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FLAMENCO SKETCHES: PART 1

By Richard Lester

"In the dunghills of Naples amidst noisy streets, splendour and squalor, magnificence and filth, babies played, their brothers and sisters chased dogs and mules; and their elders made love. The Scarlatti family probably enjoyed the respectability of upper floors, far removed from the noise of rattling carriage wheels, the lashing of whips and the soft belching cry of the carter to his horse. More probably a Vesuvius of curses filled the air as rich and as colourful as the piles of melons and peppers on the street corners and as odoriferous as the fish of the nearby market. Only slightly subdued at the hour of siesta, this racket gave place at night to guitars and strident Neapolitan voices raised in quarrel or in amorous lament." [1]

These imaginative observations open Ralph Kirkpatrick's biography of Domenico Scarlatti, who was the sixth of ten children born to Alessandro Scarlatti and Antonia Anzalone between 1679 and 1695. Domenico, born on October 26th 1685, studied music with his father and later with Pasquini and Gasparini. The latter was employed as choirmaster at the famous *Ospedali della Pietà* in Venice, so it is quite probable that Scarlatti received tuition there. In 1709 he entered the service of Maria Casimara, Queen of Poland as Maestro di Capella, composing operas for her private theatre in Rome.

During the last year of his employment with her, Domenico had established connections with the Vatican and in 1714 he was appointed Maestro di Cappella of the Basilica Giulia. Shortly after, he also found employment in a similar capacity to the Portuguese ambassador, the Marques de Fontes -- and from there proceeded to a post at the Portuguese Court in Lisbon as music master to King Joao V's younger brother, Don Antonio and the Infanta Maria Barbara, the King's daughter.

This period at the Portuguese Court lasted about nine years, during which time, on a return trip to Rome, Scarlatti had married Maria Catalina Gentili on May 5th 1728. On their return, life at court had moved on to the extent that Princess Maria Barbara, now eighteen, was betrothed to Crown Prince Ferdinand of Spain, son of Felipe V. In January 1729, it is reported that the court left for Badajoz, and "...notwithstanding the deep snows, and much fatigu'd with bad weather which had scarce ever ceased from the time they left,"[2] Princess Maria Barbara now met, for the first time, her husband to be.

According to the British Ambassador, present on that occasion, Maria Barbara was, to put it mildly, extremely plain, "...and I could not but observe that the Princess' figure, notwithstanding a profusion of gold and diamonds, really shocked the Prince. He looked as if he thought he had been imposed upon. Her large mouth, thick lips, high cheekbones and small eyes, afforded him no agreeable prospect."[3] On that rather shaky foundation, by the River Caya at the border of the two countries, marriage contracts were exchanged.

On February 3rd, 1729 it is reported of the royal couple that: "...in the evening the court being arrived at Seville, their Majesties and Highnesses took a turn in the garden of the Alcazar, which is the ancient palace of Moorish Kings..."[4]

Scarlatti was presumably housed in the vicinity and, reflecting on his later music we can imagine him walking through the picturesque gardens of the Alcazar with the hypnotic sounds of Andalucian song, guitars and castanets filtering through the hazy air, providing a wealth of fresh and exciting musical ideas.

The court resided in Seville for four years

before moving northward to Madrid. The annual itinerary was then divided between the Royal residences. Easter at Buen Retiro near Madrid; Spring and early summer in Aranjuez, the ancient seat of Carlos V and Felipe II in the Tagus valley between Madrid and Toledo; La Granja, high up in the Guadarrama mountains toward Segovia, for the main summer sojourn; Autumn at the Escorial on a lonely hillside overlooking the great plain toward Madrid; Christmas at the palace of Buen Retiro on the outskirts of Madrid, and January to mid-March at the old Royal hunting lodge of the Pardo.

