

## My Awakening by Silvia Duran

October 7<sup>th</sup> 1973. I found myself with a folded newspaper turned to the page with the crit: *"Silvia Duran is an interesting flamenco dancer. She moves her arms with consummate artistry and her footwork is a marvelous experience accented by her inherent musicality...."*



What a feeling of relief and freedom from worry! Relief, realizing that my fear as a "paya" (non gypsy) and a foreigner had actually been unfounded. Fear of coming onstage right after an artist of such tremendous stature as Carmen Mora. The only way to describe my feelings at this moment: relief and freedom.

My gypsy colleagues had been unbelievably supportive throughout rehearsals, and now they rushed to give me the good news. I must admit that it had been hard for me to believe that any good would come of my performing immediately after Carmen, even though she, with her typical generosity had been the deciding factor in the final "lineup".

Wowwww! Now I could finally come back to earth, read a newspaper and see what was going on in the world. The previous month of September had been a whirlwind of work, work and more work. No time for anything, least of all catching up with world news.

Daily private classes with Victoria Eugenia, "Betty", and/or Juanjo Linares and/or Mercedes and Albano. Then, rehearsals with Carmen Mora for the programme of Flamenco recitals to be presented in the important theatres all over Spain, together with rehearsals, somehow "pushed in, with El Camborio for a Gala in Acapulco Mexico.

By 9 p.m. I would enter the kitchen entrance of Madrid's most exclusive Tablao Flamenco "Café de Chinitas" where Pepe the cook would be waiting for me with a "pepito de ternera" (steak sandwich) and an enormous glass of coffee. I would go up to my dressing room and start preparing for the performance. Although physically tired, I felt marvelous and full of inspiration after what had been a very full and satisfying day. At 11.30 p.m. the first performance in the "Cuadro"; at 00.30 the "Attracion" and then finally at 02.30 the final "Cuadro". Going to bed at more or less 4 a.m.

With the newspaper in my hand, I turned the page and saw a huge photo of a tank and the headline "Yesterday Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. The Egyptians have crossed the Suez Canal and the Syrians are close to Tiberius. The prospects for Israel are not good.."

I froze. It took a few moments for what I had read, to sink in. Suddenly, I felt strangely alone. I was there with Manzanita, Vicente, Chipi and Lucas, friends so dear to me; friends whose support and faith in my ability had proven beyond a doubt their sincerity;

gypsy friends with our own special connection (the Jews and gypsies have historically belonged to persecuted and little understood minorities). Why was I suddenly feeling so far away emotionally? Why was I hesitating to voice my deepest thoughts? Could it be that deep down I knew that I would not be able to make them understand what I was going through? But, the words spilled out all the same, without my ability to control them.

"I must go to Israel. There is a war there and that is where I should be"....

"What do you mean - go to Israel? What for? Are you crazy? You can't be serious. To go to Israel in the middle of a war?"

"I am Jewish and that is where I want to be at this time."

"But you were born in South Africa. You are here with us in Spain and you are one of us. We are Catholic, and if there were a war in Italy it would be the last place we would go and remember Italy is home to the Pope ....."

It was of no use explaining these deep feelings. All I could do was to somehow get to Israel as soon as possible.

And that proved to be an almost impossible mission.....

Spain in 1973 had no diplomatic relations with Israel (these were only established in 1986) and there were no direct flights from Spain to Israel. In addition, no airlines, apart from El Al, were flying to Tel Aviv, due to the War. All planes from European destinations were full, flying Israeli soldiers home to join their units as quickly as possible; preference being given first to the "tayassim"(pilots), then to "tankistim"(tank soldiers) and then finally to "Golani" and other units.

There was definitely no place for a flamenco dancer coming to entertain the troops.

And then it came to me, a brainwave. Suddenly, I knew what to do.....

But first, I had to complete my commitments to Carmen and Chinitas. Carmen was wonderful. She had lived and performed in the United States for some time with her husband, the famed flamenco gypsy dancer Mario Maya. There she had made many Jewish friends and she understood my connection to Israel. Her words have stayed with me always: " If I were you, I would take my tape recorder and get started to work right away."

I spoke to Don Manuel, the owner of Chinitas, and he did not hesitate releasing me, telling me that my place would be waiting for me on my return whenever that would be ....

My great plan, in order to get to Israel, was to call Shmuel Zemach, the famous Israeli impresario. I had been in close contact with him regarding his coming to Spain to see me perform in Chinitas with my group with the idea of bringing us to Israel for a tour of performances in all the main centres and this visit was scheduled for November 1973.

I called Zemach's office in Tel Aviv and spoke to his secretary Daniela.

"Zemach is at the front, but not to worry , I will get your message to him and will get back to you with an answer." Almost immediately the phone rang: "Zemach says to get on a plane and come. He will organize everything. "

I flew to Johannesburg, South Africa; all flights from Europe to Tel Aviv were full; organized my seat and spent a few days at home, with my parents. They were, as always, loving and supportive. They sensed how important this journey was to me.

I left from Jan Smuts and arrived at Lydda (now Ben Gurion Airport) at 2 a.m. and was met by Major Yakov Peretz, the head of the Entertainment Corps of the IDF. He took me to the Sheraton Hotel in Tel Aviv, leaving me with an order: "Tomorrow at 10.30 a.m. Gila Almagor will fetch you with a car and a driver and you will go to perform for the wounded in Tel Hashomer Hospital"

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