

# sf flamenco

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San Francisco Bay Area's On line Flamenco Magazine Email: [flamencoshows@yahoo.com](mailto:flamencoshows@yahoo.com)

+ April 2005 Special Feature  
**ROBERTO ZAMORA**



Roberto Zamora (photo: Madeline Berger)

*Roberto Zamora has worked with Rosa Montoya, Teo Morca, Cruz Luna, Omayra Amaya, Chuscales, Joaquín Encinias, La Tania, Manuel & Antonio de la Malena, Jesús Montoya and Antonio de Jerez, and is an active member of Yaelisa's Caminos Flamencos.*

*He teaches private classes in flamenco cante, palmas, and dance accompaniment and has a unique ability to help students understand the interrelationship of palmas, guitar and cante por bulerías.*

Special Double Feature

JUAN DEL GASTOR  
Un Homenaje, Classes and Workshops



Juan Gomez Amaya was born in 1947 in Morón de la Frontera (Sevilla) into one of the most revered dynasties of gypsy flamenco. The dynasty was founded by his uncle the now mythic guitarrist Diego del Gastor. Read more on SF Flamenco's April Double Feature! [Link](#)

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**"ENTRE AMIGOS"**  
A Tribute to **ROBERTO ZAMORA** y su Arte Flamenco  
Brought to you by La Nina Productions and The Bay Area Flamenco Partnership

An evening of Flamenco Music & Dance based

on original paintings by ROBERTO ZAMORA

Featuring a cast of flamenco dancers and musicians including Roberto Zamora, Yaelisa, La Monica, Melissa Cruz, La Nina, Jason McGuire, and Keni "el Lebrijano".

SATURDAY, APRIL 23rd, 8pm

LA PEÑA CULTURAL CENTER

3105 Shattuck Ave.

\$18 adv./\$20 door

Box office hours: Weds-Sat. 1-6pm

(510) 849-2568 ext. 20

[WWW.LANINAFLAMENCO.COM](http://WWW.LANINAFLAMENCO.COM)

#### ROBERTO TELLS HIS STORY:

Where shall I begin the story of my personal flamenco adventure, which has helped to form and shape who I am? Because my father was Bolivian Indian, I feel that my flamenco spirit grew out of my father's emotional and spiritual legacy. The emotional volcanoes he carried inside never found an outlet, and this resulted in a very turbulent and scarred family upbringing for me.

When I first heard the sounds of flamenco singing and guitar they resonated deeply inside of me, despite the fact that when I began flamenco I didn't know Spanish, as due to the prejudice my father experienced in his generation, he never spoke it when I was growing up.

From the time I was a young boy I felt a strong need for musical self-expression and I began performing when I was around 9 years old. I did doo-wop in the late 50s and later I took up the electric guitar and played in various rock bands in the Bay Area in the 60s.

As I approached my middle twenties, I was again drawn to my European background, having lived in various European countries until I was 16. I was also searching for a musical form that would still "feel right" when I was in my 50s and beyond. It was around this time that I discovered flamenco, dare I say it, in the LPs of Manitas de Plata and José Reyes (parents of the now famous Gypsy Kings). At the time, the early 70s, we were lucky to get anything flamenco. What we were able to get was mostly Manitas de Plata, some Sabicas (which sometimes had singing) and some LPs of the then famous Antonio, the dancer who was also known in the US.

Fortunately around that time José Greco brought El Farruco and his son on tour to the US, which was one of my first exposures to what I think of as "real" flamenco. Being a singer, I immediately tried to imitate the sounds I was hearing as they resonated deep inside my psyche.

Concurrently I also began dance classes with two artists who were teaching group classes in the Bay Area, Miguel Santos and Rosa Montoya. Rosa Montoya took me under her wing after my first return from Spain and I had the honor to work with her for many years. I also met La Monica (she was only 8 or 9 at the time!) and she and I have gone on to work together frequently since then

It was also in the early 70s that I met the guitarist Gary Hayes, a.k.a. Gerardo Alcalá, who I have been friends with ever since. Gary had already been exposed to more flamenco than I and I shall always be indebted to him for introducing me to what flamenco for me is all about. He loaned me the Pohren books "The Art of Flamenco" and "Lives and Legends of Flamenco". He also loaned me the hard-to-come-by LP, "Canta Jerez" which transformed my perceptions with its profound earthy "flamenco gitano" and with the photos it had on the back of the gitanos de Jerez in a "juerga". Listening to this recording, I immediately realized that this was what flamenco for me was about, not the elaborate stage shows I had until that time been exposed to. Just by the photos alone I knew I had to go to the south of Spain to find flamenco.

