

**THE INFLUENCE OF FLAMENCO**  
**ON**  
**SPANISH MUSIC**



**A LECTURE-RECITAL**

**BY**

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Given in Ottawa, Ontario  
on Friday November 6, 1998  
at Carleton University

The lecture included selected pieces of Spanish music for the piano,  
Pertinent to the material presented, cante jonto poetry and dances  
Which had been choreographed by Barbara Solis especially for the lecture.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **ANCIENT DANCE IN SPAIN**

Dance has always been an inherent part of Spain. When the Phoenicians first came to Andalucíá or Baeticà, as it was called in the eleventh century B.C., they brought with them dancers renowned for their exquisite artistry. In the fifth century A.D., during the time of the Roman conquest in Spain, Spanish dance was famous for its beauty, fire and sensuousness.

With the spread of the Arabic Culture to Spain in the eighth century, despite religious prohibitions by the Islamic faith, both music and dance continued to flourish. The introduction of the Oriental influences to Spain in the ninth century by the Arabs, gave to Spanish dance its exoticism.

Ancient dance in the Iberian Peninsula was used for many reasons. It was used to express every facet of life at the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels. It was used as a form of deep personal communication between God and the Soul. It was used to celebrate religious festivals and battles that had been won. For the ladies, it provided a delightful recreational outlet much as it does today.

Ancient dance in Spain varied from region to region. This was mainly because each region had its own customs, habits and costumes and because the regions had absolutely nothing to do with one another. Regional dancing still exists in Spain and is largely distinguished by costume and type of dance.

The outstanding characteristic of Ancient Dance in Spain was its pride. Pride was an important element of the dance and was used during the dance in a most arrogant manner in order to suitably impress other kingdoms. Pride was often used as the basis of reason for attacking one's neighbours. Pride continues to be an outstanding characteristic of Spanish dance today.

With this capsulated background we are now going to focus our attention for the next little while on a form of dance which is synonymous with Spain today, yet at times grossly misunderstood, called flamenco. During the course of this lecture, we are going to look briefly at the origin and evolution of flamenco, its philosophical belief and two of the elements which pertained to the belief and which made an enormous contribution to flamenco.

As well, we shall look at the three main categories into which flamenco is divided today, and the four creative mediums through which they are expressed. We will also explore some of the elements and influences which have been contributed to flamenco by the Arabic and gypsy cultures and see how these have imposed themselves on Spanish music.

## **FLAMENCO**

Flamenco is not just another dance performed by the gypsies of Southern Spain for the purposes of fleecing the unsuspecting tourist out of a few hundred pesetas. Pure flamenco is a way of daily life. It influences beliefs, attitudes, customs and philosophies. It demands total emotional and physical involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Pure flamenco is about life, its trials, its difficulties and its disappointments. It isn't pretty and it is certainly not the commercialistic exhibition which sometimes passes for flamenco on the concert stage today.

At times, it expresses the profound melancholy that overcomes one when life has lost its direction. At other times, it expresses the despondency and despair that the soul knows and feels when it has been acquainted with tragedy.

Pure flamenco is the deep song of the soul. With this song, the soul on its endless quest through the eternal journey of time, is able to express all of its experiences freely and unashamedly.

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<sup>1</sup> Pohren, "The Art of Flamenco", p. 15

Here is an example of a cante jondo or deep song of the soul poem by Federico Garcia Lorca. Lorca was a brilliant young Spanish poet who was tragically killed during the Spanish Civil War. The poem is about a singer, singing a song of deepest melancholy to a dancer. The dancer is robed in long trains of black silk. In cante jondo poetry, long trains of black silk are the symbol for death:

Crystal lamps and green mirrors  
 Upon a Dark platform  
 La Parrala sustains a conversation  
 With Death.  
 She calls, Death does not come  
 And she calls again.  
 The people are enveloped by her sobs  
 In the green mirrors, long trains  
 Of black silk move.<sup>2</sup>

## **THE ORIGIN AND EVOLVEMENT OF FLAMENCO**

Flamenco was thought to have evolved in Spain around the beginning of the fifteenth century, when the Catholic monarchs Isabella and Ferdinand decided to rid the country of all the minority groups. Expulsion was enforced by the Inquisition.

As a result, three persecuted people – the Jews, Arabs and Gypsies, found themselves allied through cultural commonality. Joined by Christian dissenters, a fourth distinctive element was added to the cultural blend.<sup>3</sup>

Originating at a most primitive level, early flamenco was created in an atmosphere of underground caves. It emerged from the various elements and influences of the four outcast societies hiding from the dreaded Inquisition. In its continuing evolution many contributions were made to it.

