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FLAMENCO SKETCHES: PART 2

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(This article is the second part to a two-part article, the first part of which appeared in Autumn 2006.)

The Jota

Although the *fandango* provided the basic elements, cross–relationships from other dances contributed to the overall Hispanic flavour and atmosphere of many sonatas. The *jota*, (another song / dance related to the *fandango*), although not classified as flamenco, provides influences of a different style. References to the word *jota* are to be found in a music book from Avila dating to the end of the seventeenth century. One cannot do better though, than quote Anna Ivanova's account of the dance in her book, *The Dancing Spaniards* which gives a vivid description that engenders the atmosphere of the *jota*.

> The origin of the *jota* is obscure, although theories on the subject are not lacking. Spanish authorities on the subject differ in their opinions. Some claim it is Greek in origin and others that it is Arabic. The accepted home of the *jota* though, is Aragon, but something very like it is danced everywhere in Spain. It is alleged to have come to Aragon from Valencia, but when, why, or how, remains a mystery. In days gone by, it was used for curative purposes much in the same way as the tarantella was in Italy.
>
> Nowadays it is danced at popular gatherings, both secular and sacred. As is the case with most dances from northern Spain, which are more boisterous than those from the south, the *jota* slackens in tempo as it travels towards the Mediterranean coast. The steps of the dance are performed on the ball of the foot; the angle of the foot varies, sometimes being turned in, out, or at times kept quite straight. Nowadays, it is danced in rope-soled slippers called "alpagartes".[13]

Rhythmically, it is in triple time and the rapid footwork includes toe and heel movements, stamping of the feet, high springing steps for the men, lower for the women — and there are also beaten steps.

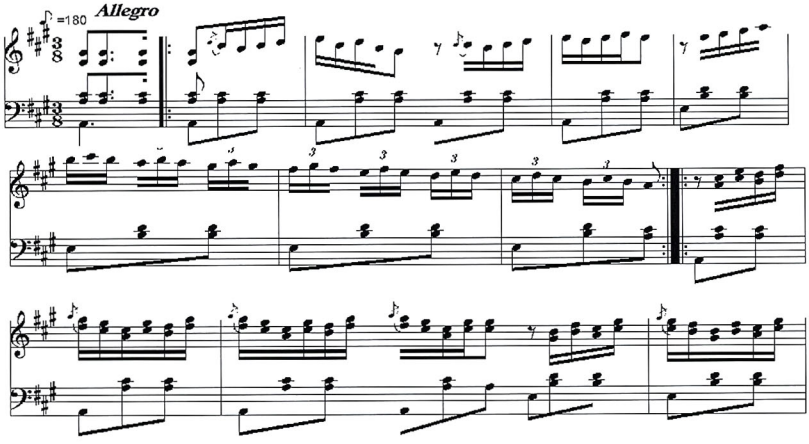
Both sexes perform movements of a crouching nature, consecutively kneeling first on one knee with great velocity, then on the other, followed instantly by swift leaps into the air. The steps often appear to be executed just a little after the beat, resulting in a lilting effect of great charm, caused by the counter-rhythm in the music- rather like a tiny rhythmic hiccup and very characteristic of the *jota.* By comparison with dances from other regions, head, body and arm movements are used sparingly.

Tambourines, guitars and *bandurrias*, together with the human voice and castanets, provide the musical accompaniment for the dance. The harmonies of the *jota* are quite elementary and most alternate between four bars of tonic and four bars in the dominant. (Example 11).

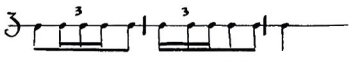
Other varieties that spread from Aragonese roots into Navarre, Valencia, Alicante and Murcia southwards into Andalusia possess more adventurous harmonies that almost equal the *fandango*. When the *jota* penetrated Navarre, it met the prevailing Basque elements which noticeably fertilised other regions. In Valencia, the *jota* has been assimilated with melodies from Castile and Andalusia. The *jota alicantina* has its own chord progression, and another type found in Murcia is even more varied, passing through E Major, C Major, F Major, C Major and G Major.

A frequent musical feature of the guitar accompaniment is the use of ascending and descending thirds, often in triplets, and usually played by two *bandurrias*. This feature was quite common in Scarlatti's time also and classic examples occur in K.207 in E Major, K.397 in D Major, K.423 in C Major and quite possibly K.209 in A Major.