When Felipe died in 1746, Fernando VI and Queen Maria Barbara on October 10th made their state entry into Madrid, "...amid extravagant celebrations followed by parades, bullfights and fireworks."[5]

About Scarlatti

Little is known of Scarlatti between 1733 and the accession of Fernando and Maria Barbara. He was knighted in 1738 in the Portuguese order of Santiago and shortly after, he dedicated to Joao V his first published collection of pieces, the *Essercizi per Gravicembalo* which was published in London in 1739. His first wife, Catalina by whom he had five children, died in 1739 and although no records exist, it is thought that somewhere between 1740 and 1742 he remarried, taking as his new wife, Anastasia Ximenes, a native of Cadiz, by whom he had four children. It is during this period between 1738 and 1756 that he presumably wrote the majority of his vast output of sonatas for Maria Barbara. Domenico Scarlatti died in Madrid on July 23, 1757, in the house in the Calle de Leganitos after receiving the last rites of the church.

Burney

It is in his sonatas that we hear what the 18th-century musicologist, Charles Burney described as, "the imitation of tunes and melodies sung by carriers, muleteers and common people." In the same chapter, Burney quotes a conversation with a M. L'Augier, one of the principal physicians at the Viennese imperial court, a skilful musician, and intimately acquainted with Domenico Scarlatti. It reads, "M. L'Augier sung to me several fragments of Bohemian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Turkish music, in which the peculiar expression depended on the contre tems, or breach of strict time; beat the measure, and keep it as exactly as is necessary, in more refined and modern music, and it wholly loses its effect." A footnote then goes on to explain that "It has been supposed, that the ancient Greeks had scales of sounds, in which intervals were divided into more minute parts, than any that are to be found in modern music; and it seems, as if our present divisions of time, were far from including every variety of measure possible."[6]

This is invariably omitted from studies of folk music and flamenco, but its relevance to these notes is important, providing a direct and first-hand reference to the gypsy folk music that attracted Scarlatti's attention.

Arab Origins

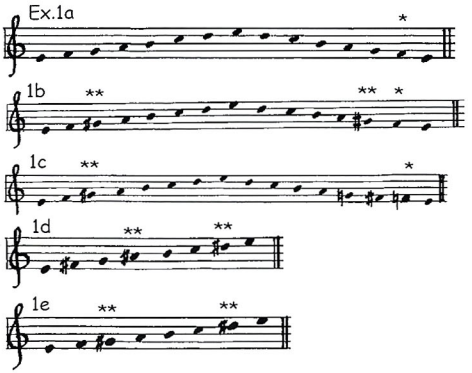
The musical colour most frequently heard is the interval of an augmented second, that part of a harmonic minor scale prompting an immediate association with eastern music - a familiar sound, but skilfully introduced by Scarlatti with obvious and specific intention.

The augmented second is of Arab origin and a musical relic from the Moslem invasion of Spain in the eighth century, which left such an indelible impression on the culture of that land. Their music in particular helped shape the course of Spanish folk music - and in turn, flamenco. According to Manuel de Falla, who made an extensive study of the subject, influences include Byzantine chant, the immigration into Spain of numerous bands of gypsies most of whom settled in Andalucia, and quite possibly, Jewish synagogical chant.

Flamenco

Flamenco, although a relatively modern term, is nevertheless the "label" attached to most people's perception of the whole Spanish folk music genre, and Scarlatti's Hispanism is a direct result of that evolutionary process. The melodic shape of most flamenco music

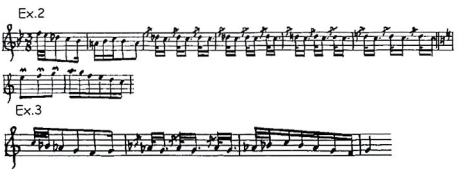
centres on the Phrygian mode and its variants. Ex. 1 gives an indication of the types of scales used in Andalusian folk music and you will notice that the flattened supertonic *, frequently acts as a leading note resolving downwards, usually onto a major chord. The last four descending notes in (1a) form what I term the Andalusian melodic descent, or "Phrygian fall" A-G-F-E.



Example 1

Examples occur on many occasions in the sonatas that make this very point, acting as a fleeting colour and adding spice to the overall flavour. When certain notes are raised a semitone **, the alternation between minor, major and augmented second creates a bimodal melodic line often associated with songs from IslamicArabic regions. These subtleties are contained within *cante jondo* (literally, deep song), Andalusia's oldest and most characteristic type of music. The use of enharmonism acts as a means of expressive modulation that enhances the poetic mood that the words imply.

