

# NIGHT MOVES

HIP-TO-HIP WITH THE COLUMBIA'S FAUSTINO RIOS

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▲ Artistic director, Faustino Rios, choreographs the Columbia dance troupe's nightly performances.

The lights fall dark in the Columbia's Don Quijote dining room as Flamenco guitars and bongos gain intensity through speakers. Colorful track lighting follows four women in red gracefully waving black fans, and a spotlight centers on the old stage. A hypnotic foot stomping grows nearer. Faustino Rios enters the room, dramatically twirling his cape and thrusting his hips to the beat of the music. Women in the audience swoon, forgetting all about their paella.

Faustino has had this effect on women at the Columbia for eight years, and others around the globe for 32. But he admits a certain weakness for the Columbia. "It's just one of those special places," says Faustino. "You get

a magical feeling when you're here." And that magic—whether it's the Spanish wine, sensual music of the Flamenco show or the history of the building itself, has changed his life. More than 20 years ago, Faustino toured the Columbia with his Spanish dance troupe, and locked eyes with the hostess. He left Tampa dreaming about the beautiful cashier and kicking himself for not asking for her number. On his next trip, he sought out the woman with the warm brown eyes, Jeny, and three months later they were engaged. They have now been married for 19 years and have a 14-year-old daughter, Sabrina. She is the understudy in the show.

The Flamenco invites you to fall in love. How could you not, Faustino wonders, when you hear a story about a man and woman finding each other, told in a beautifully provocative dance with vibrant costumes and

soulful music. "The dance is like a painting," he says. "Beautiful. And everyone makes their own story." He later adds (with a smile) that it's really about a man trying to conquer a lady.

Even with all his charm and experience dancing for audiences from Las Vegas to Spain, Faustino still gets nervous. "I just want to make sure I put on a good show and the audience enjoys themselves," he says. At the end of the night, when the crowd roars as a woman rushes the stage to unbutton Faustino's shirt, he knows it was a job well done. ■



## Stir It Up

Barry the bartender makes one mean mojito, one of the Columbia's signature drinks. A veteran staff member of more than 20 years, Barry's been known to stir things up in the Café. He wouldn't reveal his whole recipe, but he did tell us the secret ingredient—a mint-infused simple syrup.