Before I went to Spain, I had also seen Isa Mura (Yaelisa's mother) at the Old Spaghetti Factory and was impressed and touched by her emotion and intensity. Judy Jones, former wife of David Jones, a.k.a., David Serva, also became a close friend. We would spend countless hours listening to Antonio Mairenas's "Gran Historia del Cante Flamenco Andaluz" and the La Fernanda & Bernarda LPs, attempting to understand all the letras being sung, segments of which, even after hours and days, we just couldn't get. It certainly wasn't like nowadays when the recordings are crystal clear and hardly a CD comes out without all the "letras" being printed out. Through Gary I also met Eloisa Vasquez and Kyle Ickes and together we formed a little group. We'd carry around a plywood board and set up on the U.C. Berkeley campus, Ghirardelli Square, and various street fairs and dance and play in the hot sun for whatever we could collect in my Cordobés hat.



Roberto singing for Rosa Montoya

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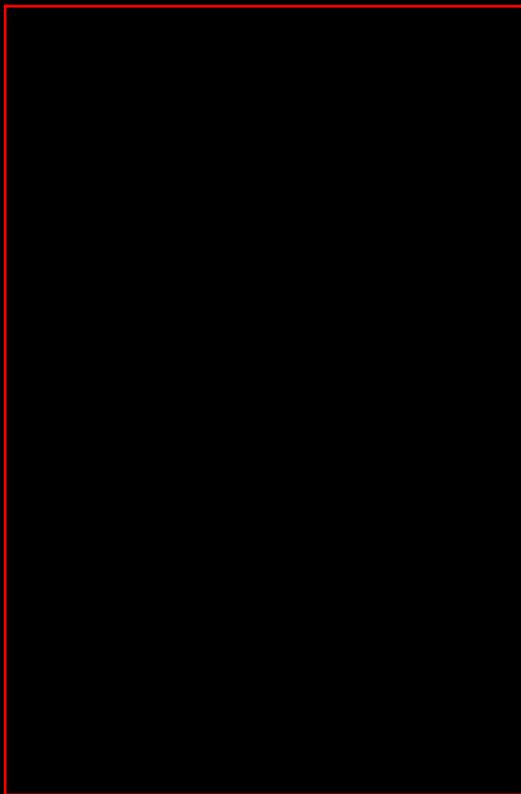
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Cuadro with Raguél Lopez, Lee Thompson, Agustín Ríos, Roberto Zamora and his wife Alicia.

So, before long, I sold all my electric guitar equipment and my car and went to Franco's Spain. I only planned to spend three months but ended up staying almost two years. On the day my return flight was scheduled, I was standing by my window facing calle Joaquín Costa and I decided that my soul belonged in Andalucía and that I couldn't leave.

Spain at that time was really different. Flamenco was more or less underground. Sure you could go to a tablao. But the kind of flamenco I wanted to experience happened in private fiestas among the gypsy families. Fortunately, by a combination of how I looked and the people I knew, I gained entry into quite a few of these fiestas. I was lucky. One of the first images in my mind was a fiesta in Morón de la Frontera with Miguel "el Funi", La Fernanda and La Bernarda, Pepa de Utrera and Paco and Juan del Gastor.



Juan del Gastor & Roberto

During this time, I was also fortunate to have known and studied with Pepe Ríos, brother of Agustín Ríos, a family who came from Morón de la Frontera. He had a tiny, very "gracioso" studio, covered with photos of himself performing with flamenco greats. I was fortunate to see Pepe Ríos sing and dance in fiestas, and his naturalness and inventiveness always amazed me. He, like his brother Agustín, was extremely knowledgeable about the cante, having heard it from the time they were in the womb.



