

Flamenco dance movement

Flamenco is an all-embracing term that includes dance [*baile*], singing, [*cante*], guitar playing [*toque*], rhythmic hand clapping [*palmas*], and shouts of encouragement [*jaléo*]. Flamenco dance movement expressions consist of:

1) rhythmic expressions, including rapid heelwork/footwork [*taconeo/zapateado*], slapping the thighs and chest, and hand clapping [*palmas*], marking steps with the feet [*marcar/marcando*], and occasionally, castanet [*castañuella/palillo*] playing while performing *taconeo/zapateado* or *marcando*; 2) other lower body movements from the waist down, including hips rolls and hip juts, leg lifts, and leg circles executed from the knee down; 3) upper body and arm movements, including twisting and circular arm movements [*braceo*], and spiraling the spine, producing a counter-line in the back [*torcido*]; 4) circular movements executed with the wrists and fingers, and fanning movements executed with the fingers [*muñecas/filigrana de los manos*], and finger snapping [*pitos*]. Combinations of these movements may or may not be performed simultaneously; 5) full body expressions that combine the elements described above as aspects of a performance, and 5) *Pellizcos* [pinches/nips], movements which consist of shoulder shrugs, facial expressions, miming gestures, small hops and jumps, and other personalized movements improvised in a performance.

In flamenco, the lyrics of a song, the *letra*, and the verse of the song, the *copla*, vary according to the interpretations of the singer and dancer. A guitarist generally provides musical accompaniment, but dances can also be performed with only the rhythm of the *palmas* [hand claps], *solo de pied* [with only the sound of the dancer's rhythmic footwork and no other accompaniment], or with the singer performing *a palo seco* [dry/without guitar accompaniment].

The History of Flamenco - Café Cantantes

Traveler and English writer George Borrow is one of the first to thoughtfully document Gypsy songs and dances in The Zincali, published in 1841. Between 1800 and 1860 other mentions of flamenco in travel books include references to the *fandangos*, *malagueñas*, *peteneras* and *rondeña* of the *cante Andaluz* [Andalusian style flamenco singing] and the *polo* and *caña* of the *cante Gitano* [Gypsy style flamenco singing].

It was in 1842 when flamenco became a popular, public event with the popularization of the first *café cantante* [19th century flamenco nightclub] in Seville, Spain. The cafés gained further momentum in the 1860s when similar clubs sprang up in Málaga, Granada, Cádiz, Jerez de la Frontera, and in Madrid and Barcelona. The cafés consisted of a large room lit by oil or paraffin lamps. At one end of the room was a small stage for the performers. The other end of the room was filled with small tables and chairs for observers, who were usually *aficionados*. Observers could expect to watch and listen to one or two singers, three or four female and male dancers, and two guitarists. The performers were Gitanos [Gypsies], Andalusians [people who live in the most southern region of Spain], and occasionally, Spaniards from northern cities, particularly Barcelona and Madrid. This situation gave rise to the *cuadro flamenco* performance, which is the most popular presentation of traditional flamenco today.

Three important aspects from the *café cantantes* era established what we know as contemporary theatrical flamenco. First and foremost, the *café cantantes* provided flamenco artists with a decent wage. This re-energized flamenco, since the artists had regular contracts with salaries and a critical audience of *aficionados* who appreciated their work.

Secondly, in the *café cantantes* Gypsy flamenco music collided with divergent Andalusian songs and dances. The professionalism required by Gypsy and Andalusian performers to be in constant competition with each other led to new and distinctive styles of guitar playing and dancing, and beautiful new variations of flamenco songs.

Gypsy singers generally specialized in *cante jondo* [deep song] forms like the *soleares*, *siguiriyas*, and *martinétes*, but also sang *cante intermedio* [intermediate song] and *cante chico* [light song], like *bulerías*, *alegrías*, *cantiñas*, and *tangos*. Andalusian singers specialized in Andalusian songs, including *malagueñas*, *verdiales*, *tarantos* and *granadinas*. Eventually, competition between singers for high paying jobs in the cafés, as well as contact between performers, developed artists who mastered songs from both the Gitano and Andalusian repertoire. Silverio Franconetti, who owned a *café cantante* in Seville, earned a fortune and a reputation by singing a wide variety of songs from both styles.

A third important aspect of the *café cantantes* is that eventually, the growing audience demanded that dancing and guitar playing, not singing, play the major performance role. These arts greatly advanced during the *café cantantes*. Dancing developed significantly with interpretations of never before danced *cantes*, including La Mejorana's (c. 1862-1922) innovation of the *baile por soleares* [danced *soleares*]. Dancers La Macaronna (c. 1860-1947) and La Malena (c. 1870-1953), who performed in La Argentinita's Las Calles de Cádiz in 1933, both began their professional dancing careers performing in the various *café cantantes*.

