

For Spain's banks, it's always bad news when the dancers arrive

As economic frustrations grow, Spaniards are getting creative — targetting banks in costume and with flamenco flash mobs.



FLO6X8 / SUPPLIED PHOTO

A flash mob stages a flamenco protest at a Spanish bank. The dance can be used to "express desperation, rage, pain and the desire to change things," says one of the protesters.

By: Ashifa Kassam Special to the Star, Published on Sun Jun 16 2013

SEVILLE, SPAIN—There's a long lineup this morning at this local bank in southern Spain. An elderly lady stands at the front, sighing as she slowly fans herself with a pamphlet on savings accounts. Behind her, a mother and daughter loudly debate what to have for lunch. All of a sudden, the portly man in the back of the line breaks into song.

"To hold my own, I've had to pawn the parrot," he wails in Spanish, "I've even had to sell my house." A woman, dressed in black and wearing oversized black sunglasses, claps along. Seconds later, she bursts into a flamenco performance, timed perfectly to the beat of his song. Soon another seven dancers join in, heels clicking on the marble floor, filling the bank with sound.

Welcome to the latest way Spaniards are expressing their frustrations with the economic crisis:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iop2b3oq1O0&list=UU6LVQXKnuvuBrZrJuDwsSzw>

For exactly four minutes, this group will bring business in this bank to a halt. The customers' confused expressions turn to smiles, some clapping along, occasionally even yelling out a hearty "bravo." The bank's manager rushes over to the performers, asking them politely to leave, while signalling his employees to call police.

Brainchild of an anti-capitalist collective known as Flo6x8, these seemingly spontaneously performances

have been taking place at banks across southern Spain, as well as in Madrid and Barcelona. This morning the collective — which takes its name from a common flamenco rhythm — will perform in three banks, each exit carefully timed to avoid encounters with the police.

“Flamenco can be so forceful, so aggressive,” says one of the dancers who goes by the pseudonym La Niña Ninja, a play on the nickname for subprime loans. “It captures perfectly how we feel about the crisis. You can use it to express desperation, rage, pain and the desire to change things.”

Pseudonyms are necessary, says the group, because their actions flirt with the law. While it’s not illegal to stage a song-and-dance performance in a bank, they risk being charged with trespassing. And their insistence on recording and photographing each performance, despite protests from the bankers, could land them in court.

The performances have been a hit in [crisis-wracked Spain](#), with the group’s videos earning more than a million views on YouTube and national media attention. Public anger against the banks is palpable, says La Niña Ninja, with many blaming irresponsible lending practices for fuelling the real estate bubble that collapsed in 2008.

As unemployment continues to soar, most banks have resisted public calls for leniency on those who fall behind on mortgage payments. Instead banks in Spain carried out an average of 115 evictions each day last year. When contacted, the banks targeted by Flo6x8 refused to comment.

As public anger intensifies, flamenco flash mobs are part of a wave of increasingly creative protests. From the [activists who showered clients in confetti](#) when they closed their accounts at a bank bailed out with public funds, to a day of action that saw Spaniards deposit their garbage in the doorways of banks across the country, activists across the country are now often adding a theatrical spin to their protests.

“Our imaginations are the most powerful weapon we have against established power,” says Luis Chamarro of the Platform for Mortgage Victims (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca), a group founded four years ago to fight against property repossessions.

Costumes and clever chants have become a key part of the group’s activism, says Chamarro. “They command attention. And it gets people talking.”

After 26 years of working in the banking sector, Chamarro is now one of the more than six million unemployed in the country. His two grown children still live at home, and as all three of them spend their days fruitlessly searching for jobs, it’s given him a window into another reason for the colourful protests. “In all the suffering, we still have the right to enjoy ourselves.”

The ultimate goal of the flash mobs, say those behind Flo6x8, is to encourage Spaniards to use their voice to counter the crisis — in whatever form of expression suits them.

“Frankly, we’re seeing things today that wouldn’t be out of place in Spain 200 years ago,” says one Flo6x8 member who goes by the name Titi Mon Parné. “People picking through trash bins, looking for food and anything else they can use. The level of poverty is maddening.”

The situation is only getting worse, he says, warranting more action. “Tomorrow everyone in Spain might finally rise up and hold a revolution,” he says.

He pauses a few seconds before adding, “You never know.”

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