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<sup>2</sup> Pohren, "The Art of Flamenco", p. 22

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 40

One of these contributions was made by the Gypsies who had come from India and Pakistan to Spain in the early 1400's. This particular contribution was of major significance mainly because the entire gypsy culture was rooted in shamanism. Gypsies believed that the daily life of each individual was controlled by a spirit or a demon.<sup>4</sup> Nothing could happen or take place until the spirit demon or duende as it was known, entered the soul and filled it with the necessary inspiration.

The resulting emotion from this belief was to lead to the ultimate creation of an early form of flamenco known as *Andalucían cante jondo*. This same emotion was to give to flamenco its tragic, sorrowful and revengeful aspects, and it was to account for the predominant pre-occupation with Death, which was to become a central theme for all flamenco.

Passing through Egypt, which was well developed musically and culturally, some of the Gypsies brought with them to Spain the complex *Indran* rhythms and the beautiful Arabian melodic and dance influences, all of which were contributed to flamenco.

In addition to the exotic Oriental influences which the Arabs had brought to Spain in the ninth century, the Arabs made another significant contribution to flamenco – their *Andalucian Love Poetry*. This was a particular kind of love poetry which had been written by the early Arab poets who had first come to Spain and had been utterly astonished and captivated by its beauty. Many of the *cantes* (songs) in flamenco follow the poetic rhyme schemes of this lovely poetry.

With the absorption of these several contributions, flamenco was then to evolve into a highly sophisticated musical form known as *cante jondo*.

Today, flamenco is divided into three main categories: *cante jondo*, *cante intermedio* and *cante chico*. That is to say deep song, medium song and light song. Each of the categories is expressed through four creative mediums: *cante*, *bailo*, *toque y jaleo*. That is to say singing, dancing, playing and recitation. These are sometimes referred to as “The Four Flamenco Arts”.

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<sup>4</sup> Harding website “World’s Oldest Dance”

Each art is distinctive and stands on its own.<sup>5</sup> The most perfect moment in flamenco is of course, when all four arts are brought together and blended into one complete harmony.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that the bullfight is also considered to be a flamenco art by the gypsies. This is because it has so many of the same symbologies that are associated with flamenco.

## SACROMONTE

The piece which will open this afternoon's lecture recital is called *Sacromonte*. Sacromonte itself, is just outside of Granada and means Holy Mountain. It is full of caves and it was in the caves of this mountain where four outcast societies hid from the dreaded Inquisition and where flamenco was born.

The outstanding flamenco influence in *Sacromonte* is of course the element of the dance. The dance upon which the piece is based is performed barefoot and is accompanied by little finger cymbals and a tambourine.

*Sacromonte* contains both Arabian and gypsy influences. Sensual shoulder and hip movements of the Arabian dance are combined with the fiery, passionate movements of gypsy dance.

Dissonance and sharp accentuation reflect the Arabian oriental melodic influence, while the persistent pleading of musical phrases which continually turn upward suggest the gypsy influence. Here is Turina's *Sacromonte*.

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<sup>5</sup> Pohren, "The Art of Flamenco", p. 43

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 44

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF FLAMENCO

### MYSTICISM

One of the key factors which made an enormous contribution to flamenco was the philosophical belief in which the entire gypsy culture was rooted, called Shamanism. Shamanistic belief was perceived by the gypsies through the element of mysticism which most often took the form of sound. Sound was absolutely essential to this mystical perception since it represented, depending on which sound, a spirit or demon that had to be worshipped or feared. In all of the ritual, religious and magical incantation dances of the gypsies, sound played an important role.

The perception of belief through mysticism meant for the gypsy, the remote past. A place in the mind where emotion and intuition could not be replaced by reason. A place in the mind which was haunted by fear, violence and tragedy.

The perception of belief through mysticism also meant for the gypsy, the struggle with the conflict between good and evil. The gypsies believed that through this struggle, one could achieve the dignity to accept one's fate or destiny which was unalterable.<sup>7</sup>

In Turina's *Danza Ritual*, the flamenco influence is the element of mysticism. The main characteristics of mysticism; fanaticism and intoxication, are reflected by Turina through his use of tetrachords, which are presented diatonically and chromatically, and a persistent dotted rhythmic figure which is heard throughout. Pervading the whole piece is a gong-like sound which is representative of the spirit or demon that must be worshipped or feared. Here is Turina's *Danza Ritual*.

