



THE HOUSE PLUS
Reviewed by Jill Sykes

York Theatre, Seymour Centre
September 27

For the first time in its 25 years, Carnivale has commissioned work for its annual festival of multicultural arts events. An evening of dance titled *The House Plus* is the result: a mix of experienced and new approaches to choreography.

Anyone who saw flamenco dancer Antonio Vargas in the film *Strictly Ballroom* – an international broadening of a career that was already well established – will be delighted to find he doesn't look a day older and still rattles those heels with a bravura macho flourish.

His work, *The House*, is the main piece on the program. Based on Federico Garcia Lorca's *House of Bernada Alba*, a tragic story of suffocating family traditions, passion and death, it is a stylistic hybrid. Vargas himself is the pivotal male character, taking his zapateado skills up a flight of stairs to a stage within the stage where he offers a flamenco dance display that is appropriate to the story and will be familiar to those who have followed his career.

The rest of the cast mostly dance barefoot in choreography largely based on modern dance, though several of the women also put on their shoes for flamenco sequences that are expressive and theatrical.

Once more with emotion

The House Plus

Seymour Centre
Dance theatre



One of the world's leading flamenco dancers and choreographers, Antonio Vargas, has reinterpreted his classical piece, *The House Of Bernard Alba*, for a special staging during Sydney's Carnivale.

Working with an ensemble of local dancers and choreographers, Varga has combined flamenco with contemporary dance elements. "It's totally different," he says.

Vargas has toured Europe for six years with the original *The House Plus*. It is a mix of traditional flamenco rhythms, innovative choreography and intense percussion.

For the Sydney version, Vargas is trying a new cocktail.

"In an abstract form I am combining traditional flamenco rhythms and time signatures with contemporary dance to allow more emotions to come through," he says.

"Contemporary dance is vague. It has nice steps but lacks the emotional aspect. There's more rawness here."

In the work, a dramatic story of flaming Latino passions evolves through the intensity of flamenco dancing.

Five sisters live together behind closed doors in a house full of intrigue. Their domineering mother insists they mourn their dead father for eight years, but instead the daughters take interest in the charming Pepe Romani, played by Vargas.

While the oldest daughter is set to marry Romani, the youngest daughter becomes his lover.

The mother remains in denial of it all.

As choreographer and performer, Vargas is revisiting *The House Plus* for Carnivale from a different angle. It will be the same interpretation of the script, but will include some different and contemporarised choreography.

The work leans on Vargas's theory of exploring natural dance movements using contemporary rhythms.

Dance theatre language has always been about keeping the simplicity at the forefront to allow true expression and the dancer to portray a passionate rendering.

The House Plus is a two-act work, of which the second act is Vargas's reworking of the flamenco piece.

The first act features three



Flamenco classic revisited . . . Antonio Vargas picture: TARA JOHNS

new works commissioned by Carnivale. For these he worked with three up-and-coming Sydney dancers and choreographers — Jrisi Jusakos, Marina Tamayo-Phillips and Paul Cordeiro.

Continuing to develop the relationship between flamenco and other artforms, Vargas has incorporated the individual cultural backgrounds of each of the dancers.

Tamayo-Phillips' *The Legend Of Maria Makiling* plays on traditional Filipino folklore.

Jusakos's *Pasos sin Hauellas* — Spanish for steps without traces — combines Vivaldi with live tabla playing in an exploration of various dance styles.

Cordeiro's *Evert* is a look at the similarities between animal and human behaviour. It traces the ease with which humans ignore their evolutionary headway and

revert to their animal instincts in times of distress.

Vargas has international standing as a master of flamenco dance. His most recent work includes developing not only a traditional flamenco repertoire, but also flamenco interpretations of well-known works.

He has worked in television and film, including choreography and a cameo role in Tom Cruise's *MI:2* and playing the gypsy father in Baz Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom*.

□ *The House Plus* is at Seymour Centre, corner City Rd and Cleveland St, Chippendale. It plays from September 27 to 30 and October 2 to 5 at 8pm. Tickets: adults \$33, concession \$25. Bookings: 9351 7940. Information: 9251 7974 or www.carnivale.com.au

RASMUS HEIDE



JUST before she went to the Antarctic two years ago, on a New Zealand Artists Fellows Programme, dancer and choreographer Bronwyn Judge, unexpectedly discovered the fascinating story of

Kathleen Scott. While she was riding over frozen ice, walking in the frozen landscape, and visiting the historic huts, she found herself thinking about the woman who had married Captain Robert Falcon Scott, and came back inspired to create a dance theatre work about her.

