

THE GYPSY INFLUENCE IN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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There are many gypsy musical expressions that come from Europe, including styles such as jazz or hip-hop. However, the world of classical music has a historical debt to the gypsy people. Romani culture has inspired great composers for almost five centuries, and at the base of the admiration for gypsy musicians there is an implicit acknowledgement of the creative role of gypsy composers and performers.

The general public knows about Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, but not everyone knows that he composed them incorporating Romani popular melodies and tried to imitate the style, the technical brilliance and the charm of the most famous gypsy composers and violinists of his time. Such outstanding figures included János Bihay and Antal Csermárk. As a matter of fact, at the base of the admiration for gypsy musicians there is an implicit acknowledgement of the creative role of gypsy composers and performers, since beyond creating melodies and writing emotionally loaded songs, their extraordinary virtuosity as performers was —and still is— what made them unique artists.

Sadly, their reputation as virtuosos has overshadowed their talent as composers, and it is shameful because when Viennese editors, in the 18th century, published collections of *verbunkos* —dances that originated the popular *czardas* associated by Romantic composers to Hungarian popular music— they concealed the true authorship of many themes and arrangements was concealed. Romani influence is present in many pieces by internationally renowned composers such as Franz-Josef Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Johannes Brahms and Antonin Dvórák, but there is a lack of justice for the gypsy contribution patent in some music compositions that would not exist as we know them today even though gypsies greatly influenced their creation. To prove such an influence, a great orchestra conductor, Hungarian Ivan Fischer, has recorded extraordinary versions of works by Brahms, Liszt and Dvórák that stress the prominence of Romani violin, clarinet and cymbal virtuosos.

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As a matter of fact, the highest value of gypsy music is the interpreter's creativity, their inspiration, charisma and communicative power that produce an immediate fascination. But it is important to delve further into the creative function of gypsy musicians and their role in a particular field such as classical music, determined by strict classical rules, where even cadence must be written as sheet music because classical interpreters renounced the value and daily compromise of improvisation.

Many authors and Beethoven specialists —Luca Chiaronte among them— have vindicated in recent years his genius for improvisation as the true driving force of his music. In fact, the value of improvisation is being reclaimed more and more by advanced conservatories and elite schools as a fundamental part of music creation, something known by experience to Early and Baroque music specialists, and which has been central in gypsy music from its beginnings.

THE CONFUSION OF TOPICS

In the specific case of Spanish music, general lack of knowledge about gypsy contributions goes together with the confusion and distortion caused by centuries of topics, prejudices and stereotypes that completely distort Romani identity. Asking if there really are any gypsy composers is acceptable ignorance. This question implies severe misunderstandings —the debate, for example, leads to the eternal discussion about author's rights, about the extolled supremacy of the composer as agent of musical creation. However, things are not so simple.

Most likely, if we are looking for a gypsy composer with an academic classical education, author to many original pieces and arrangements, not many can question Francisco Suárez as a pioneer in his triple facet as a solo saxophonist, orchestra conductor and composer. In this case, his is an expression of a passion for music creation that is linked to pedagogy, since he was a teacher and director and the local school of music of Zafra. In fact, one of his goals is precisely the vindication of Romani influence in Classical music; to that end, he is leading the European Romani Symphonic Orchestra, a formation made up of gypsy musicians of which he is the conductor and with whom he has recorded an eye-opening album. His version of *Gelem, gelem*, the international gypsy anthem written by the gypsy composer Jarko Jovanovic, is remarkable, especially *Adagio for a gypsy bride*, an extraordinary symphonic version of the *alboreá*, a type of music that is part of gypsy identity,

reproducing the unique and unrepeatably atmosphere of a gypsy wedding within the orchestra.

A lover of gypsy culture, the late violinist and orchestra conductor Yehudi Menuhin felt the lyricism, the rhythmic power, the naturalness and the freshness of gypsy musicians. Going back to the classics, the Romani influence has a special meaning in the songs and dances of Brahms, Dvóřak and Leos Jánacek; in the violin and orchestra pieces of diverse authors such as Fritz Kreisler, Joseph Joachim, Max Bruch, Bela Bartók, Georges Enesco, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, György Kurtag and many others. However, honestly, I think that such influence is most obvious in Spanish music and also in the many works by foreign composers, especially Russian and French, who got inspiration from Spanish music or even recreated it, with Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Emmanuek Chabrier or the aforementioned Ravel as illustrious examples from an endless list.

Not many people know, for example, that the music of the great Catalan composer Frederic Mompou also shelters the influence of the gypsy women he met during his walks in the suburbs of Barcelona, giving birth to the cycle *Suburbis*, of which there is a piano and an orchestra version. It is just a small sample being there are many ways to have influence on a musician, and for that reason, it is legitimate to state proudly that without gypsy influence many of the great achievements of Isaac Albéniz, Enrique Granados, Joaquín Turina or, obviously, Manuel de Falla—whose great works are clearly influenced by flamenco and, especially, by gypsy singing—would not have come to be.

