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Photo courtesy Barcelona Flamenco Ballet

David Gutiérrez and Paula Reyes, principal dancers with Barcelona Flamenco Ballet, will dance in a performance called "Luxuria" on April 16 at the Alex Theatre.

Performance at Alex to Spotlight Flamenco Dancing

By Mark Kellam
Burbank Leader

When Barcelona Flamenco Ballet performs at the Alex Theatre in Glendale on April 16, a local percussion musician will be accompanying the dancers.

Gerardo Morales, who also plays guitar, will be playing a cajon during the performance by two of the ballet company's principal dancers, David Gutiérrez and Paula Reyes. The performance will be at 8 p.m.

"I'm a multi-instrumentalist," Morales, a Burbank resident, said, adding that he's been playing both guitar and percussion instruments since he was 12 years old.

A cajon is a box on which the musician sits and beats the front or sides of the box, with higher sounds coming from the top and deeper sounds coming from the middle of the box.

His first professional gig was playing drums at bars when he was 15 years old.

"I'd got paid, like, 20 bucks," he said. "I had to wait in the parking lot because, obviously, they were bars and I was 15 years old... (I had to wait) until I was ready to play, they would bring me inside and then I had to leave right away."

He plays currently mostly in Los Angeles, though he's played across the country with musicians such as the Black Eyed Peas and Christina Aguilera.

"I even played for Kanye West. I played one of his first gigs," he said with a chuckle.

Morales has also worked on films such as "Toy Story 3," "Little Fockers" and "Think Like a Man."

Regarding what drew him to want to play drums and guitar, he said, "I just always had a feeling... I love music. I was always passionate about music."

He said he remembers being 12 years old and having dreams about playing music.

He added that his family didn't sign him

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Photo courtesy Gerardo Morales

Burbank resident Gerardo Morales will play the cajon during an upcoming performance by the Barcelona Flamenco Ballet at the Alex Theatre.

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up for music lessons and he learned how to play the instruments on his own.

"My cousin played a little bit of guitar," he said, adding that he learned a lot from his Peruvian friends, who eventually led him to his interest in flamenco music. He said he often played the cajon at Venice Beach, but he knew there was more he could do with his music career.

He said that when he performs, the sensation is "electrifying. It's an amazing feeling... This is what I was meant to do."

In the past, he has played with Nino de los Reyes, who was the first flamenco dancer to win a Grammy for his work with Chick Corea and the Spanish Heart Band. He's also played with flamenco guitarist Antonio Rey, who won a Latin Grammy in 2020.

The upcoming performance at the Alex is called "Luxuria," which means lust in Spanish.

Principal dancer Gutiérrez is also the founder and artistic director of the company.

"Luxuria" tells the tale of an artist (Gutiérrez), who encounters the love of his life (Reyes).

Gutiérrez said he is excited about the upcoming performance because it will be the company's first performance in the Los Angeles area.

"It will be a chance to bring a little bit of Spain to L.A.," he said through a translator. "You're going to see that flamenco

dance is something that's innovative."

He started dancing at a very young age. "I started dancing because in our country it's very usual for people to learn flamenco dancing. It's like, in other countries, they make their kids play football or basketball," he said.

"For me, I saw my sister dancing and I would want to imitate her, how she danced," he said. "So, I started flamenco dancing as a hobby and now I'm a professional doing it."

Regarding how he feels when he's dancing, he said, "Dancing flamenco is my life. It's my language. It's the way I express myself... I'm very different from the person in real life and the person that is performing."

Gutiérrez said the most difficult part of flamenco dancing is controlling the rhythms, adding that the dance style has 60 different rhythms.

He said he had wanted to bring performances to the United States earlier, but couldn't because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He said the United States has a significant Latino community, so he felt it would be a good place to bring flamenco dancing.

Tickets for the April 16 performance range from \$25 to \$100. The Alex Theatre is located at 216 N. Brand Blvd in Glendale.

To purchase tickets and for more information, including up-to-date COVID-19 safety protocols on the day of the performance, call (818) 254-8456 or go to alextheatre.org.