Kathleen's Antarctic premieres at the Fortune Theatre on Friday and includes dance of many kinds, narrative from Kathleen's diaries, music, and video footage Judge took in the Antarctic. The script tells the story but the dance carries the interrelationships between the characters, Judge said.

She sees Captain Scott and Kathleen's great friend, Isadora Duncan, mirroring the two sides of Kathleen's character.

"What Scott admires in Kathleen is what Kathleen relates to in Isadora, basically a free spirit and following impulses. Isadora's unconventional and rebellious but she's also undisciplined, and Kathleen's not," she said.

Kathleen (1878-1947), despite being an orphan and brought up in a convent, was unconventional for her time. At 19 she went to Paris to study sculpture with August Rodin, and later volunteered for relief work in war-torn Macedonia. There she lost her religion after seeing horrific torture.

Throughout her life she would go "vaga-bonding", often with a male companion, walking through Europe, and sleeping under hedgerows or in haylofts. Yet she held conservative views and in the 1930s she was one of the most eminent sculptors in Britain, doing portraits of famous people, and becoming the confidante of many politicians of the day.

Kathleen has been overlooked by many art historians because her work was realistic and has been overtaken by people like Barbara Hepworth and Jacob Epstein. Because she held conservative views, Richard Huber, director and script writer thinks many feminist art historians felt she was not of great interest.

"She was definitely a woman who was oriented towards males and she wasn't very supportive of the suffrage movement. But that's just what she says, and it's very clear her life contradicts that. In many ways she's a very strong-minded, independent, creative woman who, you could say, was very much an archetypal feminist. But her spoken values don't put that forward. I think the combination of the conservatism of her work and her personal social political conservatism tended to sideline her and people decided she wasn't very interesting," he said.

She also received bad press when she openly said she chose Scott because he would be "the great one who should be the father of her son", Judge said.

"She always stated she married Scott for his genes, because he was responsible and good father material, decent and honest and had a great sense of responsibility.

In the general circle of people she moved in, the artistic circle of the day that wasn't the norm. Because of that, people assumed she wasn't in love with Scott."

However, Kathleen's diaries reveal her true feelings, and after their son, Peter, was born, she found she had fallen "gloriously, passionately and wildly in love" with Scott. Unfortunately, they only had about a year and a half together before he set out for the Antarctic in 1910. It was more than two years afterwards, while on a ship to Harotonga, that she heard of his death. She expresses her grief in her diary: "My Con has gone, except in the great influence he had. He has been my God, my conscience, my motive power. All those long weary days with no more news, always only his pain, his mental agony boring into my brain. For my God is godly I need not touch him to know that."

Kathleen made several memorial sculptures of Scott, including one in Worcester Boulevard in Christchurch. In 1922, she married another naval captain, Edward Hilton-Young, who had lost an arm during the war and later became a politician and Baron Kennet.

From reading her diaries and working on the script, Huber said he got a clear sense of an ambi-

tious person who lived fully, was in control of her life and liked to have things her own way.

"She manages to deal with the adversity and move on. Her conservatism is a very admirable trait and I think

it reflects a lot of her own enculturation with British class. She's part of that system and all the values that go with it."

Artistically she was a romantic, her art life, love life and religious impulses coming together into the same thing, he said.

"As a person she's very contradictory, but she makes no attempt in her own life to resolve those. She has these clear different sides to her, and that's how she functioned in life. She was drawn towards contradictory situations and people and we tried to structure the script to bring that out."

The different sides in Kathleen's character are brought out through many styles of dance — tango, flamenco, modern expressive and contemporary.

Tango was then the rage, and Kathleen went dancing whenever she felt the need. She danced right through her life, when pregnant with Peter and until her late 50s, when she had to dance with younger men because it had ceased to be an occupation for older men, and while her one-armed husband was doing his late-night political sittings she would go dancing. And in tango, two dance as one, so it could also represent relationships, Judge said.

"The idea of repressed passion that is so visually obvious in flamenco, seems pertinent to Scott's personality, because he was very frustrated in that he couldn't be what he wanted to be because of his sense of responsibility and sense of duty."

Modern expressive dance stems from Isadora Duncan, Kathleen's friend, and reflects her free and unconventional character. They lived together in Italy and Kathleen delivered Isadora's illegitimate child.

