

Flamenco Nuevo in the '90's

I don't know about you, but I'm exhausted. Flamenco in the '90's was such a wild ride that part of me just wants to go lie down somewhere and absorb it all, but there isn't time; there's just too much new stuff coming in.

The revolution that began in flamenco over a quarter of century ago brought in sounds and ideas from around the world. By the '90's these had become an established part of flamenco's musical language, building on flamenco's traditional vocabulary. Now, a new generation has begun to explore this expanded vocabulary, taking it even farther into some surprising new areas.

Spanish film director Carlos Saura created an accurate portrait of flamenco at the end of the century in his film *Flamenco*. It includes performances by some of the artists from the original revolutionary vanguard, such as Paco de Lucia and Manolo Sanlucar; younger innovators such as the guitarist Tomatito, singer Duquende, or dancer Joaquin Cortez; and contemporary traditional artists such as Moraito.

The film ends with a rumba from Ketama, a group whose music combines elements of flamenco, pop, Latin, and jazz. Ketama kicked off the '90's with *Y Es Ke Me Han Kambio Los Tiempos*. This innovative CD included the witty, charming Sevillanas *Punchero Light* in which this very traditional Spanish folk dance form is recast with variations in Cuban, Brazilian, and American Jazz styles. Ketama followed this with *Songhai*, a collaboration with Malinese kora player Toumani Diabate. Flamenco-Blues group *Pata Negra* and jazz-tinged *La Barbería del Sur* are two other Spanish groups who mixed their flamenco with strong doses of Latin and jazz in the '90's.

Ketama and *La Barbería del Sur* represent something of a dynasty in contemporary flamenco since they both include members of the Carmona family. In '96, family member Juan Carmona recorded *Borboreo*, one of the most intriguing instrumental flamenco CD's of the decade. This complex, challenging recording goes beyond simply adopting outside elements, investigating the rich new language of contemporary flamenco. Tomatito, Camarón's last accompanist before his death, Gerardo Nuñez, and Vicente Amigo are also guitarists who delved deeply into a musical language that is rich and new while remaining solidly flamenco.

Most of the artists mentioned above were introduced to the rest of the world through a series of CDs entitled Jovenes Flamencos ("Young Flamencos") on the Nuevo Medios label. Similarly, the Flamenco Vivo series on the French label Auvidis continues to offer a wide range of recordings featuring both adventurous new artists like Jose Luis Monton or Rafael Riqueni as well as contemporary traditional artists like Moraito or the late Pedro Bacán.

Spain's renewed connection with the rest of the world has been a two way street. A number of European and North American flamenco artists have emerged in the '90's, including Dutch guitarist Jacco, Canadian artist Miguel de la Bastide, American guitarist Adam del Monte and the flamenco/jazz trio Mojácar. The '90's also saw the growth of flamenco-influenced artists such as Ottmar Liebert and Strunz & Farrah.

But what about Paco de Lucia, the guy who started it all? His '92 recording Ziryab may still be his most controversial recording. Featuring guest artists Chick Corea and Manolo Sanlucar, this is a recording that lovers of flamenco either love or hate. After seven years without a new recording, his '99 release Luzia explored territory he'd discovered over the past quarter century.

Flamenco's expansion into a divergent range of forms and styles has been compared to the growth of jazz in the '40's and '50's. It's no longer just a matter of one or two artists pushing on certain boundaries. It's dozens of new and established artists exploring in all directions, as well as an expanding audience for traditional artists. That's why listening to flamenco in the '90's has been such a wild ride - there's just so much of it and it's all wonderful. Whether you're attracted to flamenco at it's most traditional or its most innovative, the '90's brought us a wealth of music to choose from dozens of young artists who promise to astound us in the coming decades.

Recommended Listening:

Gerardo Nunez: Jucal (Alula)

Vicente Amigo: Vivencias Imaginadas (Sony Discos)

Jose Luis Monton: Aroma (Auvidis)

Ketama: Y Es Ke Me Han Kambio Los Tiempos (Mango)

Juan Carmona: Borboreo (Harmonia Mundi)

La Barbería del Sur: La Barbería del Sur (Nuevo Mundo)

Paco de Lucia: Luzia,Ziryab

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