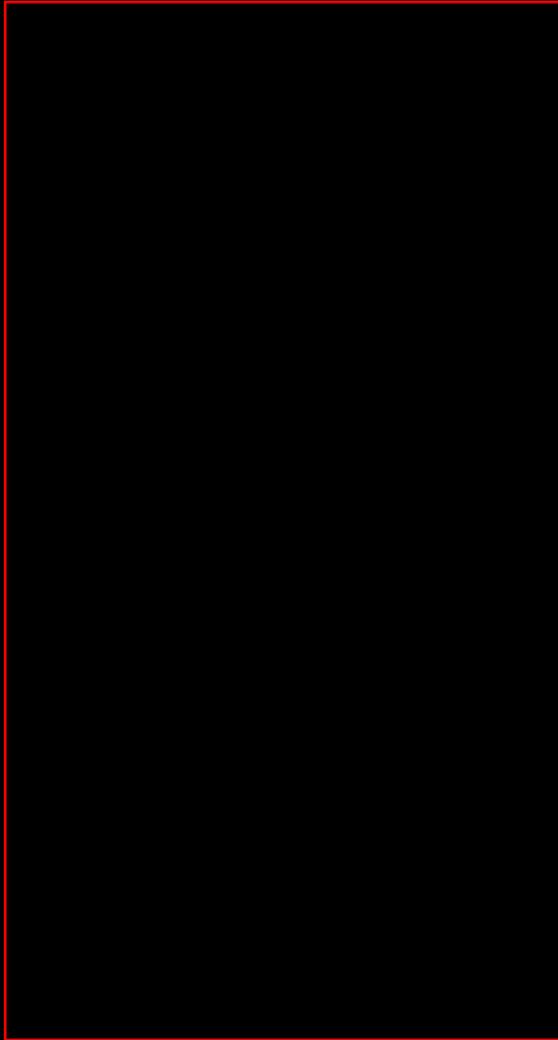
Pepe Ríos, Agustín's brother

I also became friends with the family of La Tania who at the time was about 12 or so. They took me into their home and made me part of the family. Through them I met Anzonini del Puerto and Isidro Vargas, a bailar gitano, brother of the famous Angelita Vargas and uncle of El Potito. Also, through Julia, Tania's mother, I met and took lessons with Rafael "el Negro" and Matilde Corral when their studio was still out by the Macarena.

Since Tania's family had been in Spain for so long, I met many artists through them and lived some of the most magical times of my life with them.

During this time I also saw Manuela Carrasco when she was first becoming known. Of course I immediately fell in love with her arte and would go anywhere, anytime to see her perform, or dance in fiestas. Her father was her palmista at the time and he would keep a strong, hypnotic and primitive compás with his palmas and foot accents. The singer Curro Fernández, one of my favorite singers, also left an indelible impression on me for his interaction with the dancer and his unaffected sense of drama in the context of flamenco performance. During this period I was also fortunate to be able to see El Farruco dance his trademark solea and bulerias with Chocolate singing.

After this magical first introduction to flamenco in Spain, I came back to the Bay Area to explore further who I was and to resolve conflicts in my personal life.



Roberto dancing Soleá

As luck would have it, shortly after my return in 1975 I got hired by Richard Whalen at the legendary Spaghetti Factory and there began my now 30-plus-year career as a flamenco singer/dancer. We worked weekends for a flexible wage, depending on the size of the audience, and at times supplemented by Richard out of his generosity. Many people came through the Spaghetti Factory --it was the meeting place for anyone interested in flamenco-- and I was able to do it because I lived on almost nothing, had free rent at my friend's shop/warehouse, and didn't care about tomorrow. I became close friends with Isa Mura, and we worked together often and were bound by our mutual love of the style of flamenco we instinctively shared. Through my relationship with Isa, I met Yaelisa who became like family and we also developed a strong working relationship. I also met Keni Parker around this time. We became close friends because of our shared sentiments and passions. Over the years his life and mine were always intertwined. Both here and in Spain with our mutual gypsy friends Pedro Bacán, Anzonini del Puerto, Miguel Funi and La Fernanda and La Bernarda, to name a few.



De fiesta con Agustín Ríos

In the 70s another phenomenon happened that had an immeasurable influence on me as a flamenco dancer and singer and on the Bay Area as a whole. We had the great fortune that Agustín Ríos de Morón de la Frontera and also Anzonini del Puerto came here to live. Anzonini was only here for a few years but Agustín has remained here since then. They both were immense influences in me as an artist and as a person. Agustín, even though we're the same age, became like an older brother to me and we were inseparable for years. Anzonini became my uncle. I became the palmista for both of them, spending countless hours, and in the instance of Agustín, years by his side and having the privilege to live and breath his often profound flamenco singing and guitar playing.