While expressive dance is about emotional expression, contemporary dance is more abstract and not about human emotion. It reflected the Antarctic, she said.

• 'Kathleen's Antarctic', at the Fortune Theatre from March 8 to 16, features dancers Antonio Vargas, Paul Corderio, Donnine Harrison, Mike Birnie, and Bronwyn Judge, with music performed by Sydney Manowitz, Jenny Barnett and Amos Mann, and vocals by Ana Good.

• The idea of repressed passion that is so visually obvious in flamenco, seems pertinent to Scott's personality ... •



(Top) Kathleen Scott on the trip back to Port Chalmers after farewelling her husband, (above) Captain Scott for the last time as he set sail for Antarctica.

THE DOMINION

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Your cut-out guide

Flamenco dancer Antonio Vargas talks to Bess Manson.

ANTONIO VARGAS is excitable, downright manic even, when he talks about his lifelong passion for flamenco.

The mere mention of castanets will set him off for much of the afternoon. And his enthusiasm is infectious as he jumps up and becomes one of the characters he is playing in Wellington flamenco group Desde Sevilla Dance Company's show.

He gesticulates like a man waiting for rescue then he grabs my arm to make sure he has my full attention, and tells me all there is to know about the romance and passion of flamenco.

At 61, Vargas is in good shape. When he takes off his clothes — which he does, without time for protest, to slip into costume — that's obvious. Apparently lots of yoga, lots of love-making and the occasional cigarette are the secrets, which is better than most of the advice out there, he says.

Vargas joins Desde Sevilla for its dance drama show, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, opening tonight.

Written by Federico Garcia Lorca during the Spanish civil war, it tells the story of four sisters desperate to escape the enclosed world imposed on them by their formidable mother. Enter Pepe, tall, dark and dastardly, who sets about wooing the eldest daughter, with thoughts of her inheritance, and secretly romances the youngest

daughter on the side. Before you know it, all the daughters are vying for his affections and explosive results ensue.

Like any good flamenco dance drama it is packed with themes of sexual tension, smouldering jealousies and steamy passion.

The story unfolds with no real dialogue apart from the "odd gibbering". Instead, Vargas uses song, music and, of course, flamenco. But people will get it, whether they know the dance or not, he says.

"It is a very strong play. Flamenco encourages you to bring out of yourself a particular emotion that creates facial expression, almost mime-like attitudes to your dancing, and the music and rhythm enhance that all together to bring out the character.

"It's a very accessible style of dance choreography which allows [the dancers] to express themselves as characters. It's important to keep the balance of the fact that it is a play and not just a flamenco dancer who comes out to do a dance then go away."

He says he chose *The House of Bernarda Alba* because it plays a good host to flamenco yet has a strong storyline. This is important, he says, because flamenco is still an elusive art form outside Spain.

"It doesn't matter how often an American, an Englishman, an Australian goes to a flamenco performance they still don't

know what the bloody singer is singing about. In Spain they know when to say 'ole'. Overseas, they are afraid to open their mouths."

Vargas plays the role of the morbid mother in the performance and though he knows the role well, having directed others in it many times before, he says he was dubious about playing it himself.

"Flamenco is such a macho thing. A real hormone-extreme situation for the male. I said to myself 'I don't think I have the courage for this' but Lorca wrote the part of the mother for a man so I kept up the tradition."

THE dance drama is preceded by solo flamenco numbers by the Desde Sevilla dancers and Vargas. "I can't let people go without letting them see me in my element."

Vargas is fantastically confident. And why shouldn't he be? He has had a lifetime to perfect his art.

Born in Casablanca, he was dancing at the age of five. At 16 he joined the prestigious Pilar Lepez dance company in Madrid and at 22 he formed his own company. It was the influence of his two aunts, who performed in the flamenco circus, that led him along the flamenco path — a path that eventually led him to Hollywood.

He has starred in a handful of films, including *Mission Im-*

possible 2. But perhaps his most notable celluloid performance was in Baz Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom*.

Now based in Melbourne, where he has his own flamenco company, he makes regular pilgrimages to Wellington to work with Desde Sevilla, a group that has reached new professional heights, he says.

"They have the enthusiasm, and they have the [flamenco] bug. Once you see that, you know you are half way there because they are extremely receptive. They are like, 'Feed me man, I'm hungry.' They are a very united and strong bunch of people. They understand each other and do not have that ego problem that many people in other groups have."

