

MASTERY OF THE FLAMENCO GUITAR SERIES

VOLUME III "TOQUES LIBRES"

The Non-Rhythmic Flamenco Tradition

A study guide to accompany the video program, with definitions of how flamenco music is structured and learned.

Written by Guillermo Rios

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VOLUME III: MASTERY OF THE FLAMENCO GUITAR

Congratulations! You have just purchased a video production of which I am very proud. Your afición and tireless work ethic will enable you to play some of the world's most beautiful guitar music with personal identity and conviction.

The purpose of this booklet is to guide your study of the "Toques Libres" as presented in my program. Please understand that flamenco music has always been taught on the on-on-one basis (teacher to student) and that the use of standard musical notation and/or tablature is a relatively recent event. In my opinion, its use as a teaching aid is limited by its very nature - that the reader instinctively assumes that what he has learned via the scores is the only way to play the music. Flamenco music in Spain has never been scored

and later played by other guitarists as written. We learn each other's music, music of the great maestros, or music that is required in a performance that we have arranged. It is committed to memory and we play it with the same precision and discipline as classical, jazz and other great musicians.

Our system of learning, however is different than their systems. Remember that just because it's strange at first does not mean that less discipline is required, or that there are no set musical rules of structure which must always be observed. At times, during this program, you may feel that I am becoming a little "abstract" - that is that the music appears to be lacking any recognizable rules. Again, have faith that the structure is there, even if you cannot perceive it right away.

In this program, I mention that no measured beat is apparent. One must understand that the absence of a beat implies that the melodic line and its harmonic support

(2)

must not depend on a rhythmic beat for its charm or clarity. Phrasing and melodic shapes achieve their own kind of rhythm, which we can feel even though there is no beat.

Over the years many of my students as well as flamenco music lovers have asked "Why does flamenco music have its own unique sound?" First, what we play on the guitar is inspired by songs whose name the selection we are playing bears. This song and its many variations are our main source of melodic inspiration. The chords which would harmonize the melody are derived from the chordal accompaniment of that particular song. The songs themselves have their roots in the riches of at least 5 ancient and modern cultures: East Indian, Jewish, Arab, European and Gypsy cultures. All this has been blended together to the wonderful world of flamenco.

The guitars' participation in flamenco is perhaps 150 years old and its evolution into the flamenco guitar of 1998 is nothing short of miraculous. Simple chordal accompaniment of the songs began to give way to small variations and contributions of a

(3)

variety of guitarists who had become wizards of accompaniment. Their creativity intrigued younger players who had something to say, too, and the explosion were in motion. Javier Molina, Ramon Montoya, Niño Ricardo and the most brilliant Agustin Castellon "Sabicas" were the men whose fanatical love of music, the guitar and flamenco singing was translated into guitar virtuosity and composition codifying flamenco guitar music for subsequent generations.

I had the singular good fortune to be a friend of Agustin Castellon "Sabicas" from 1972 to his death in 1990. His greatness as a refined and sensitive gentleman increased beyond measure my already boundless admiration for his artistry. He always was respectful of my love of flamenco, boundlessly generous with suggestions, hints, jokes, anecdotes, and profound musical wisdom. A great many things he told me took me years to fully understand what he had meant. My other teachers Juan Maya "Marote" and Pepe Habichuela helped me immeasurably and displayed the same deep

(4)

love of the music, gentlemanly grace and purity over the years which is always uplifting and joyous.

On a recent trip to Spain, I was treated as an old friend and gracefully shown that even after all these years of the profession our learning and "discovery" of the vastness of music and this unique art is never over.

Enough will perhaps never be said of Paco de Lucia, our generations' most gifted guitarist. A disciple of Sabicas, Paco de Lucca's first teachers were his older brother, Ramon and Niño Ricardo. Paco's contributions in every aspect of playing the guitar are equal in grandeur to those of Sabicas. His love of the music, his creative genius and his astounding capacity to play his music on the guitar are yet another miracle. He has inspired all subsequent generations of professionals and brought flamenco music to an audience, undreamable 25 years ago. We are all indebted to him.

I have included these remarks about the giants of the flamenco guitar tradition,

(5)

because all knowledge of flamenco is valuable and often it is not easy to encounter. I do not diminish anyone by not naming them here; indeed the flamenco guitarists of today are composing and recording their music within the deepest traditions of the art and it is extraordinarily beautiful. Listen to it all. Listen to recordings of the flamenco singers, Camaron de la Isla, Enrique Morente, El Torta. Hear how the songs are accompanied, how they carry the rhythm etc. Ask questions, and remember, there are no dumb questions.

As you watch and listen to the program--

I highly recommend listening and watching the entire program before actually studying the individual sections, just to capture the feel of my system. Then, with the guitar in your hands, imitate things that you hear easily. Try to orient yourself to the concepts that I am describing.

(6)

I recommend working in small sections - imitating a few chords at a time and rewinding as often as possible. Remember the meaning of dialogue - Having a conversation - It is important to remember that you want to be speaking musically with yourself, your listeners, or even between the upper and lower registers of the guitar.

A good way to get started with the melodic ideas is to sing them. Sing the notes out loud until you are sure that you have them correctly. When you do, you will be able to play them correctly on the guitar.

In this Tarantas I do an opening section using the technique called "Alzapua" - you can refer to volume I for a closer look at how to do this. Listen to how the thematic line develops. Sing one of your own and then find the notes here in this key and arrange your own theme.

(7)

Granaina

Note the new tonic key B major.

Remember that the variations I am playing are beautiful in their own right, but that they represent musical concepts as well. By rewinding and imitating with the guitar in your hand you will see the opening statements, connectors and thematic sections.

Mineras

I am playing 3 different keys here - A^b, C[#] and E^b. Follow along with me, reading my hands and rewinding as often as necessary. On the solo I play "Luna Mora," I bring in a "beat" of 3/4 time. This is to enhance or develop the main idea. It is a traditional way to play in these keys.

Try it yourself in any of the keys.

(8)

Malagueñas

Here is a key you'll be more familiar with. Play along in small sections - Or take a chord, or melodic spot and make up your own variation.

Rondeñas

The opening piece on this video program is an arrangement of mine, a Rondeñas. Experiment with this tuning, D A D F[#] B E "Rondeña" tuning. You will find it very beautiful.

(9)

Final note: Listen to the solo I play which is a Tarantas. Try listening to the overall feel, as well as the individual notes and variations. After a while, switch off the television and play through the chords of any of the forms we have shared today. See how the chords suggest melodies or silence. Enter this beautiful labyrinth, you will always be rewarded with beauty and surprises!

Enjoy your new knowledge and never give up your dream of playing the flamenco guitar.

Guillermo Rios, 1998

(10)