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<sup>7</sup> Stanton, "The Tragic Myth", p. 82

## SEDUCTION

Associated with this philosophical belief of the gypsies was another element which made an enormous contribution to flamenco – the element of seduction. To the gypsies, seduction in flamenco is the elemental truth that the sum total of life is birth, mating and death. For the gypsies, seduction in flamenco is the embodiment of the teasing, the first flirtation, and the final fatal impact when one succumbs to overwhelming desire. It is the climb to passion and the plunge to destruction.<sup>8</sup>

A dance of seduction is performed barefoot, usually by a younger woman, while the other members of the clan sit on the ground in a circle around her. The dance demands the participation of the whole body. The feet pray in their consuming desire. The knees bend. The hips sway under the surge of passion. Arms reach out seeking, undulating. Fingertips beg for sanctuary. Teeth and eyes flash, shoulders entice. At the end of the dance, a white handkerchief is thrown into the lap of the chosen admirer.

Turina's *Danza de la Seducción* demonstrates the outstanding flamenco influences of seduction. Sensuous, taunting, teasing aspects of the dance are captured by Turina in the opening motifs, and through unexpected changes of tempo. Swaying hips and enticing shoulder movements are expressed through a seductive rhythmic figure, particularly in the central section.

## **MODERN FLAMENCO AND THE FOUR CREATIVE MEDIUMS THROUGH WHICH IT IS EXPRESSED**

### CANTE JONDO

As I mentioned earlier, flamenco today falls into three main categories. Of the three, cante jondo is the most profound and emotional. To illustrate the influence of cante jondo flamenco on Spanish music, I have chosen *Playera*.

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<sup>8</sup> Armstrong, "Dances of Spain"



*Playera* was one of twelve Spanish Dances written for the piano by the great Catalan composer, Enrique Granádos. The dance itself is categorized as cante jondo flamenco and is expressed through three of the creative mediums. It is sung, danced and played.

An exceedingly plaintive form of the ancient siguiriyas, whose melodic content reflects strong Arabian influences, the *Playera* was originally a lament sung in the procession to the graveyard, and again at the gravesite. The forlorn verses of its cante speak of the relentless stalking of death and the hopelessness of living in a cruel and unkind world.<sup>9</sup>

The verses of the cante follow one of the poetic rhyme schemes of the Andalucían Love Poetry written by the Arabs when they came to Spain in the ninth century. They are filled with the profound melancholy that pervades all of flamenco. Here is an example of a *Playera* cante:

Behind the funeral cart  
Sobbed my mother.  
She didn't weep tears  
She wept blood.<sup>10</sup>

Other elements and influences of cante jondo flamenco which may be heard in Granados's *Playera* are as follows:

- I. The representation of two of the creative mediums, the voice and guitar.
- II. The Arabian melodic influence with its narrow range, movement by step or small leap and the prominent use of the interval of the 5th. This particular interval appears in a downward form at the end of certain phrases and in the left hand of the piano work, bass clef.
- III. The Oriental-Arabian melodic influence with its sad, minor-like melody, its musical accentuation of certain beats or pulses and its closure on a note of the dominant.

<sup>9</sup> Pohren, "The Art of Flamenco", p. 134

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 23      Detras el carrito  
Iloraba mi madre.  
No Iloraba aquita  
Que Iloraba sangre.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my very great pleasure to introduce to you our guest violist for this afternoon, Kevin James. Kevin and I are going to perform for you a more ancient interpretation of the *Playera*. We have called it *The Lament*. It has been arranged for viola, tambourine and dance. The *Playera* was one of Douglas Voice's favourite piano pieces, especially when it was played correctly. It was also the last piece that Douglas and I were working on before his untimely death this past June. It will be danced in his memory.

### CANTE INTERMEDIO

To illustrate the influence of cante intermedio flamenco on Spanish music, I have chosen *Malagueña* by Isaac Albeniz. The *Malagueña* comes from the Province of Malaga, which is on the southern coast of Spain. Categorized as cante intermedio flamenco, it is expressed through two of the creative mediums, cante y toque. That is to say, it is sung and played. A *Malagueña* is not danced.<sup>11</sup>

The *Malagueña* is a direct descendant of the *fandango grande*, whose serious cante jondo reflects strong Arabian melodic influences. The verses of its cante encompass the most profound of human emotions.<sup>12</sup> Like the *Playera*, they follow one of the poetic rhyme schemes of the Andalusian Love Poetry, written by the Arabs in the ninth century, who were at that time living in Spain. The cante of a *Malagueña* is free. It has no pre-determined beat and it is sung unaccompanied.<sup>13</sup> Here is an example of a *Malagueña* cante:

I watched my mother arrive  
In the cart of the dead,  
And I found myself crying.  
My mother being so good,  
Should not have had to die!<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Pohren, "The Art of Flamenco", p. 118

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 126

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 126

<sup>14</sup> Pohren, "The Art of Flamenco", p. 127

Ay-y! Yo vi a mi mare  
En el carrito de la pena,  
Y se me ocurrió a mi el deci,  
Slendo mi mare tan buena  
No se debia de mori!

