

Recommended Flamenco CD series

Stephen Dick

Over the last twenty years, flamenco has undergone an explosion of styles and ideas comparable to the transformation jazz went through during the bebop era.

This transformation can be traced directly back to the work Paco de Lucia did in the 70's and '80's. Over the course of a few years, de Lucia reinvented the flamenco guitar, expanding its harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic language. Since that time, a new generation of artists has come along, building on that body of work

Some artists have responded by re-interpreting traditional styles, creating new traditions in the process. Others have found ways to mix flamenco with other forms from around the world to create new sounds.

Such variety has also made it more difficult for the first-time listener to know where to begin. Fortunately, two CD series have emerged in the last few years which do a wonderful job of exploring different aspects of contemporary flamenco.

The "Flamenco Vivo" series on the Auvidis Ethnic label from France is a beautifully produced collection of recordings of the best contemporary Spanish artists reshaping traditional styles. Each CD focuses on the work of a particular flamenco artist, usually a singer. The series sampler, Flamenco Vivo, is a great place to begin. It presents works in a number of basic flamenco forms, featuring guitarists Moraito, Pedro Bacán, and Paco Cortés, among others, both as soloists and as accompanists.

It would be natural for guitarists to be drawn to those recordings which feature guitarists as soloists, but it's the accompaniment work found in this series that shows what a great flamenco guitarist can do. Accompanying a flamenco singer isn't simply a matter of running through a fixed set of changes. Singers will improvise, re-shape, and stretch their melodic material. A good flamenco guitarist will stay with the singer through all those twists and turns. A great guitarist will create a counterpoint that complements the singer without ever sacrificing solid support.

Moraito, one of the leading guitarists of the new generation, plays with an intense clarity as he accompanies singer Fernando Terremoto on Cosa Natural, providing both solid support and exciting counterpoint to Terremoto's impassioned voice.

Cortés work on the Flamenco Vivo compilation comes from his recording with singer Carmen Linares, Canciones Populares Antiguas.. These pieces are arrangements of traditional Spanish songs combining classical and jazz textures with flamenco rhythms. Music this inventive defies classification.

Pedro Bacán, recently deceased, can also be heard performing with his sister, Inés Bacán, on the Flamenco Vivo compilation and on De Viva Voz. Bacán's guitar playing has a depth and complexity that perfectly complements his sister's expressive voice.

The Bacáns can also be heard in a more natural setting on Solera, Volume III in the Noches Gitanas en Lebrija series on the French EPM label. This recording captures some of the feeling of a traditional juerga, a flamenco jam session.

On Vieja Letanía, another album in the Flamenco Vivo series, singer El Chino is accompanied by Vicente Amigo, one of the new guitarists who has successfully built on the foundation Paco de Lucia laid. Amigo's music is full of surprising twists and turns which can be even more surprising the second time you hear them. Amigo and El Chino are joined on this album on various songs by three other guitarists, Juan Carlos Romero, José Antonio Rodriguez, and José Antonio "El Chaparro." The textures these musicians create when playing together is rich and, at times, astounding.

Whereas many of the artists featured on the Flamenco Vivo and Noches Gitanas en Lebrija series represent contemporary interpretations within the traditional flamenco style, the artists on the Los Jovenes Flamencos series from Nuevos Medios in Madrid are working to extend the boundaries of flamenco to include a wide variety of influences from Jazz to the Baroque. This series of compilation disks show just how broad flamenco has become. The first CD in the series, called simply Los Jovenes Flamencos, is distributed in the U.S. by Rykodisc on the Hannibal Records label. Subsequent CDs in the series, imported from Madrid, are a little harder to find.

Although many cuts on the disks would fit right in with some of the more traditional work found on the Flamenco Vivo series, other tunes, such as Ray Heredia's Blues de la Frontera, a flamenco/blues excursion on the first CD in the series, shows just how much the language of flamenco has expanded.

Flamenco groups like Pata Negra or Ketama, also featured on the first CD, can sound at times more like rock groups than flamenco ensembles. Juan Carmona, formerly

the main guitarist with Ketama, has an exciting way of combining angular flamenco rhythms with jazz harmonies.

Although these CD series focus somewhat on two different approaches to flamenco, it would be misleading to characterize these two approaches as separate camps. The two styles complement and feed each other and both represent an effort to expand flamenco. Listening to any CD from either series will change your ideas about flamenco. Selections from each of these series, taken together will give listeners a sense of how rich flamenco has grown in the last twenty years.

Discography

Flamenco Vivo Series

Pedro Bacán & Inés Bacán "De Viva Voz" Auvidis Ethnic B6812

Various Artists "Flamenco Vivo Auvidis Ethnic B6824

Carmen Linares "Canciones Populares Antiguas" Auvidis Ethnic B6201

Terremoto "Cosa Natural" Auvidis Ethnic B6847

El Chino "Vieja Letanía" Auvidis Ethnic B6836

Distributed by Harmonia Mundi

Los Jovenes Flamencos (The Young Flamencos) Rykodisc HNCD1370

Los Jovenes Flamencos, Volume III Nuevos Medios 15-640-CD

Pedro Bacán & Inés Bacán "Noches Gitanas En Lebrija" EPM 982342

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