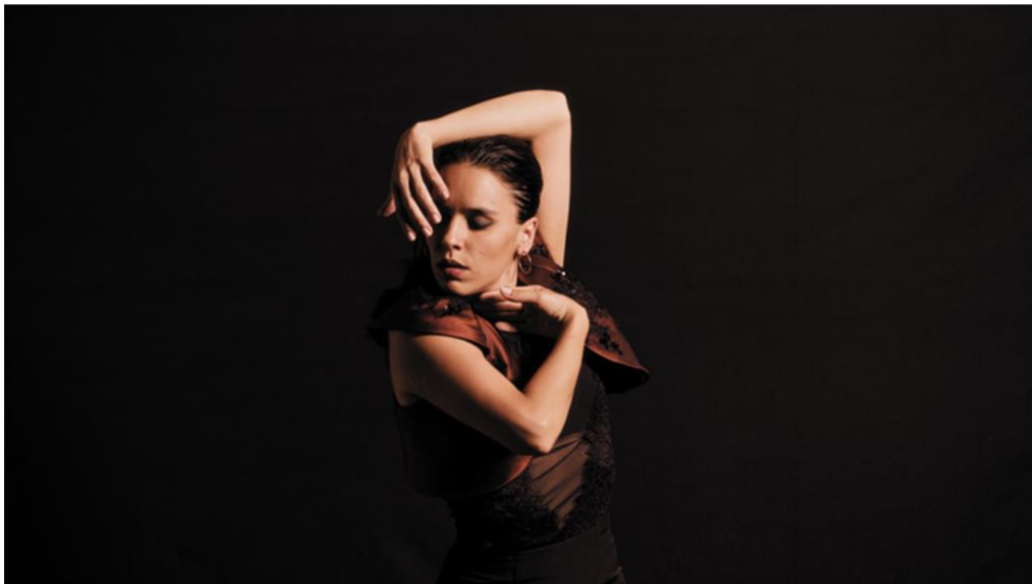


DANCE | THEATER | EVENTS

Fundarte Gears Up for a Season of International Performances Mixed With Social Awareness

Despite budget cuts, Fundarte is assembling another season that fosters cultural exchange.

By Liz Tracy | September 25, 2024



Sonia Franco will bring *Ser.Rana* to the stage during Fundarte's FL.Flamenco. Photo by Alberto Centella

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Fundarte director Ever Chavez left his job as a theater director and his home in Havana when he moved to Miami at the turn of the century. Once he arrived, he says, "I realized, at the time, there was a hole in the programming of the Latin and Hispanic performances, like theater, dance, music."

His pluck and creativity led him to launch Fundarte in 2003 to build up an alternative performance scene with an eye on social issues. Twenty-two years later, he's still bringing exciting and innovative international performances to South Florida and sharing Miami's artists with the world.

"I became very passionate about Miami. Miami was my new home," Chavez explains. He loved his new friends, colleagues, and the artists he met, who welcomed him warmly. "I wanted to give back. The best I can do for my new home is to bring here what I think is the most recognized performances from around the world, especially Latin America."

After moving to the U.S., it took him about three years to learn how to run a nonprofit. In 2003, he cofounded a successful flamenco festival in partnership with Miami Dade College at the Lincoln Theater. The endeavor grew, and Chavez decided to bring contemporary Cuban artists to town as well.

"Everything here related to Cuba was very nostalgic. Most of the people were very sad about it. They left the country and couldn't go back," he says. "But I just arrived from Cuba, so I didn't have any nostalgia." He made steps to let Miami leave the cultural past in the past by bringing rock and Spanish-style Cuban music to town. Soon, he worked with Michael Spring at the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the City of Miami Beach to expand this programming.

