

MUSIC REVIEW

Buika soars with pure emotion

■ Spanish singer **Concha Buika** seduced a Little Havana audience with anguished yet powerful songs of love and loss.

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Concha Buika, the Spanish singer who made her U.S. debut at Little Havana's Manuel Artime Theater on Wednesday night, is one of those extraordinary artists who doesn't seem to make music so much as let it flow through her.

Small and slender, with wide, expressive features and a sudden, gleaming smile, Buika has a diva's larger-than-life incandescence but none of the studied glamour.

She seems a pure conduit for the most powerful emotions, possessed by the music and the moment, joyfully lit up by something stronger than she is. She's a great artist, and she could be a star — for a long time.

The audience seemed to recognize this from the first song, shouting bravo, some of them in tears. Many were Latino, and Buika's love-destroys-and-saves-all intensity is very much in the tradition of Latin love songs.

But she has a spontaneity and joyfulness that set her



ALIVE WITH POWER: In her U.S. debut on Wednesday, Concha Buika sang blues themes with flamenco intensity.

apart. Sometimes she would stop singing and let the music flow up through her body, hands splayed round her head as if listening to a voice inside.

Barefoot, she wore a long, loose, white cotton dress draped to reveal her back and sides, and you could see her torso snake and pulse in a dance that was part African, part flamenco and uniquely hers.

Musically, too, Buika is unique. She can slide from a guttural blues shout to a sweet, husky whisper. Her voice has flamenco's sharp, nasal intensity, but also the wide-open, soaring quality of soul or gospel.

Her five excellent musicians — Cubans Iván

González on piano, Miguel Yadam González on bass, Enrique Ferrer on drums and Spaniards Ramón Suárez on cajón (box drum) and Daniel López on acoustic guitar (López and pianist González were particularly outstanding) — flowed responsively with her, blending jazz and flamenco rhythms and harmonies into an rich, indefinable, fluid music.

"Forget me if you can, because I couldn't," she howled on the opening *Tu Volveras* (You'll Return). On *Mientenme bien* (Lie to me well), accompanied only by piano, she dove deep into the almost unbearable pain of love lost. But the sense of her music and the concert overall wasn't tortured, but transported, sometimes overwhelmed, by life.

Several songs Buika wrote or co-wrote, like *Ay de mi primavera* (Oh, my spring), and *Bulería alegre* were wild flamenco jazz jams, celebrating her power to continue despite disappointment and hurt, Buika scating, dancing, possessed.

"Wounded but alive! Afraid but with power!" she shouted in the closing *Jodida pero contenta* (Screwed but happy). Wounded, perhaps, but with more life and power than most of us.

