

ARABIAN NIGHTS IN SPAIN

In 711 A.D a Berber chieftain from Africa and his Syrian army of 12,000 crossed a narrow body of water and landed without opposition not far from where the Pillars of Hercules had once stood (Cadiz). The enormous Rock where the landing took place still bears the name of the chieftain – Gibraltar.

Soon after Tarik's initial advance, another larger body of men joined him and gradually, one region of Spain after another, succumbed to the Arabian invasion almost without a struggle.

CANCION ARABE

We are going to open our program with the *Cancion arabe* by Enrique Granados. The piece strongly reflects the kind of musical influences that the Arabs brought to Spain. Its sound evokes the austere Arabian desert, vast and lonely.

In 758 A.D. the first Arabian Dynasty was established in Spain at Cordoba. The king who ruled Cordoba during that time was Abdur Rahman I.

When Abdur was 20, his grandfather's dynasty at Damascus was overthrown. The entire family was murdered except for Abdur and his brother who were not in the palace at that moment. Hunted from village to village the two brothers were finally trapped at the edge of a river. Abdur's brother was caught and beheaded while Abdur himself, managed to escape by swimming across the river. Eventually he made his way to Spain where he established his kingdom.

LEGEND OF THE OLD MOORISH CASTLE

During the time of the Arab occupation there were many legends that surrounded various castles and towers throughout Spain. One such legend had to do with a particular castle known as the old Moorish Castle.

“Once upon a time there was a travelling luteplayer who came upon a very old castle somewhere in Andalucia. As he draws near to the castle he

hears a moaning sound. At first he thinks it is the wind. He looks up at the castle parapets but he sees nothing.

Strumming his lute but with much less bravado he decides to cross the drawbridge which has been let down silently and mysteriously. He hears the moaning sound again.

As he approaches the massive wooden doors they begin to open, slowly. He enters the courtyard. His heart is pounding. The courtyard is empty. There's no one there. He has heard strange tales about this castle. He begins to wonder if he will be received graciously or thrown over the castle walls and left to die like others before him.

Suddenly the courtyard is filled with people, soldiers carrying sharp carved scimitars, musicians, singers and dancers. He breathes a silent prayer to Allah, he is going to be shown warm hospitality. All too soon he must take his leave. And as he sets out once again down the dusty road, strumming his lute he can still hear the echoes of the sad saeta and castle festivities.

Here is the Legend of the Old Moorish Castle.

Abdur's greatest contribution was to bring a degree of unity to the Arab states that had already been established in Spain.

Under Arabic domination Spain continued to prosper. The Kingdom of Cordoba was the most outstanding expression of this prosperity.

During the 9th and 10th centuries, the city of Cordoba had 200,000 homes, 900 public baths and 600 mosques. The streets were paved and there was piped water. Houses were whitewashed on a regular basis. This is still a traditional custom in Andalucia especially in the smaller villages. Each home had an airy, sunlit patio filled with flowers and fountains. This tradition too, has continued.

The palace of Abdur Rahman the III built just outside of the city was sumptuous. By this time the Great Mosque of Cordoba begun by Abdur the I boasted 21 doors and 1,293 columns carved from marble, jasper and porphy. The mosque was lit with hundreds of lamps made from silver.

A famous Arabian musician named Ziryab had also come to Cordoba from Baghdad during the 9th century. Like Abdur the I, he too had had to flee his native home because of a jealous rival, in this case the jealous rival was his music teacher. In addition to Arabian-Oriental musical influences, Ziryab brought with him many innovative ideas which he introduced at Court.

For the ladies, he suggested colouring their hair with henna. He also suggested changing the heavier, dark-coloured garments which were worn to lighter textured, pastel coloured ones, especially during the intense Andalusian heat of the summer months. Guests were astonished when they were invited to sit at table with him to find fine dishes, cutlery and crystal glassware. He was an excellent chef and a special cake he introduced is still made today at Toledo. Ziryab's most important contribution was the establishment of a music Conservatory. His principles are followed even today at the various conservatories of music throughout Spain.

CORDOBA

Let us go now to Cordoba. In the silence of the night, the fragrances of jasmine and orange blossom float on the air. The palm trees sway gently in the evening breezes while in the distance, a lonely guitar begins its melancholic song.

DANZA ORIENTAL

The oriental influences which Ziryab brought with him to Cordoba soon found their way into the dance. Gentle hip movements and graceful arm movements of the Arabian dance were combined with the slow turns and head movements of the Oriental dance. Accompanied by cymbals and sometimes a kind of primitive stringed instrument which could produce its own harmony, the *Danza oriental* was one of the most exotic dances to be performed at the Arabian courts.

Following the Arabian custom, another splendid palace was built at Sevilla. Like Cordoba, Sevilla was also a beautiful city with streets lined with graceful palm trees the Arabs had brought, tiled plazas and the Giralda, its most famous tower. Sevilla too, was a center of culture and learning and drew many Arabian poets. Their poetry not only enriched the city's history but made an enormous contribution to the existing Spanish culture especially through its music and dance.