



When Dutch flamenco guitarist Teye first met his future artistic partner and wife Belén in her native Sevilla, so mesmerized was he by her fiery spirit that he didn't even notice she was beautiful—or so he declares. Over a decade later, evenings with Teye & Belén begin with Teye teasing out exotic, tantalizing tones on his guitar, catalyzing the night's mood with his opening strum. Belén sits on the cajón (wooden box drum) sparingly tapping rhythms to accent the guitar's melody, smoldering in her relative repose. Then she rises, flawlessly executing staccato footwork and spinning patterns, with dramatic poses punctuating her sinuous turns. Blazing incandescent with intensity and beauty, she sings, drawing audiences into the world of Teye & Belén.

Together Teye & Belén have captivated audiences from México City to Istanbul to Montréal and many cities between. The most remarkable quality of Teye & Belén's flamenco performances—more than their spirit, attractiveness, or talent—is the extraordinary chemistry they share, a quality frequently remarked upon by new fans. Neither Teye nor Belén has gypsy blood, but the gypsy spirit certainly manifests in their never-ending quest to reach new audiences and experience new adventures. The story of how their partnership came to be is an inspiring and circuitous one.

Teye and Belén did not meet until they were adults, but their youthful histories share remarkable similarities. Both developed early and strong passions for music—honing in as youth on their future forms of artistic expression—and embarked on determined quests to achieve distinction in those fields.

According to Teye's parents, as a young child he would abandon his toys when Spanish guitar music crossed the airwaves of the old family radio. When the huge annual fair engulfed Sevilla, Belén's parents took their small girl. She danced madly all night to the pervasive sounds of flamenco, until she would have to be carried home exhausted.

Teye begged his parents for a guitar. They required that he study piano, theory, and recorder and do well to earn the privilege of his first guitar, a classical model acquired when he was ten. Inspired by hearing the Beatles and Stones, the electric guitar and rock and roll continued to lure him. He traveled to England tantalized by a magazine interview with Keith Richards, but rather than attaining the holy grail of rock, he met a young woman from Spain. Shortly thereafter he made his first trip to Spain at her invitation.

Teye traveled extensively around Spain, especially in the gypsy heartland of Andalusia, seeking out the greatest flamenco guitarists to learn from, and achieving the remarkable feat of being accepted and taught by traditional and insular gypsy flamenco artists. When necessity required that he make money to continue his pursuit of flamenco, he would return to Holland to play his newest flamenco licks in clubs as a solo act. He also toured Europe fronting rock bands. Back in Spain, Teye earned the extraordinary honor of being hired to play as the principal guitarist in a gypsy-owned tablao or club.

Separately, Belén embarked on a quest to find sympathetic flamenco dance teachers and survived her own parents-mandated stint at a classical music conservatory. As a teenager, her rebellious nature attracted her to rockabilly, then hard rock and punk music, leading her to desire a drum kit.

On his first trip to the U.S. in 1985, Teye visited Austin to see his friend and fellow flamenco guitarist Gary, who he had met in Spain. From that first visit, Teye was impressed with how much music there was and how welcoming everyone was. When Teye returned to Austin in 1992, Gary was teaching piano lessons to roots rocker Joe Ely's daughter. Ely had become interested in flamenco and recently returned from his first visit to Spain. Gary introduced Teye to Ely, and the two clicked. Wanting to add Spanish flavor to his music, Ely helped Teye get a work permit to join his band as featured guitarist. Thus began seven years of touring and recording with Joe Ely all over Europe and the U.S. Through the Ely connection, Teye played with such luminaries as Bruce Springsteen and Dwight Yoakam and appeared on David Letterman and Conan O'Brien.

Not long after Teye had connected with Joe Ely, he met Belén in Sevilla and soon invited her to travel to his new home of Austin with him. This began several years of traveling back and forth between Austin and Spain. When Teye proposed, he promised Belén that if she would live with him in Austin, he would make sure they returned to Spain at least once a year to drink from the enduring wellspring of flamenco.

As enjoyable as serving as Joe Ely's lead guitarist was, Teye always wanted to play authentic flamenco at the end of the night. Teye & Belén honed their flamenco duo and begin performing and teaching. A few years later, Teye left Ely's band to concentrate on flamenco and collaborating with Belén.

Belén's unwavering desire to create percussive sounds now fuses with Teye's singular guitar playing in riveting performances that have captivated audiences from authentic and intimate tablaos to major international festivals, including the Uit-Festival in Amsterdam, Festival México del Centro Histórico, Festivalissimo in Montreal, the Spanish Festival in Özgür Park Üsküdar in Istanbul, and WOMEX/Feria Mundial del Flamenco in Sevilla.

The rock and roll sensibility from Teye's pre-flamenco tours as an electric guitarist shines through in the pair's attention to minute technical aspects of their performances. He credits his ability to coax gorgeous tone from his guitars to his formal degree in classical guitar from the Conservatory of Music. After releasing three CDs in Europe on the Dutch label CoraZong, their latest, *FlamencObsesionArte*, is receiving its U.S. release in Fall 2005, their first album to receive this push in their new homeland.