Government grants, like those from the county, have been lifelines for organizations like Fundarte. After Gov. Ron DeSantis wiped out the state's budget for the Division of Arts and Culture, Fundarte and others have struggled to make ends meet. They signed contracts with performers and planned their 2024-25 season well in advance, and they need to fulfill those financial obligations now with fewer funds. Additionally, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs was forced to cut its budget. Lucky for Fundarte, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation offered additional support to keep it afloat this season.

Since that original flamenco festival, the organization has introduced the city to plenty of new artists, like Spanish singer Rosalía, who performed at one of Fundarte's events before becoming an international superstar. This season, it will host the ZunZún Children's Fest, FL.Flamencos, Global Cuba Fest, and Out (Loud) in the Tropics.

ZunZún is co-presented with the Miami-Dade County Auditorium's (MDCA) Away From Home Series, which brings arts and education to different parts of the county while the venue undergoes renovations. This year, the festival takes place at the **Westchester Cultural Arts Center**. "If the mountain doesn't come to you, you go to the mountain," Chavez says, quoting a Spanish saying about expanding its geographic scope. He loves bringing events to areas of the city like Hialeah and Kendall so that communities that don't often get international programming can experience performers from around the world.



Insectos y Bicharracos by singer-songwriter Rita Rosa Ruesga will have the kids figuring out which party guest stole a pastry.

Huracan Films photos

"We are bringing music to the children, but we don't treat them like others. We bring them very smart and theatrical performances so they can learn Spanish or sing or reflect about something like ecology or the water," Chavez explains of the goal of the work.

This year, Fundarte will present a musical theater play that's also an interactive investigation into a missing tart, *Insectos y Bicharracos*, by singer-songwriter Rita Rosa Ruesga in partnership with Roxy Theatre Group at the Westchester Cultural Arts Center on October 12. Latin Grammy award-winning children's musician Luis Pescetti is also coming from Argentina to perform on October 13 at the **Miami Beach Bandshell**. "The parents are going to love it even more than the children," Chavez assures.

FL.Flamencos will bring unconventional flamenco to the **Aventura Arts & Cultural Center** on November 2 and 3. This year, the festival presents *Ser.Rana* by Sonia Franco, produced by Spain Flamenco Arts from Madrid, and a masterclass with the dancer, choreographer, and actress in partnership with Roxy Theatre Group. In March, it will present Global Cuba Fest at the Miami Beach Bandshell in partnership with Miami Light Project, featuring Latin Grammy-winning bassist Alain Pérez.


Out (Loud) in the Tropics – "Loud" has been added this year – explores freedom of expression, gender politics, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues through the arts. "We're trying to cover these social perspectives from the performing arts," Chavez says. It features Colombian artist La Muchacha and Chilean singer Pascuala Ilabaca and Fauna at the Miami Beach Bandshell. *DJ Apollo* by local **dancer and choreographer Pioneer Winter** will explore memory, intergenerational queer dynamics, HIV/AIDS, and legacy through dance theater at the **Miami Theater Center**. Spanish musician Marco Flores will present *Rayuela* (Spanish for "hopscotch") at the Aventura Arts & Cultural Center.

"I do believe in the power of art. That's one thing that I think makes us different from animals. We reflect, and the arts are a vehicle to really touch on issues. The arts are the only thing that can give people the sensibility to touch it so that they can reflect on social issues and be a better person and more conscious about other kinds of people," Chavez says.

Fundarte also brings Miami-based artists to other cities with its No Borders series. The Afro-Cuban folklore performance *Celestina* by Teatro El Público will premiere in Madrid in December, and Lukas Avendaño and dancers José Ramón Corral, Charlene Francois, Enrique Villacreces, and Lize Lotte Pitlo will stage *Bio'Ngo* in Mexico as part of the International Partnership Program of the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs.

"We do presentations for everybody, not just Latinos or Hispanics," Chavez says. He asks people to come out and support performances that advance the arts, examine social issues, and share cultures across international boundaries.

View Fundarte's upcoming 2024-25 season schedule at fundarte.us.



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