Melodies generally move within the compass of a sixth but the number of tones available is increased by vocal portamento. This is obviously what Burney referred to in his aforementioned footnote. A further Oriental characteristic is the repeated insistence on a single note, with appoggiaturas (from above and below), which make a dramatic point. The sonata in C Major K.548 illustrates this point (Ex 2) when compared to a *cante* extract (Ex. 3), part of a *solea*, a plaintive song of sorrow and loneliness.



Example 2 and 3

In a similar context, K.193 offers comparable passages; the harmonic progressions here, invariably follow Moorish intervals and a melodic treble line that often echoes what Dean Sutcliffe describes as "Andalusian chromaticism."[7] Barbara Zuber places the short motif of the opening of the second half of the sonata as the vocal intonation of "Ay" , a kind of introductory "warming up," followed by four bars of ornamental melismas that marks the *planteo* (exposition of the melody).[8] This sonata also interestingly relates to the castanet rhythm of the *seguidillas*, referred to later.

The sonata climaxes two thirds of the way through the second section as it reaches a point of anguish, poignantly placed over the bass Andalusian melodic descent. K.107 in F Major, is described by Dean Sutcliffe as an echo of *cante jondo*, "a composite sound picture that may be suggestive of quarter tones, of something beyond the diatonic system and its notation."[9] Certainly the more melismatic passages allow Scarlatti to meander effortlessly through vocal portamento in a most convincing way. Another illustration of the more vocal style is K.87 in B Minor, described by Donna Edwards as a reflection of the *siguiriya gitana*. The sighing motifs, from bars 27-29, she thinks, are reminiscent of a lament.[10]

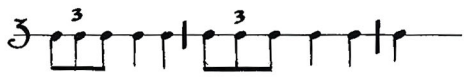
The *siguiriya* is usually accompanied by guitar and was originally one of the gypsies' simple burial and mourning songs. It is the most extremely sad and serious of all the *cante jondo* laments. Pessimism, sorrow, death and pain are central expressions. The rhythms are very difficult to capture and demand much emotional involvement. The

middle section K.184 in F Minor is another instance among countless others which captures this "weeping" effect, conveying the deep poetic well-springs of the Andalusian gypsies, whose lyrical imagery describes the conflict between despair and hope; love and the pain of love; guilt and atonement; evil, and divine protection.

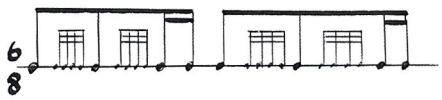
A further influence was possibly the *seguidilla* and although not strictly classified as flamenco, it was very much in evidence as a highly popular song and dance and was also integrated into the popular zarzuela, a musical drama which became a favourite pastime of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century. The *seguidilla* originated in La Mancha and like so many other Spanish dances, is primarily a song, regarded by the Manchegos as the quintessence of Spanish dancing.

The dancers take up their positions to the strumming of four introductory chords on the guitar, but do not move immediately; the guitar continues to play and the singers sing a verse. Only then do the dancers give a roll on the castanets as a signal that they are about to begin. After dancing the first *copla* (or verse), the dancers suddenly stop -- motionless -- quite deliberately, which is an outstanding feature of the the dance: the head thrown back with one arm arched over the head, the other across the head. With one leg turned outward and forward, the other supporting the body, the guitars continue and the dancers, accompanying themselves on castanets, begin to dance again after a long pause -- again to the accompaniment of the singers and guitarists. The manner of stopping abruptly requires great skill and is called the "*bien parado*."

The harmonic structure of the triple time accompaniment consists of odd phrase lengths beginning on the second or fourth quaver, with melismas often sung to a weak syllable at the ends of phrases; tonality is usually in the major. A typical *seguidilla* rhythm played on castanets is shown here and makes its appearance in K188, K193 and K204b.