The castanet rhythm shown is a typical accompanying feature in Example 12.



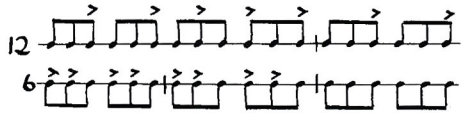
Ex. 11, transcription of a Jota Aragonese



Ex. 12 , castanet rhythm, jota

K.207 in E Major is a clever compilation of ideas from this dance. It opens with ascending and descending thirds over a basic tonic/dominant harmony and castanet effects can be clearly discerned in the middle of each half. As an experiment, I once played this sonata in a concert with two Spanish dance experts dancing the *jota.* This proved a highly successful experiment — and great fun.

The *buleria*, another vibrant song/dance whose origins go back to earliest times, became incorporated into flamenco similarly to the *fandango*. Its rhythm is quick and spirited and the gypsy *buleria* is amongst the more rhythmically complex forms. The basic rhythmic pattern is of twelve beats with accents falling as shown below. This basic pattern is then frequently overlaid by another with accents on 1, 2, 4 and 5.



Ex. 13, bulleria

A variety of percussive effects provides more cross rhythms and include *palmas* (handclapping), *pitos* (finger snapping) and the rapping of fingers and knuckles on a table top. Castanets are not used in this dance. Other percussive devices are *taconeo* (heel stamping) and *zapateado* (to stamp with the shoe). Variations frequently begin on the 12th beat of the previous rhythmic unit and occasionally on the 11th or 10th beat which gives the dance its amazing dynamism.

The cross rhythms of this dance are plainly distinguished in the following sonatas: K45 (Example6), K56, K96, K532, K537 and K521 - with numerous other examples. To appreciate fully Burney's claim that Scarlatti "imitated" the folk music of his time, it is to the villages (where this music is still very much alive) that we need to turn to discover possible links. It is necessary to state, however, that from the wealth of folk music material, Scarlatti was encapsulating musical effect, spirit and atmosphere.

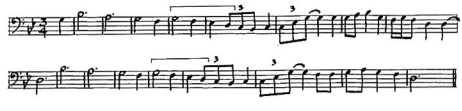
There is practically no evidence to support the hypothesis held by some that a particular sonata is a *fandango, jota*, or any other of the numerous song/dances of Spain. Considering the very hallmarks of Spanish folk music — modal characteristics, chromaticism, enharmonism and vocal portamento and rhythmic irregularities etc. — any attempt at imitation within our western notational system can only be perceived as an approximation that creates an overall impression.

Vocal Music

Turning now to some of the types of vocal music that fall outside of the flamenco genre, there is a clear connection between the folk songs still performed today and the folk music of Scarlatti's time. In studying this important link, I was drawn to some recordings of authentic folk music made by Alan Lomax in the early 1950's. This was by far the best starting point as it provided first hand evidence. Lomax writes:

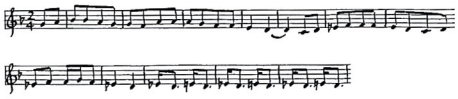
> Listeners accustomed to thinking of Spanish folk music in terms of the fiery songs of Andalusia will be astonished by its diversity. Throughout a sorrowful history, beneath a succession of absolute rulers, the spirit of the Spanish peasant has been sustained by the ancient and beautiful traditions of the villages of Spain. To some extent, this traditional richness has compensated for the bitter economic poverty of the country. Bygone kingdoms and long-buried conquerors still live in the provincial cultural patterns of the present day. The choral songs of the Basques, the sober ballads of Castile, the mountaineers' songs of the Asturias, the delicate guitars of Andalusia, all these might belong to different countries. Diverse currents of culture have poured into Spain, linking the north with Western Europe, and the south with Africa and the Near East.
>
> The Arab conquest in the eighth century reinforced immemorial cultural ties that had existed between Spain and North Africa, for the North Africans who comprised the conquering Arab armies were first-cousins and neighbours of the people of southern Spain. Arab commanders of these armies brought with them the art and science of Islamic civilization, which not only flourished in Andalusia, but also penetrated north and west as far as Provence and Sicily, contributing to economic and cultural renaissances in those regions. As the Christian re-conquest began in the tenth century, the influence of French epics stimulated the growth of epic and ballad poetry in Spain.
>
> Subsequently, a school of lyric song sprang up in imitation of the works of Provençal troubadours; while the institution of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the Jerusalem of the west, brought Western European medieval culture into the country. Spanish folk music may be thought of in terms of three main zones: north, central, and south. The north is a region of choral singing, brief and verdant lyric verses, the flute and the bagpipe, and of clear ties with European folk culture. The Castilian central zone is characterised by hard-voiced solo singing or reedy unison in sober melodies; by the *dulzaina* (a short oboe), the guitar used as simple accompanying instrument; and above all, by the *romance* — the narrative song. In the south, song and dance becomes intensely personal and expressive. Andalucian dancers use every part of their body to express emotion, just as the singer and the guitarist run the gamut of embellishments, vocal tricks and emotional colouring.
>
> Andalusian music and dance is clearly related, by way of the Middle East, to the music and dance of India. It is interesting to speculate whether this connection had begun in the time of the Romans. Roman poets and writers of the first century were already talking about the dances of *Betica* (the Roman name for Andalusia) and of the *puella graditane*, who used to come to Rome to execute their sensual dances with castanets during the Roman *saturnalia.*[14]

Below are extracts from a few of the songs that give an impression of strong nationalistic conformity and rustic spirit, a trait which can be identified in many of Scarlatti's sonatas. The first example highlighted on these recordings is a muleteers' song from Galicia. (Example 14). This rugged backcountry to the north of Spain is rich in folk music and this particular song in triple time with long, slow cadences expresses a real Middle Eastern nostalgia. This muleteer, his animals loaded with wine-skins full of the vintage of Ribadavia, pleasantly loaded with wine himself, swings along the mountain track singing the following song with encouraging shouts to the mule at the end of each verse, "Mula, alaelo, alalelo."



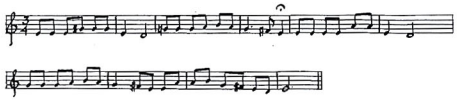
Ex. 14

Example 15 illustrates a lullaby from the province of Leon. The sweet, monotonous melody dates from at least the fifteenth century.



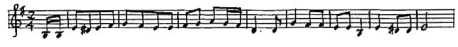
Ex. 15

Example 16 is a spinning song from a village near Astorga in northern Leon.



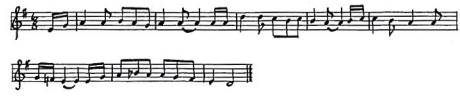
Ex. 16

Example 17 is a Ballad from Estremadura which dates back to medieval times.



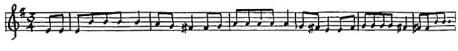
Ex. 17, ballad

Example 18. is a fragment of a Romance, a medieval ballad that gives a clear indication of the type of well known Spanish songs commonly heard in the smaller cities and villages in Extremadura to the south west of Spain, bordering on Portugal. The southern part of this region shares many musical characteristics with Andalusia.



Ex. 18

Example 19 is a *sevillana.* All day long as the *romeria* rambles through the countryside, this popular Andalusian song is performed. The *romerias* are annual pilgrimages to a religious shrine and are really like glorified picnics with plenty to drink, much music and dancing.



Ex. 19

The opening of this song immediately captures the modal flavour created by the Andalucian melodic fall, also shown in the Lullaby (Example 15), and in some form in most of the other examples.

We now find some interesting clues regarding Scarlatti's success in securing the emotions of the folk genre. There is a similarity between the power of dramatic expression in folk song which lies in the ability of the performer to project images vocally — and Scarlatti's use of modal inventiveness in conveying this effect. These examples form a basis for Burney's claim. Songs similar to these provided a well-spring on which a fertile mind could expand, providing Maria Barbara with a flavour of her cultural inheritance.

The following sonatas provide an ethnic affinity with the fragments of folk music above, in their almost melodic naiveté: K109 in A Minor, K238 in F Minor, K107 in F Major, K126 in C Minor, K185 in F Minor, K.197 in B Minor and K474 in Bb Major.