With rehearsals about to start, Vargas takes a minute to pose for a photograph. He slips into his flamenco skirt, buttons up his blouse and lights a cigarette. For a macho man, he makes a good woman.

● *Desde Sevilla Flamenco Dance Company and Antonio Vargas perform The House of Bernarda Alba at No 5 Cable St, November 15-18.*

He breathed life into Paul Mercurio's dancing in Strictly Ballroom and now he is set to electrify the stage in Wellington.

Arts on Thursday

The ice widow

DAVID EGGLETON

Kathleen's Antarctica, by Bronwyn Judge, directed by Richard Huber, Fortune Theatre, Dunedin.

WHEN SIR ROBERT FALCON SCOTT legged it into the void of the white continent on his fatal expedition of 1910 he left behind – farewelling her at Port Chalmers – his wife Kathleen. Scott of the Antarctic is the stuff of legend, the personification of heroic endeavour, while his wife is remembered (if at all) as just an appendage, the ice widow. Bronwyn Judge's dance-drama *Kathleen's Antarctica* revisits the Edwardian era – that fag-end of British imperial trailblazing – to tell Kathleen's story in her own words taken from her diaries, and in dance. At heart, it's a fiery fandango danced on ice.

Kathleen Scott was in fact one of the leading woman sculptors of her day, a fascinatingly complex, contradictory creature, as self-willed and obsessive as "Con" Scott himself; they were a good match. Judge's dance-drama presents a collage of fragments, quotations, excerpts, video-clips and voice-overs to create an effective time capsule containing a number of electrifyingly memorable highlights. The two obsessives – she, the bohemian free spirit who hung out with primitivist dancer Isadora Duncan; he, the stiff-upper-lipped, buttoned-down Englishman – stage the courtship of the sculptor and the explorer:

their fatalism expressed through the tango, danced with something of the ferocity of the original Argentinian style.

As Scott, Antonio Vargas is the embodiment of the masculine principle, exhibiting the self-control of the virtuoso flamenco dancer: he whips the air with a walking cane and stamps a rat-a-tat-tat in Cuban-heeled boots in exact contrapuntal counterpoint to the magnified tick-tock of a clock. Cutting in on Kathleen dancing with another suitor in a London ballroom, he dances with such volcanic energy as to reduce the other's impeccable style to that of a tailor's dummy.

Vargas's fancy footwork, whether pitched to flamenco castanets or matched by the authentic tango melodies of a polished, on-stage orchestral band, is an education, but Bronwyn Judge's elegiac finale is equally brilliant. With the words "sacrifice" and "exultation" still ringing in our ears, we see her perform an ingenious catalogue of dance styles – all gesture and emotion – to express grief and then something more complex than grief.

The other dancers rise to the occasion. Donnine Harrison and Paul Cordeiro as Antarctic sea creatures slither over each another, then intertwine, as a piano accordion plays a sea-shanty. And Paul Cordeiro makes a supple marble statue of Scott, folding into the wish-fulfilment shapes of sculptor Kathleen – her husband as her white knight, standing out sharp and strange in a pool of white light. *Kathleen's Antarctica* is a landmark event. ■

LISTENER APRIL 6 2002

Fire and passion

Flamboyant, passionate flamenco dancing takes to the theatre stage in the Capital tonight.
By Tom Cardy.

FAST AND furious flamenco is one of the best known and recognisable dance styles in the world.

But it's not often that Wellington is treated to flamenco incorporated into a play. Wellington-based flamenco dance company Desde Sevilla have done just that with the return of flamenco dancer, teacher and choreographer Antonio Vargas.

Vargas and the company will stage the New Zealand premiere of his adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's play *The House Of Bernarda Alba*.

Lorca, one of Spain's best and most influential playwrights, didn't have any flamenco dancing in the play when he wrote it during the Spanish Civil War. Vargas, however, who has toured his version in Europe and Australia, thought it could work.

"When I saw the play the first time I immediately saw [that it could work with] choreography. It just hit me straight away. I knew I could do something with it," he says.

Vargas plays the matriarch in the play *Bernarda Alba*, but it isn't unusual. Lorca specified that it be played by a man, as in his play *Alba* becomes so domineering and tyranni-



FIERY FLAMENCO – Jamie King, left, as Pepe Romano and Antonio Vargas as Bernarda Alba in *The House Of Bernarda Alba*. Picture: ROSS GIBLIN

cal, he says. The tension and drama comes when, years after Alba's husband has died leaving her penniless, a man called Pepe Romano appears. He woos two of her daughters, including her oldest who is rich. A third sister, who is also in love with Romano, causes the youngest, who is having an affair, to commit suicide. Heavy stuff. But it can be abstract and quite weird at times and there's a good dollop of humour as well, says Vargas.