Example 4 seguidilla rhythm



Example 5 A typical sevillanas rhythm

K. 492 is possibly influenced by this dance.

Usually danced by couples in heeled shoes, it contains light springing steps. Everything is smooth in this dance with beautifully coordinated sinuous use of the arms, shoulders and body. This is particularly noticeable in the crossing steps when the dancers change places with one another. The elegance of the shoulder movement is reminiscent of the eighteenth century "shading" of the shoulders typical of the early French *minuets*. Again, tonality is in the major key.

Fandango

Next in our quest for answers, we turn to arguably the most important influence in Scarlatti's music and since most aficionados believe that the *fandango* is the basis for most Spanish dances, it would seem appropriate to use it as a role model. Its importance can be gauged from many sources documented throughout Spain's colourful history. Padre Miguel Garcia Basilio, an eminent 18th-century organist and guitarist appointed at the Escorial, was particularly famous for his guitar *fandangos* -- so much so that groups of admirers would gather under his window at night to hear him play- - and the dance had such a sensual nature that Casanova, in 1768 was himself shocked by the salaciousness of the couples dancing it, and thought that after such dancing women would be unable to refuse their partners anything.[11]

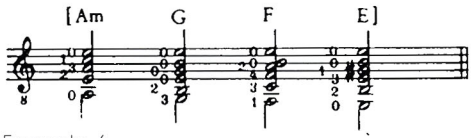
Of the numerous varieties that Scarlatti heard both in Seville and Madrid, the Andalucian *fandango* in all its forms probably

served as the principal source, its harmonic diversity being greater than any other. It was performed in almost every region of Spain as an Andalucian folk song and dance as far back as the seventeenth century, but its roots were established around the eighth century.

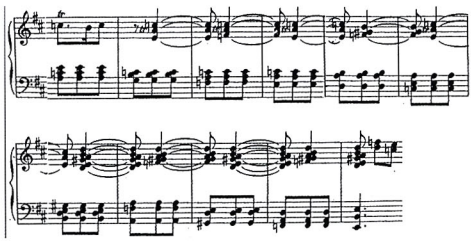
The music follows a strict harmonic pattern consisting of an introduction cadencing in the E (Phrygian) mode followed by the first phrase of the verse (copla), cadencing in C Major. This key then forms the new harmonic centre for the rest of the verse. The second phrase ends in F Major, the third returns to the harmonic centre whilst the fourth phrase ends in G Major. The sixth returns to the harmonic centre and the *copla* finishes in the E mode. Modulation from the tonic to the flattened submediant is another link to Scarlatti's frequent excursions into the folk genre.

K.141 in D Minor exhibits three features already mentioned. The *bien parado*, indicated by a pause over a silent bar, allows the music to cadence in the dominant, A Minor, before modulating to F Major. A parallel passage in D Minor modulating to B flat Major appears later. In each case, the tonality progresses through several fattened supertonics resolving downwards, keeping the flamenco spirit alive.

In the *fandango*, instrumental passages between the coplas, called *falsetas* are performed by guitars, *bandurrias*, a kind of flat backed mandolin; *laudes*, (lutes); *panderetas* (tambourine) and castanets. These interludes mainly re-establish the Phrygian mode and act as a type of rondo format, abacaba. The resolution of the flattened supertonic is common in many passages, especially those associated with Andalucian *fandangos*, that contain a descending progression of chords on A, G and F, which finally resolves in E Major, producing the "Phrygian fall." (See Example 6)[12]



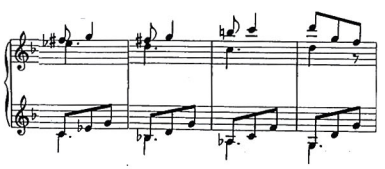
Example 6



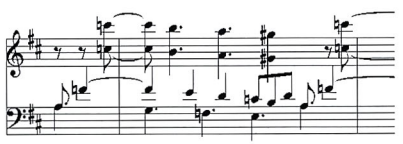
Example 7, K.119

A classic example can be found in K.119 in D Major (Ex.7), in which the melodic line of the bass makes use of this effect; in this instance, employed three times, A-G-F-E - E-D-C-B, and ending A-G#-F-E. The latter includes the augmented second acting as a passing colour that highlights the Moorish version of the scale. The whole harmonic structure centres on the inherent modal tension, heightened by ten and eleven-note chord clusters that threaten to tear the strings from the instrument. The latter must surely be a reference to *rasgueado*, a guitar technique, discussed later.