Flamenco brings some fresh air to classical music, although it is very difficult to turn the rhythm and *pellizco* (emotion) that define the *arte jondo* (deep art) into a symphonic pattern. Manuel de Falla, who loved this manner of intimate singing, was looking for that atmosphere of freedom, the honesty of the performer, when he created *El amor brujo* with the legendary dancer Pastora Imperio in mind. In order to capture the greatness of the gypsy soul that illuminates the work, it is necessary to listen to the first version of this wonderful gypsy one-act piece, written in 1915 and based on the texts of María and Gregorio Martínez Sierra and re-scored by the musicologist Antonio Gallego. Josep Pons recorded this original version with the singer Ginesa Ortega and the Orquesta de Cámara del Teatre Lliure, thus returning the piece its storyline

coherence. Only a flamenco singer can naturally transmit the anguish in Candela's pleas to recover his lover.

To some extent, Falla standardized his work in the symphonic version, adapting the solo part to the usual voices of the classical world, soprano or mezzosoprano; nonetheless, the plot of the gypsy piece is less understandable, perhaps a matter of voice colour, of temperament, of *pellizco*. For that reason, even the symphonic version gains new life with a flamenco singer. As a matter of fact, flamenco infused itself into Falla's musical universe, not just anecdotally it but rather to become a source of inspiration, thus recreating its melodic variations and harmonic and rhythmic patterns to the extent that he invented a new music that sounds unequivocally flamenco. There is something magical in his *Noches en los jardines de España*, in *El sombrero de tres picos*, in the *Siete canciones populares españolas* or in *La vida breve*: in the scenes at the forge, in Salud's *romanzas*, one can feel flamenco notes in the vigorous dances.

There is an anecdote that accurately illustrates Falla's eagerness to recall the *lamento jondo* (deep lament) even in lighter contexts. A year before writing *El amor brujo*, the comedy *La Pasión* was performed for the first time in Madrid's Lara theatre, another example of his collaboration with the couple Martínez Sierra. For this piece, he composed a *soleá* for voice and guitar that was to be interpreted by the actress Catalina Bárcenas. According to her own testimony, quoted by Antonio Gallego, she was embarrassed because, although she rehearsed the *copla flamenca* with Falla himself at the guitar, she sang it very badly. She did not want to sing it, but the maestro, to convince her, replied: "You don't need to worry. All of a sudden, when you can't hold it anymore, you just interrupt the *copla* and start to cry".

The territories where flamenco and classical music meet are infinite and at their intersections there is the indisputable relevance of gypsy identity, which in the end has shaped flamenco's purity to a large extent. In the magic *pianism* of Isaac Albéniz, Enric Granados and Joaquín Turina, in the colours impregnating his orchestral pieces and also in the deep emotion of their songs; in Pablo Sarasate's Romantic zeal and rapturous virtuosity; in the *zarzuela*, creating thousands of *coplas*, *romanzas* and dances of flamenco origin. Hundreds of scores recall the atmosphere of the *cante jondo* (deep singing) and the endless elegance of dance nourish a unique musical heritage encouraged by Felip Pedrell's nationalist drive and outlined by Falla, who drew the path that many composers have followed, from the Generation of '27 until today.

Without even mentioning numerous works and authors, we may also thoroughly enjoy the popular songs harmonized by Lorca and by Joaquín Nin-Culmen, Rodolfo Halffter's songs based on Rafael Alberti's *Marinero en tierra*, Mauricio Ohana's work inspired by Lorca, and the great concert compositions and a large part of Joaquín Rodrigo, Moreno Torroba and Antón García Abril's vocal productions, done in a style of melodic inspiration that is very skilfully cultivated nowadays by the composer, pianist and orchestra conductor Miquel Ortega.

The late violinist and orchestra conductor Yehudi Menuhin, who passionately defended Romani influence in classical music, also fell in love with flamenco and promoted the opening of Juan Carmona's *Rapsodia flamenca* in 1999. We must get rid of our prejudices to listen to the classical world of Manolo Sanlúcar, of David Peña Dorantes or Vicente Amigo —his *Concierto para un marinero en tierra* in collaboration with Leo Brouwer is a fine example—, or that amazing *Bach por flamenco* by the Seville pianist Miriam Méndez, an outstanding example of a classical record.

Even the avant-gardes are not exempt from the Andalusian gypsy essence. One must listen, for example, to the skilful orchestration of Falla's the *Siete canciones populares* by Luciano Berio, a difficult challenge to overcome without falling into a simple pastiche as recorded by tenor José Carreras. The innovative *Debla para flauta* by Cristóbal Halffter (and his wonderful *Fandango*) or the overwhelming power of the *Homenaje a Carmen Amaya*, a superb piece for drums by Joan Guinjoan, are masterful instances in a musical territory that is being explored nowadays by musicians such as José María Sánchez Verdú and, especially, Mauricio Sotelo, who gave a new and thrilling sound value to the mysterious colours of voice and *cante jondo*. These territories are nurtured by the restlessness of flamenco singers such as the misunderstood Enrique Morente, an artist who oozes music and poetry, or Miguel Poveda, who has opened works by Joan Albert Amargós —his symphonic album *Sonata Suite* is exceptional, with Tomatito and the Orquesta Nacional de España conducted by Josep Pons— and Enric Palomar, who are looking for new ways to express the gypsy Andalusian influence in classical music.