"It does show how women were seen in that period of time... Women being pinned down and [being denied] freedom of expression. Plus of course in Spain during the civil war [with] that and religious aspects, there were always double standards and corruption. A lot of stuff was going on."

Besides flamenco, the show also includes live music, with cello, percussion and Portuguese-style singer Maria Emilia Paixao.

Vargas, 61, is an old hand at adapting Spanish and Latin American works to flamenco, including Gabriel

Garcia Marquez's *Chronical Of A Death Foretold* and *Carmen*.

Vargas was born in Casablanca, Morocco, and grew up in Spain and Britain. He learnt dance and music and returned to Spain when he was 16, eventually joining a dance company. "I never looked back. I've been dancing since."

Vargas says he went into dance theatre because it was so inspiring. "It's almost addictive. It's an art form that has so much in it. It has a lot of emotional and spiritual energy, so you really need the feedback from the audience."

Last year in Wellington he performed a collage of three flamenco pieces called *Flamenco Fiesta* with Desde Sevilla and was impressed by the standard of flamenco in Wellington. "They have really taken the roles and have understood it really well."

■ *The House Of Bernarda Alba*, 5 Cable St (old Free Ambulance building), tonight to Saturday, 8pm, and Sunday, 6pm.

Flamenco dancer Antonio Vargas sees no point in art without passion. CHARMIAN SMITH talks to the international dancer and choreographer who is on one of his regular visits to Dunedin.

Passing on the passion

"I couldn't see the purpose of just doing something for the sake of doing it," says Antonio Vargas. He

performs a few pretty dance steps in the small *Otago Daily Times* interview room to demonstrate technique without passion. Then, in an instant his gestures become fiery, his expression intensifies and his feet stamp a rhythm. This is the real stuff, sending a tingle down the spine.

"What am I dancing for — other dancers? No I want to communicate with everyone that comes to an auditorium and make them feel part of my story and bring them into that story and transport them with me — and that's the art of most artists," he said, sitting down again.

He finds much modern dance cold and, with a background in flamenco, has developed his own style. "I've humanised it, and given it a sharpness and a passion and the face talks, and that, married to the movement, it's almost like a new kind of school."

His most recent piece of dance theatre incorporating traditional flamenco with expressive movement was last month's production of Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernada Alba* in Wellington.

The 61-year old has been dancing since he was a child. A Sephardi (a Jew of Spanish, Portuguese or North African descent), he was born in Casablanca, Morocco, and brought up for the first few years in a society in which Jews and Muslims lived peacefully side by side.

That changed in the early 1950s and his family moved first to Gibraltar, then nearby Algeciras, in Andalusia, the heart of the flamenco region, and later, when he was 11, to England. A few years later, told he was too short to be a ballet dancer, he returned to Spain to study flamenco.

"Having been born in Morocco I was very aware of Arabic rhythms and the Arabic culture in general, and the singing. Flamenco seemed to me to be a natural thing to fall into," he said.

"Flamenco dance has an aesthetic and is percussive, and it has also a form that is euphoric, in a way. It's probably still elusive to many people, in a way, because the language — they sing in Spanish and it's all this howling stuff.

"People still find it a little bit hard, but I've been able to get around that, turning it into dance theatre and thinning down a little bit that strong guttural stuff. Especially Anglo-Saxons and Americans, they find that very difficult. I try to slowly introduce that — at the end of programmes I try to put one piece that's very strong but rhythmical to excite people."

Flamenco originated with Gypsies who were expelled from Rajasthan about 1200 years ago, he said.

"The Rajasthanis used to be afraid of these people who used to be fortune tellers and musicians. They had strange rituals and the Rajasthanis were frightened they were going to steal their souls and their wives' hearts." The Gypsies travelled to Egypt. Some went

across North Africa to Morocco and Spain and others went north to Hungary and other parts of Europe, taking their music, dances and other traditions with them. When the Gypsies arrived in Andalusia there was already a strong folk culture with singers and poets which combined with Gypsy music and dance to become flamenco, he said.