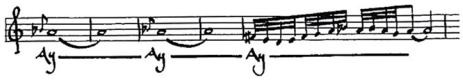
Time and again one hears the vocal flourishes which occur both in modal and non–modal forms. One of the best examples of this is a *saeta*, the origin of which merits explanation before any musical descriptions are given.

Scarlatti, you will remember, resided in Seville for four years during which time he would have witnessed the Holy Week processions. To this day, beginning on Palm Sunday, enormous floats carrying intricately carved life size figures commemorating the events of Christ's Passion and Resurrection, are slowly borne through the narrow streets to the magnificent cathedral. Hooded figures of the "*cofradias*", religious brotherhoods, walk alongside, in front and behind the floats, sometimes in silence but often to the accompaniment of bugles and drums which beat a sombre rhythm. In the eighteenth century, piercing trumpets and muffled drums set the scene as depicted in Goya's *The Procession*.

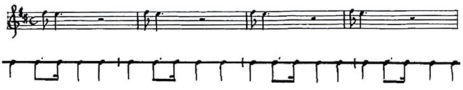
The *saeta* is begun when the processions stop, and is usually sung from a balcony as the cavalcade reaches specific points along the route. It is a spontaneous prayer, an arrow of song directed at the figure of

Christ or the Blessed Virgin Mary (Madonna) that rests on the ornate and often candlelit float. It has often been suggested that the Sonata in D Major K.490 represents an impression of this wonderful spectacle. The sombre rhythm shown below (Example 21) pervades the piece, representing perhaps, the muffled drums as they accompany the float.

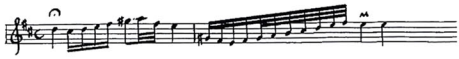
The long drawn out "Ay" (Example 20), or opening vocalization that cuts through the air allowing the singer to "warm up", creates the unique climate in which the *cante* proceeds. The melismatic flourishes can be clearly determined in this sonata if one compares the following:



Ex. 20, saeta



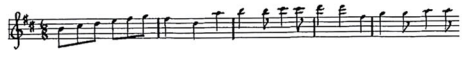
Ex. 21, Sonata K. 490, followed by a typical drum rhythm used in processions



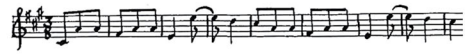
Ex. 22, Sonata K. 490

Features of K491 and 492 which follow, compare interestingly with elements in the *sevillanas* and *fandango*, both danced after the Semana Santa celebrations at the Seville April feria. There is no doubt also that Scarlatti drew inspiration from the guitar — not only in its accompanying capacity for dances, but more likely from the wealth of guitar music that existed.

Two notable composers were Santiago de Murcia (c.1680-c.1740) and Gaspar Sanz (1640-1710), who were inspired by tunes and dances like the *fandangos* and *canarios*, and were pioneers, incorporating vigorous rhythmic strumming *(rasgueado)* with a single melodic voice, played *punteado* (plucked). Sanz, in his treatise for the five-course guitar, *Instruccion de musica sobre la guittarra Espanola* (1674), gives an example of a *canario* with alternation between 6/8 and 3/4 (Example 23), a favourite Scarlattian trick of displacing the basic metre. Think of Bernstein's "America" and you get the effect. The sonata in A Major K.280 classically produces this effect (Example 24).



Ex. 23, canario



Ex. 24, Sonata K. 280

These observations will, I hope, help the listener to appreciate an extra dimension, as part of a much broader picture in appreciating many of the influences behind some of the greatest music of the eighteenth century. Domenico Scarlatti dominated the keyboard scene in the Iberian Peninsula during the eighteenth century and his contribution to music led Ralph Kirkpatrick to describe him as "the most original keyboard composer of his time."[15] His legacy truly evokes an impassioned and spectacular panorama of 18th-century Spain.

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13 Anna Ivanova, *The Dancing Spaniards*, (London: John Baker, 1970), 167.

14 Alan Lomax, Notes, *The World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, vol. 4: Spain.* Compiled and ed. Alan Lomax. Rounder Select CD ROUN1744, 1999.

15 Ralph Kirkpatrick, notes, *Domenico Scarlatti: Sonatas for Harpsichord*. CD Arkiv Produktion 2533072, re-released in 2004 as Catalog no. 2533072.