

A passion for flamenco

BY BEVERLEY BROMMERT

Not only is cantaor Jose Salinas blessed with a resonant, expressive voice; his dashing good looks make his presence on-stage a welcome feature of flamenco shows, as anyone attending the current production of *Flamenco Puro* at Obz Café will no doubt confirm.

This is not the first time Salinas has performed in South Africa – his first appearance was in *Missa Flamenca* in 2002, then he subsequently returned for the production of *Flamenco Vivo*.

On this, his third visit, his enthusiasm for Cape Town is undiminished. Speaking via an interpreter, since his English is sketchy, he waxes lyrical about the mountains and beaches of the Western Cape. “I love everything here so much,” he says warmly. “I was born in Almeria, a city with beaches, and Cape Town reminds me of home, which I miss as I now live in Madrid ... But it’s not just the geography I like here, it’s also the people.”

It comes as a surprise to learn that he only needed one day in which to rehearse for his present show. “That is usual for a flamenco cantaor; it’s very easy if you know the idiom, like jamming in jazz.”

What is involved in training to be a cantaor? “You have to be really dedicated ... and have a passion for flamenco,” is the prompt reply. He goes on to remark that this career involves embracing a whole lifestyle, which was easy in his case as it is hereditary: his great-grandmother played the guitar and sang, although not professionally. “She only performed for the family at the

time of the fiesta,” he explains.

For him, the requisite dedication to his art comes naturally as he loves the general aesthetic of flamenco and everything that goes with it.

“It has such depth,” he explains. “There is all that underlying emotion – pain, nostalgia, ache, sometimes joy. It comes from the heart, so real and authentic, it expresses the soul of the people as they dance and sing what they feel.”

Salinas’s artistry has brought him invitations to appear all over the world, and he has toured extensively, from the USA to Japan, all over Europe, and even Russia. After this run of *Flamenco Puro*, he is off

to New York before joining his family in Tarragona for the festive season. Asked when he is next coming to SA, he retorts: “Next month!” then adds more soberly: “When there is money available.”

At 30 years old, Salinas still has a long career ahead of him. “I started at 25, which is very young for a

cantaor; flamenco singers begin to mature at 35 and reach their peak at 65. It’s different for dancers, they peak at 30 and go on to about 45. I wanted to sing from the age of 12, but I went to Madrid to study dentistry, and became a cantaor after qualifying as a dentist. I couldn’t help it, it is in my blood.

“My first contract was in Switzerland in May 2001, and I haven’t stopped since. I practise dentistry six months a year, and perform as a cantaor the rest of the time. I love the lifestyle: I travel, meet lovely people, get up late ... the only downside is that I miss my family, and especially my little niece who’s just turned one.”

Flamenco expresses the soul of the people as they dance and sing



IN HIS BLOOD: Spanish cantaor Jose Salinhas