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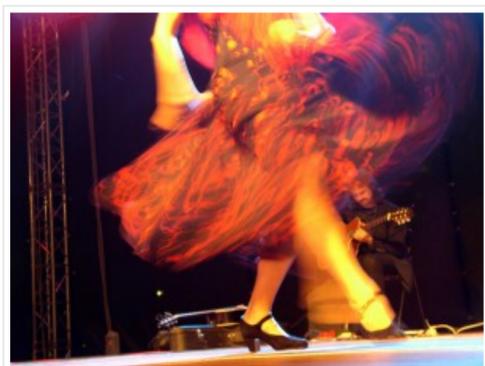
Dancing, Tapas and More at New York's Xunta

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Meghna Lamore

I'm a huge fan of flamenco, enjoying the New York Flamenco Festival as many years as I possibly could. The colours, the speed, the rhythm and the staccato percussion sweeps me away on a Spanish journey as few things can. It is with that in mind that I write today about Xunta, in New York.



Back when I lived there, Xunta was a tiny little tapas bar in the East Village, right on First Avenue and 11th street, a short hike from my apartment on 14th and 7th. It was a dimly-lit, crowded little space, done up in a fisherman's theme: fishing nets hanging from the ceiling, rough-hewn tables and benches, and - my favourite - rum barrels set on their end to form small tables, around which bar stools were placed for patrons.

The real attraction, and initial point of puzzlement to those unfamiliar with Xunta's alter-ego, is the small, flat dancing platform set right in the middle of the floor. Usually unoccupied, many's the customer who has stared askance at such valuable real estate being wasted. Thursday and Saturday nights, however, the mystery reveals itself: at 8pm, a flamenco dancer takes the stage and proceeds to delight your senses.

My first time at Xunta, even knowing that the place boasted impressive flamenco, I was still unprepared for the accomplished dancer's performance. The truly mouth-watering chorizo and bacon-wrapped dates were forgotten as my mouth instead dropped - and remained - open while this striking young woman twirled and stamped with the unconscious authority and haughty grace all flamenco dancers seem to clothe themselves with. She was joined by two other dancers - a male and a female - and the resulting beat had the entire audience on their feet toward the end. This is definitely not your dignified, story-telling variety of flamenco: this is meant to energize and captivate you!

As for the food, well, it's not sophisticated. At all. And it's not meant to be. Xunta serves authentic, bar-type tapas, of the sort you'd expect to find at the neighbourhood bar when traveling in Spain. I'll say straight off: this is probably not where you'd take a vegetarian to dine. I would recommend any of the chorizos and pretty much any of the seafood - absolutely divine in a wonderfully down-and-dirty way.

Xunta has since moved to Williamsburg, at Grand Street and Union Avenue. It still boasts the same, wonderful live flamenco performances, but in a bigger space. The Williamsburg location also has a patio area, and the authentic Spanish menu - along with really good riojas and sangrias - is still in place, as are the really decent prices. A short jaunt on the L train is definitely not a hardship for those of us who go prefer true NYC "hidden gems".

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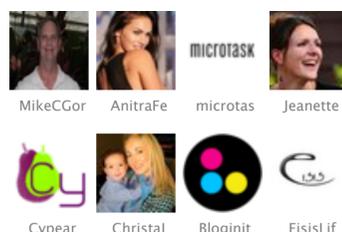


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