and Spanish Dance teacher, Diane Pickard, all ready to impart her considerable knowledge of the various forms of Spanish dancing to beginners and improvers alike.

Saturday's Day of Dance was hosted by the Stamford Arts Centre and kicked off at 9.30 sharp with tuition in palmas or clapping. Those who clap are known as palmistas, and if you think clapping out a rhythm is easy, then my guess is that you haven't tried to do it in 12-time, and then in contratiempo while your foot continues to drum out the basic beat. It's even harder than tapping your head while rubbing your tummy at the same time and few of us can comfortably master that.

Then no doubt if you think a handclap is just a handclap, it may come as a surprise to learn of the variations, basically ranging from the soft marshmallow version where your hands peel gently away from each other through to the sharp staccato tap of three fingers on the well of the palm of your hand to create a commanding amount of noise.

One of the attendees is a tambourine player in her local church, and she had a head-start – or do I mean hand-start? – over the rest who had to concentrate really hard on their counting. Nevertheless, Diane kept the learning tempo light and she entertained us with amusing anecdotes – we learned for instance that if you spot a man with shockingly kept nails and a white thumb nail, the chances are he is a flamenco guitarist and has to reinforce his thumb nail with superglue!

With flaming red hands and aching wrists, we moved to Tangos, and on went the swirling skirts and shawls. Here the counting was easier, but working with permanently bent knees presented a challenge of a different kind. Using our hips and trying to copy Diane's proudly held head and shoulders and lovely arms, gave us the feeling that we were almost ready to take on the Spanish in their own field.

The day was divided up with coffee, tea and lunch breaks, and during the various sessions Diane taught the graceful use of a fan and how to hold and play the castanets. Lunch was danced off in learning the traditional folk dance Sevillanas, and the day ended with a session on Bulerias, a very energetic form of flamenco.

And that was just the day! From 8 o'clock in the evening, everyone joined in a dance party and put into practice some of the dance steps learned during the day. Diane was on the go for thirteen hours, and this wasn't just a one off – she holds these full day-of-dance workshops regularly, in addition to teaching summer schools, one day intensive courses, private lessons and giving classes in schools.