Flamenco songs originated in the *cante de la fragua*, songs sung by blacksmiths and farriers against the rhythm of the anvil. Later, every trade had its own songs which became part of the flamenco repertoire.

The guitar, now an essential part of flamenco, was introduced in the 18th century round the time of Goya. They used to use mandolins, bells and tambourines — anything that was percussive, he said.

Flamenco is still evolving and has become more sophisticated and complicated, incorporating jazz and salsa sounds and even classical techniques. Each year, he returns to Spain to catch up on what is happening with the art.

Mr Vargas' career has taken him round the world. In 1974, while working in Madrid, he was invited to come to New Zealand and work in Auckland with dance teacher Russell Kerr, who has choreographed several shows for the Royal New Zealand Ballet, including the recent *Christmas Carol*.

While working here, he was invited to Australia where a promoter had done up a hotel restaurant as the Caves of Granada, he said.

"Can you imagine arriving in Surfers Paradise, your first impression of Australia, that weather and climate? I just fell in love with the place and I couldn't refuse. So we brought people from Spain and I worked with him for about three years."

While teaching Paul Mercurio and Tara Morice flamenco for the film, *Strictly Ballroom*, he was inveigled into the part of the father.

"Baz Luhrmann said where am I going to find a flamenco dancer that speaks English with an Australian accent and dances the way you dance," he said with a laugh.

Mr Vargas, who had never acted before, took the part then went on the road-show to promote the film. He ended up living in Munich for six years as his former agents persuaded him to capitalise on his appearance in the film and renew his European and American connections.

Then he received an urgent phone call from the office of *Mission Impossible*, Tom Cruise had seen him in *Strictly Ballroom*. "Tom jumped up, so the story was, and said,



Capital Times

The essential pick-me-up

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stage



The art of paso doble:



STAGE 1: Ploeg attempts to capture Vargas's intensity.



STAGE 2: The preliminary work - poring over countless sketches.



STAGE 3: 'I wanted to capture the energy of flamenco,' Ploeg said.

By **TERRY SMYTH**

FLAMENCO superstar Antonio Vargas didn't sit for his portrait entered in this year's Archibald Prize - he danced for it.

The story of the portrait, by acclaimed Sydney artist Ever Ploeg, began five months ago and will end on May 31 when the winner of Australia's most prestigious art prize is announced.

A win in the Archibald, now in its 81st year, means \$35,000 and a priceless boost to reputation. Past winners have included William Dobell, Brett Whiteley and George

Lambert, and winning subjects have included Banjo Patterson, Paul Keating and David "Diver Dan" Wenham.

Vargas is best known in Australia for his role in Baz Luhrmann's 1992 hit movie *Strictly Ballroom*. His portrait is Ploeg's sixth Archibald entry. The first, in 1997, a portrait of *Bananas In Pyjamas*, sparked controversy about its eligibility, but was widely popular; likewise, Ploeg's 1999 portrait of *The Secret Life Of Us* star Deborah Mailman, which won the People's Choice Award. So far, though, the big prize has eluded him.

The artist first saw Vargas perform

at the Seymour Centre in 1989. The power and passion, swirling arms and percussive feet so impressed him he still has the ticket stub. "I was mesmerised," he recalled.

Fast forward to January this year when Ploeg asked Vargas if he could paint him for the Archibald. "It had always been at the back of my mind," he said.

Vargas agreed, but had reservations. "My first reaction was that as a dancer it would be difficult to pose for a painting," he said.

"A dancer thinks about movement, not stillness, and I

couldn't visualise him being able to captivate an atmosphere and moment when a dancer's emotion and movement all work together.

"So I didn't pose, I performed - with him sketching away."

In the weeks that followed, at sessions in Ploeg's studio, the dancer danced while the painter sketched furiously, studying and interpreting each detail of expression and movement. Ahead was months of drawing, rethinking, painting small colour studies, more drawing.

"There is much more preliminary work than actual painting," Ploeg

said. "The painting part took about a month." Vargas got his first look at the finished portrait earlier this month.

"I was shocked," he said. "It was exactly what flamenco is all about - the intensity, the fire, the soul - seeing in the eyes the story of a person's life."

Ploeg said: "I wanted to capture the energy of flamenco, and he has a face born for flamenco. He's in his own little world, growing more and more intense, so that someone with no idea about flamenco or who Antonio is can look at the painting and feel his..." The artist paused, lost for words. "It's hard to describe," he said at last. "I paint rather than talk."