Scarlatti frequently makes use of the Phrygian effect. This can be seen in K.276, and K.45, (Ex.8-9.) - and in other countless more subdued examples, either as melodic gestures in the treble, or to colour the inner parts - all convincingly conveying an echo of Spain.

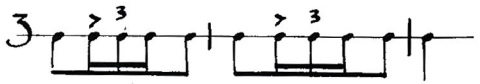


Example 8a, K.276



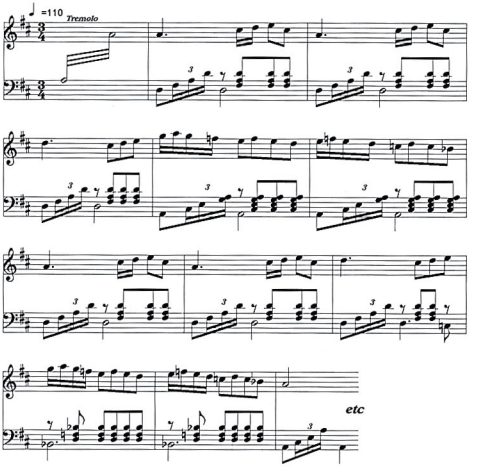
Example 8b, K.45

Today, the dance is an exhilarating spectacle, performed briskly, often to a frenzied conclusion. Heel beats are complemented by complex rhythms on castanets, and like almost all flamenco forms, the dance is an amalgam of rhythms superimposed on one another. Below is a typical castanet rhythm which helps to convey the mood.



Example 9

Harmonies, rhythm, movement, instruments and atmosphere remain to a large extent unaltered since Scarlatti's time, and were a constant source of inspiration. There are many versions of the *fandango* all over Spain, including a variation in the Alemtejo region of Portugal. In Extremadura, to the west, it forms the most typical dance of the region; in Old Castille, to the north, the *fandango* is similar to the jota. Here is an example of a *fandango* introduction from



Example 10, fandango introduction

Cadiz. Note the "Phrygian fall" referred to earlier.

The second half of this article will appear in Spring 2007's issue.
Readers are encouraged to read the review of the author's recording, part of the complete run, in our review section.

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1 Ralph Kirkpatrick, Domenico Scarlatti: *An Account of his Life and Work*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1953), 3.

2 *The Historical Register for 1729*, (London, n.d.),vol. 14, 69; quoted in Kirkpatrick, 79.

3 William Coxe, *Memoirs of the Kings of Spain of the House of Bourbon 1700 to1788*. 2d ed., (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1815), vol.III: 231-3, quoted in Kirkpatrick, 78.

4 *The Historical Register*, 73-4, quoted in Kirkpatrick, 82.

5 Enrique Florez, *Memoria de las Reynes Catholicas*, 3d ed., (Madrid, 1790), vol. II:1030,. quoted in Kirkpatrick, 78.

6 Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, The Netherlands, and the United Provinces*, (T. Becket & Co.: London, 1773), vol.1: 247-249, quoted in Kirkpatrick., 82.

7 W. Dean Sutcliffe, *The Keyboard Music of Domenico Scarlatti*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21.

8 Barbara Zuber, "Wilde Blumen am Zaun der Klassik: das spanische Idiom in Domenico Scarlatti's Klaviermusik," in *Musik-Konzepte* 47 (1986), 27-28.

9 Sutcliffe, 114.

10 Donna O'Steen Edwards, "Iberian Elements in the Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti," (DMA diss.,, North Texas State University, 1980), 29-30, quoted in Sutcliffe, 95.

11 Sutcliffe, "Lecture notes on Soler's Fandango." Given at St Catharine's College, Cambridge, 2006.

12 The progression of bass notes does not mean these are the actual harmonies; for example the chord with G as its lowest sounding note has the pitches of E Minor.