The influence of cante intermedio flamenco, which may be heard in Albeniz's *Malagueña* include the following:

- I. Representation of the two creative mediums, the voice and the guitar.
- II. The unaccompanied cante in the central section. In this section of the piano piece, passages of unaccompanied melody are set off by guitar-like interludes. While there is a time signature, it is not meant to be strictly adhered to. The unaccompanied passages are intended to be interpreted in a quasi improvisational manner.

Other influences include the Arabian melodic influence, again with its narrow range and movement by step or small leap; some of Al Farabi's ornamentation (great Arabian philosopher and musician of the ninth century); and the use of the unison at the octave.

The Arabian-Oriental influences include the short, repetitious motif which opens the piece and is heard throughout the minor-like quality and sadness of the melody, and the use of the interval of the 4<sup>th</sup> and chromaticism. The final few bars reflect the profound emotionalism of cante intermedio flamenco.

### CANTE CHICO

To illustrate the influence of cante chico flamenco on Spanish music, I have chosen the *Zambra* by Joachim Turina.

Considered to be the most artistic and famous of all the near Eastern dances, the *Zambra* originated with the Arabs and was first danced at the newly established Caliphate of Granada in the thirteenth century. Danced barefoot and accompanied by little finger cymbals and the tambourine, the *Zambra* was the most prestigious event and highlight of the music festivals and night dances enjoyed by the Arabs at court.

The Spanish *Zambra* arose out of the Reconquest. Categorized as cante chico, it is expressed through three of the creative mediums; it is sung, danced and played. Its characteristic foot stamps and hand claps reflect the grim determination of persecuted peoples, hiding in the

caves outside of Granada from the dreaded Inquisition to keep up their courage. The Zambra is one of the most exciting and sensuous dances in flamenco.<sup>15</sup>

Although categorized as *cante chico* or “light song”, the themes of the *cante* are overshadowed by fate and death. The three verse stanza again follows one of the poetic rhyme schemes of the Andalusian Love Poetry. Here is an example of a Zambra *cante*:

Don't provoke Adela  
For Adela has a knife  
For whomsoever meddles with her.<sup>16</sup>

In Turina's *Zambra*, the most obvious element is the creative medium of the dance.

*Cante chico* flamenco influences which will be seen and heard include the following:

- I. Characteristic hand claps and foot stamps of the Spanish Zambra.
- II. Sensuous shoulder and hip movements, unmistakable influences of Arabian dance.
- III. Exciting skirt movements, influences of gypsy dance.
- IV. Accelerated ending, a characteristic of Arabian dance that was later to become a hallmark of flamenco dance.

In the mysterious opening line, Turina makes reference to the mystical element of the philosophical belief of the gypsies. After all, nothing can happen until the *Duende* enters the soul and fills it with the necessary inspiration.

## CLOSING REMARKS

Flamenco was never intended just to be danced. In truth, it is part of an immense, unspoken vocabulary some of which has been demonstrated in this afternoon's lecture. Pure flamenco is a way of communication and it is a strict code of behaviour.

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<sup>15</sup> Ribera, “Music in Ancient Arabia and Spain: Being La Musica de las Cantigas”, p. 142,144,147, 156

<sup>16</sup> Pohren, “The Art of Flamenco”  
No te metas con Adela  
La Adela gasta cuchillo  
Pa quien se meta con ella!

Pure flamenco is also the essence of an essential transformation which involves a transcended state.<sup>17</sup> The soul, in this transcended state, is then able to express itself and does so through the four creative mediums of flamenco.

Our closing piece, *Asturias* by Isaac Albeniz, supports the statement that flamenco was never intended “just to be danced”. The outer sections reflect powerful influences of the flamenco guitar with a discreet reference to the mystical element of the Gypsies, while the central section reflects the beautiful Arabian melodic influence.

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<sup>17</sup> Harding, “The World’s Oldest Dance: The Origins of Oriental Dance”

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