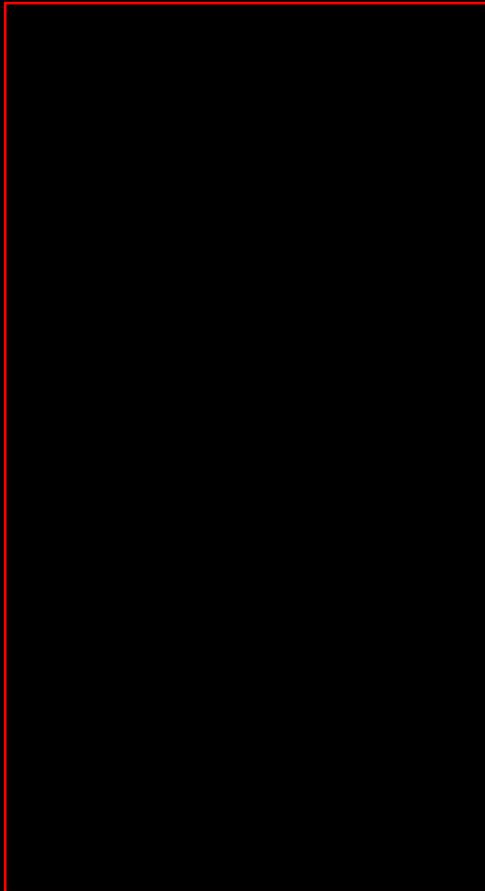


Agustín por bulerías at Roberto and Alicia s wedding



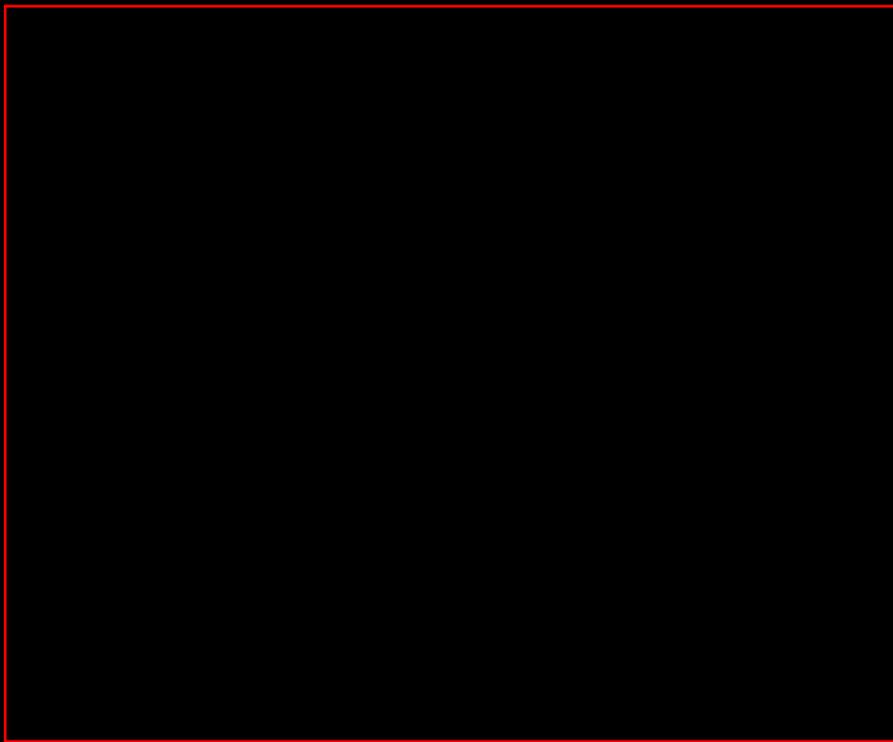
On Stage with Agustín

In subsequent and extended stays in Spain, Juan del Gastor also became like an older brother to me. We became inseparable, spending many wonderful and magical times together over the years. On two occasions we worked and lived together on the southern coast of Spain during the unbearably hot summers. They called me "el indio" because of my father.



Roberto & Juan del Gastor on the cost of Southern Spain

Another profound influence on my life was La Fernanda because of her acceptance of me and her warmth and encouragement. La Fernanda will always be in my mind like a flamenco boddhisatva. To be in her presence was always a blessing, aside from her profound cante.



A kiss for La Fernanda de Utrera

A great part of my flamenco education came not from classes, but from my friendships with los gitanos flamencos, having had the privilege and good fortune to live part of my life with them sharing the way they talk, drink, smoke, eat and live their lives. I was able to absorb the nuances of gesture and day-to-day living which all becomes a part of their arte.

I am thankful to the people of Sevilla, Utrera, Lebrija and Morón de la Frontera, who imparted to me what they could of their culture. I consistently attempt to reach deep inside myself to transmit something of their inner world. As a foreigner I have always strived to honor what they have shared with me over the years of the immensity of this rich and extremely complex art form.

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#### SF FLAMENCO.com(munity)

SF Flamenco is an online community center and magazine working to support and showcase the entire greater San Francisco Bay Area flamenco community. This California on-line flamenco magazine, includes event listings, an artist directory, flamenco artist support and resources, historical and education resources, art, nightlife and resources on local, U.S.A., Spanish and international flamenco art and culture. Be sure to read the interviews and back issues in the SF Flamenco History page. Site created and edited by Jason Engelund. SF Flamenco is a volunteer project supported by the flamenco community. If you are a local flamenco performer, find out about the free Feature Articles, and Performer's Network. Please email: [flamencoshows@yahoo.com](mailto:flamencoshows@yahoo.com)

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