The *café cantantes* flourished until about 1915, gradually falling into decline as tastes changed and audiences demanded theatrical derivatives of flamenco, including borrowings from the *zarzuela*, and the infiltration of South American songs, including the Spanish/Cuban *rumba* and *guajira*, which are called *cantes de ida y vuelta* [round trip songs] by those who maintain that these songs were originally taken to the new world, transformed by various musics of other cultures, and returned, forever changed, to Spain.

Surrounded by what many writers describe as a decadent period of decline for the art of flamenco, in 1922 a group of intellectuals and artists, led by Federico García Lorca and Manuel de Falla, organized the first *Concurso del Cante Jondo* [Deep song/flamenco

singing contest] in an attempt to resuscitate what the organizers of the event considered was the languishing, authentic flamenco.

García Lorca also did much to re-popularize the *café cantante* era with his book, Poema del cante jondo, published in 1931. Poema del cante jondo alludes to *café cantante* performances in flamenco vignettes like Café Cantante, Retrato de [Portrait of] Silverio Franconetti, and La Guitarra. Also, the popular old Spanish songs García Lorca recorded with Spanish dancer La Argentinita were available in 1931 [His Master's Voice Gramophone 1931]. The recordings of García Lorca's songs, many of which had been popular during the *café cantante* era, were now a permanent contribution to flamenco music, available for current and future generations to refer to over time.

Cuadro and tablao flamenco

García Lorca's artistic collaborator, La Argentinita, also drew attention to the *cuadro flamenco* through her Café de Chinítas, which is choreographically based on a *cuadro flamenco* [traditional flamenco performing ensemble]. Created after the primary *café cantante* era in the 1930s, performed throughout the United States, Europe and South America from the late 1930s until 1945, La Argentinita's Café de Chinítas contributed significantly to the internationalization of the *cuadro flamenco* form.

Thus, the traditional, contemporary *cuadro flamenco* takes its structure from the *café cantante* period. The flamenco dancers [*bailaors/bailaoras*], guitarists [*tocaors[as]*], singers [*cantaors/cantaoras*] and *palmístas* [performers who clap accompaniment for the dancers, guitarists and singers] arrange themselves in a quarter-circle on a stage or designated performance area, upstage and facing the audience. The performance progresses as each dancer positions him or herself center stage in front of the other performers, and performs solo dances, including the *alegrías*, *soleares*, *soleares por bulerías*, *tientos*, *siguiriyas*, *caña*, *cantiñas*, and other flamenco dances. The dancer focuses attention towards the audience, though attention is also directed towards the singer, guitarist, and *palmístas* [persons who perform rhythmic hand clapping] at various

times during the performance. The dancer sets the pace, length and tempo of the dance as a whole, incorporating musical and rhythmical elements, establishing a musical and rhythmical union between all of the performers. The dancer is familiar with the structure of the singer's *coplas* [verses of the song], and develops or improvises choreography around the length of each *copla*. The dancer is also familiar with the style and length of the guitarist's melodies [*falsettas*].

In sum, the dancer works in a unique union with the guitarist and singer. The dancer takes the leading performance role, establishing tempos and lengths of the dance. The guitarist and singer generally follow the dancer's lead, but also take turns "breaking free" from the dancer with *falsettas* and *coplas*. Most flamenco songs are of pre-determined length, and the dancer is constantly aware of an individual singer's *copla*. For example, when a singer is singing a particularly poignant passage in the music, the dancer does not generally perform a lot of fast and loud footwork, but may instead perform marking steps which includes short segments, or "bursts" of footwork [*zapateado*].

A *cuadro flamenco* performance can also include regional dances, like the *sevillanas* and *fandangos*. Singers and guitarists also often perform vocal and instrumental solos to a variety of flamenco and Andalusian songs. Singers often also dance at the conclusion of a program, joining the dancers in a *rumba Gitana*, *tango*, or *bulería*. These dances are structured improvisations, and all the performers take turns performing short variations. During this final piece on the program, dancers often "let their hair down" and good-naturedly compete, trade "licks" [difficult steps], engage in wry comments directed towards each other or the audience, and generally enjoy themselves.

A *tablao flamenco* is a contemporary nightclub where flamenco is performed on a raised wooden stage, the term derived from the word *tablado*, which refers to a wooden board or plank, or a wooden planked stage. In contemporary flamenco, the terms *tablao flamenco* and *cuadro flamenco* often refer to the same event. Dances performed in a

cuadro or *tablaó flamenco* can be completely choreographed, totally improvised, or generally, include a combination of both these characteristics and are structured improvisations.

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