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STAGE & ARTS

Pandemic inspires Twin Cities dance troupe to reimagine a classic from the Black Death

Globe-spanning, 10-day online dance event echoes Boccaccio's "Decameron."

By **Sheila Regan** Special to the Star Tribune | OCTOBER 1, 2020 — 8:10AM



Eight dancers from Europe and the United States are contributing to Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theatre's "Decameron 20:20."

During the Black Death epidemic of 1348, Italian author [Giovanni Boccaccio penned "The Decameron,"](#) a series of novellas about a group of young men and women sheltering from the plague outside of Florence. To pass the time, they tell each other stories in the evenings for 10 days, which is what "Decameron" translates to in Greek.

For its latest virtual streaming performance, [Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theater](#) takes the same framework for a 10-day video experience Oct. 1-10 featuring eight performers based in Europe and across the United States. Filmed over 10 days in June amid the pandemic and civil unrest, "Decameron 20:20" offers a time capsule of an intense moment in time, as it finds inspiration from the 14th century classic.

Each dancer has created a 2-minute video for each day, set to a score of original flamenco music by composer/guitarist José Luís Rodríguez. Following Wednesday's kickoff, you can take your pick of which version to watch each day: 2 minute edited features, or the sync versions, where you see all eight performers at once. When the 10 days are up, Zorongo will release them all together as one 20-minute video, edited by video creator Jim Peitzman.

"I told Jose: you send us two minutes of music every day," said Zorongo's artistic director, Susana di Palma. "I told the dancers: you just go with where you are at ... your immediate reaction."

Di Palma said she'd listen to the morning's music about 10 times usually before coming up with her contribution for that day. "Everybody had to work fast," she said. "I was trying not to analyze, and really evaluate where I was at that day."

In one piece, Di Palma wears an ominous mask with a beak of the sort doctors would wear during the Black Plague. For another, she visited the George Floyd memorial site, paying homage by performing a mournful dance amidst the offerings and laying down some flowers herself.

Other dancers — located in Seville, Rome, Madrid, New York, Albuquerque and Oakland — incorporated aspects of their own lives. One even showed herself cutting her hair on her pandemic wedding day.

The collaborators met on Zoom each day, which was no small feat given the time-zone differences.

"It was a unifying experience," Di Palma said. "People are in an intense emotional state. Sometimes having the ability to release some of that was good."

The event runs through Oct. 10. Tickets are \$15-\$20. Register at [zorongo-decameron-2020.eventbrite.com](#).

Sheila Regan is a Minneapolis critic and arts journalist.