

Jose Greco brings flamenco dance to Aquinas Institute

By Kevin Myers

JoDe Romano met the legendary Spanish flamenco dancer Jose Greco in her home town of Houston, Texas when she was nine years old, and he has been her greatest inspiration ever since. "From the first time I saw him, I wanted to dance," she said.

Each year when Greco performed in Houston, Romano begged him to let her dance with him. And each year, he told her she was too young. But eventually her frequent phone calls to Greco and persistent study of Spanish dance bore fruit. Immediately following her high school graduation 10 years ago, Romano traveled to Spain, and has danced with the great Spanish *bailador* ever since.

Romano returned to the United States this month, dancing once again with the famed Greco, who came out of retirement at 65 to travel on a tour strictly designed for America's youths.

With the snap of leather hitting the boards, the clicking of castanets, and the flair of traditional costumes, Romano and Greco joined with three other dancers and a guitarist at Aquinas High School, Friday, Nov. 15, for a presentation on the folk dances of Spain. The troupe was received with enthusiasm by the audience, comprising students from Aquinas, Nazareth Academy, Pittsford-Mendon, Pittsford Sutherland and Buffalo's Dunkirk High School.

"The response is identical everywhere," said Greco, referring to the 20-engagement tour sponsored by International Youth Productions of Boston. "The students seem to relate well with what we are trying to convey and with what they are seeing."

By committing himself to bring Spanish culture to the world's youth through this program, Greco has filled the void left when he retired from the stage as the world's greatest flamenco dancer. "Eventually we all find that it is time to step aside," Greco said. "But after awhile you feel a guilt complex, like you're waiting around to die or get drunk or something. I knew that I would never capture what I once was... so I decided to start again in an academic role."

Greco most enjoys observing the potential of great new dancers. "Suddenly they may find an individual style," he said, and attain the level of "such great dancers as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire or... Jose Greco."

Greco combined the grace of a ballet dancer and the virility of a bullfighter, as he



Eduardo Montemayor, JoDe Romano, Fausto Rios, and Deloris Espinoza dance a selection that appears to be a mix of ballerinas and matadors.

opened the show with a solo performance. Romano, Deloris Espinoza, Fausto Rios and Eduardo Montemayor accompanied Greco in the second dance. The troupe twirled and tapped about the stage, their movements punctuated by castanets.

Between performances, Greco provided audience members with some background on the types of dance they were enjoying. In a powerful, resonant voice, he wove a compelling history of Spain and its traditional dances. He combined explanation of Spanish dancing techniques with various folk stories based on dance, including the tale of a young man who won his sweetheart through a powerful performance. The story paralleled a courting dance later performed by Rios and Romano.

In an instrumental solo, Miguel Antonio demonstrated the unique style of flamenco guitarists. "There is no (written) music for flamenco guitarists," Greco explained. "Each performance is improvised and invented spontaneously."

When the dancers added their talents to the strains of the flamenco guitar, the

audience witnessed the spontaneity of flamenco dancing. "The flamenco dancer creates his own rhythmic pattern... and always expresses emotions," Greco told the students. "The dance is never repeated the same way."

Greco was born in Italy, and then immigrated to New York City in 1928 at the age of nine.

He grew up in a New York City neighborhood he describes as a "breeding ground for murder," and chaperoned his sister Norina to her lessons at Madame Veola's Dancing Studio in Manhattan. Somehow, through his daily exposure to the school's artistic atmosphere, Greco began to develop an unconscious appreciation for Spanish dance. To tease his sister, he attempted a dance she had been practicing for days — and performed it flawlessly. The following day, he was convinced to perform for Norina's dance class. That performance earned him a scholarship to Madame Veola's dance studio and a small stepping stone to the world renown that followed.



JoDe Romano solos with guitarist Miguel Antonio in a passionate dance.



Fausto Rios displays a leap common to some flamenco dances.



The stomping of feet introduces high school students to Spanish dance.



Jose Greco and Deloris Espinoza pair off in the finale, in which Greco courts two maidens.